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## Performing Joseph Cornell's chronotopes of assemblage

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PERFORMING JOSEPH CORNELL'S  
CHRONOTOPES OF ASSEMBLAGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this project I study Joseph Cornell's practices of art-making through a performative lens. Rather than focusing on his finished products, I am interested in his embodied processes of assemblage. I call on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope to articulate how time and space operate within Cornell's finished works and his processes of assemblage art. In so doing, I conceptualize Cornell's textual chronotope, *métaphysique d'éphémère* or "everyday magic," as well as his chronotopes of assemblage: wandering, archiving, collaging, and assembling. I move from the finished work to the contingencies and strategies of the performance of assemblage. This project is unique because I extend my research into the creative realm, developing multimedia artworks through my embodiment of Cornell's chronotopes of assemblage. My performance of Cornell's chronotopes engenders projects that provide discoveries and expand my understanding of each chronotope, Cornell's practices, and my own creative and scholarly work. The projects include: wandering New Orleans collecting memories that I then use to create an interactive website, creating a video of one of Cornell's film scripts that was never realized by combining digital and analog technologies, creating a collage film composed of found footage, and directing a theatrical performance, *Métaphysique d'Éphémère*, that was restaged three years later. I conclude by arguing that Cornell's textual chronotope, *métaphysique d'éphémère*, offers an aesthetic to work within, while his chronotopes of assemblage provide a model for both creative and scholarly work. I conclude by questioning whether the textual and process chronotopes are inextricably connected or if they can be practiced independently by artists/scholars.

## CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION

The crowded halls of the Art Institute of Chicago had been a warm retreat from the wind and snow outside. I wandered room to room anticipating the Cornell collection, peeling off layers of clothing and talking myself into becoming more comfortable with the swarms of tourists at every turn around every corner. I prepared to encounter Cornell's boxes like preparing to begin to write a new story that begins with wandering. When I finally found them I took my time with each piece. I didn't realize that there were more boxes behind me when I turned around and saw something dimly glowing across the room. I walked toward it.

Its interior was dark. The interior of every box is dark when its contents are closed from view, but thankfully Joseph Cornell's boxes are open on one side for all to see inside the memories they hide. *Lighted Dancer* stands nearly 14 inches tall, 11 ½ inches wide, and is almost 7 inches deep. The exterior wood is stained a somber brown and the front glass of the box protects the contents inside, which are saturated by a deep blue light that prompts me to step closer. I lowered my body so I was at face level and peered into the box to discover that the dark interior is composed of tree bark. The back wall of the box presents a backdrop lined with intricately detailed and distinctly textured tree bark that looks like what the inside of a dream of being lost in a forest might look like if you cut it open and explored its nighttime trees. Like stars shining the way to waking, the bark twinkles from what appears to be glitter layered atop broken glass, adding a magical element to the natural quality of the bark. I looked closer and saw that the bark acts as a frame within the frame of the box to showcase a tiny paper cutout of a dancer in mid-leap. Her legs are frozen in an aerial split, her white tutu perfectly placed despite her apparent recent movement, and one arm is frozen as she reaches toward the sky. I realized that

behind the dancer is a tiny built-in light bulb illuminating the dancer. When the light bulb is switched off the dancer disappears.

Though the box is only seven inches deep the ballerina appears very distant. She reminds me of insects stuck in sap or honey, but the feeling I am left with after standing awestruck for five minutes is myself, simultaneously squirming to get free and longing to stay still. The memory of this image is frozen in my mind like the imagined insect in sap, like the dancer in mid-leap, like myself in the memory of this moment.

*Lighted Dancer* sent me dancing out of the everyday motions of life and allowed me to wander into the dance of everyday magic always simultaneously performed in the dark boxes inside us all. I had not seen a digital or print reproduction of this box before I came upon it at the Art Institute of Chicago, and I was pricked by its presence in a way that made time stutter to a slow stop. With this moment of presence, this moment of stillness, came an unsettling haunting from a distant past. The dancer was stuck there in the dim light that illuminated her frame seemingly in mid-decay. I knew that the moment the light went off she would temporarily disappear, only to reappear again to repeat her dance of stillness.

The combination of preservation and decay in this box is hauntingly palpable. The deep blue, dimly lit box, with its ballerina trapped safely inside, haunted me there, in that moment, followed me out into the wintertime Chicago streets, onto the plane back to New Orleans, and still to this day wanders with me through the everyday magic of my life. I am left with the beautiful despair of knowing that it is always the nearly opaque light that illuminates her, that hides her from full view, and that traps her in her performance for all time--a romantic meditative ode to both her dance and mine.

In this project I study Joseph Cornell's practices of art-making through a performative

lens. As a performance studies scholar, rather than analyzing his products from a distance I am interested in his processes of production as models for creative and scholarly work. In order to study his processes I use a combination of theory and practice. I first research how time and space operate and influence human agency and vice versa within each of Cornell's creative practices. In order to articulate my understanding of the role of time, space, and human agency in Cornell's processes of assemblage I call upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. Through this research I develop Cornell's chronotopes of assemblage, which include wandering, archiving, collaging, and assembling.

In order to operate betwixt and between theory and practice I extend my research into the creative by re-performing or "trying on" his chronotopic practices as my mode of inquiry. By doing so I produce artworks informed by the roles of time, space, and human agency in his practices and my historical, critical, and theoretical research corresponding to each of his practices. As a result, this project draws equally on scholarly research of Cornell's practices and embodiment as a way of knowing. My performance of Cornell's practices of assemblage is just as significant to my research as the traditional scholarly underpinnings of this study. I embrace performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood's claim that "knowing comes from doing" (152). Conquergood argues, "Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized in the academy" (145). Through operating within Cornell's assemblage chronotopes I am able to map out a method for assemblage as a mode of creative and scholarly work. Embracing performance as a mode of inquiry privileges alternative ways of knowing that are unsettling to institutional disciplines. Dedication to combining theory and practice is specific to

performance studies. Conquergood notes, “This constitutive liminality of performance studies lies in its capacity to bridge the segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry” (152). Following Conquergood, I shift between theoretical, historical, and critical research and descriptions of my own creative work throughout this project.

In the rest of this chapter I discuss Cornell in terms of what is most important to my study, which includes his creative biography and his roles as wanderer, archivist, collage artist, and assemblage artist. I then outline Bakhtin’s theorization of the chronotope and develop my conceptualization of Cornell’s textual chronotope of *métaphysique d’éphémère* and his assemblage chronotopes. I then map out in more detail the contents of each subsequent chapter. I conclude the chapter by discussing the significance and limitations of my project.

### **Joseph Cornell’s Creative Biography**

Joseph Cornell was born in Nyack, New York on Christmas Eve, 1903. He was the oldest son of Dutch descendants, Joseph and Helen Storms Cornell, and had two younger sisters, Helen and Betty, and a younger brother, Robert. His father was a textile salesman and designer who carved wooden toys and furniture in his spare time. His mother was a Kindergarten teacher before she married. She also wrote film scripts, played piano, and was an avid reader. Cornell was close with all of his siblings, particularly his brother, Robert, who suffered from cerebral palsy. The Cornells were an affluent family and enjoyed a relatively privileged lifestyle during Joseph’s childhood. Cornell’s parents were artistically inclined and interested in the turn of the century’s entertainment; they took their children into Manhattan to see music, theatre, and vaudeville shows, and to the emerging cinema. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan explains, “As a boy, [Cornell] had taken special delight in early motion-picture theatres and penny arcades on Coney

Island and along Sixth Avenue, the Eden Musée waxworks, the Hippodrome's water ballets and theatrical spectacles, and the Palace Theatre vaudeville extravaganzas" (*Navigating* 19). His childhood hero was stage magician and escape artist Harry Houdini, whom he would have been able to see on a family trip to the Hippodrome.

Hartigan describes Cornell as a bibliophile. His desire for solitude led to him become an avid reader of books, magazines, and newspapers, all of which funded a "bank of knowledge that embraced both nostalgia and information, the addictive pursuit of collecting, and budding insights into his perception of beauty" (*Navigating* 20). He was extremely knowledgeable about authors such as Walt Whitman, Lewis Carroll, and Ada Isaacs Mencken.

In 1917, his father died from leukemia and Cornell was sent to study at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, where he began to suffer from anxiety and depression. The Cornell family had been well off since Cornell was young; however, after his father's death the family was unable to keep up their lifestyle and moved to a series of rented houses in Bayside, Queens, and in 1929 settled at 37-08 Utopia Parkway in Flushing, where Cornell would live for the rest of his life. In 1921 Cornell left Phillips Academy without graduating and returned home to help his family's financial situation. His sisters married and moved away, leaving Cornell and his mother and brother together in the family home. Cornell's affluent and happy childhood was replaced with financial, physical, and emotional responsibility for his family, particularly his brother and mother.

### **General Artistic Influences and Approaches**

In 1921 Cornell went to work as a salesman for the textile wholesaler William Whitman Company on lower Madison Avenue. During his time as a textile salesman Cornell wandered the city and took in its culture. He visited antique shops, flea markets, second-hand shops,



bookstores, theatre ephemera stores, and record stores. He also frequented museums, the opera, ballet, and the public library. In the 1920s, Cornell was interested in modern art such as French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. However, he was also following the developing avant-garde community in New York, which was influenced by the European avant-garde movements of the time such as Dada, Cubism, and German Expressionism. As Cornell researched different art movements he also became interested in artists' lives, which became a "lifelong pattern of seeking out kindred spirits through his reading and collecting" (Hartigan, *Navigating* 25). He also spent time reading art criticism and journals on music, theatre, and visual art. He attended exhibitions and began meeting artists, curators, and others in the art world.

Hartigan explains that between 1926 and 1930, Cornell kept a scrapbook in which he kept clippings dealing with his wide array of creative interests. The scrapbook was an intertwining of his developing interests. Subjects were diverse, ranging from the nature of art and poetry, music, Japanese and Chinese art and literature, spirituality, and modern art criticism. The book consists of a softcover, two-ring binder with clippings neatly pasted in no obvious sequence. Hartigan explains, "The content, like his experiences between 1921 and 1929, are so cumulatively diverse that his perception of artistic emergence as natural, gradual, and spontaneous is understandable. Evidence of a single, defining moment that moved him from walking 'with eyes and ears' and seeking 'the scientific sense of being' to making art is simply absent" (*Navigating* 39). Instead he moved from his role as an observer/collector to that of a visual artist. During this period Cornell began cutting and pasting in his scrapbook, and there is indication that he began making three-dimensional objects during this period as well.

## Cornell's Practices

Cornell was a collector. He created his works from pre-existing materials. Along with his collections of found objects he collected mass-produced Victorian paper ephemera such as trade-cards, books, magazines, and photographs. Consumption of material goods grew in the Victorian era with expanding international trade, mass production, and technological advancement; advertising “generated a sense of a universe readily filled with necessities, inventions, and fancies” (Hartigan, *Navigating* 55). Hartigan explains that there was a contradictory idea of usefulness in the Victorian era. On the one hand there was a “waste not, want not” mindset that encouraged reusing or finding new uses for household objects. On the other hand, because of the rapid production of ephemera, tastes and styles changed quickly, causing consumers to discard out-of-style objects. The first flea market opened in Paris in 1885 and the idea of “grandma’s attic” became common in the Victorian era (Hartigan, *Navigating* 56). The waste not, want not mindset re-emerged in the 1930s during the Depression when many people saved objects to be used in new ways out of necessity. In his early work, Cornell’s collages were mostly arranged with clippings and images from other sources. Cornell made use of what Joe Moran describes as “rubbish,” “that which is discarded, ignored or left behind” (62). Objects turn to rubbish when they become outdated, forgotten or when, as Moran suggests, “they outlast their status as commodities and become part of our everyday clutter” (62). Moran goes on to explain that the French term “bric-a-brac” carries the idea of objects that are casually abandoned and fortuitously survive. Michael Thompson describes rubbish as ephemeral objects from everyday life that have physically survived, but are no longer fashionable or usable (Moran 64). Rubbish or bric-a-brac held special meaning for Cornell, and he roamed the city collecting and saving each piece until he had the perfect use for it in his work. He kept thematic file folders filled with clippings and

images accumulated over the years. Cornell never used the original image he tore from a book or magazine for a piece of his work. Instead he used Photostats, copies of copies, keeping the original in his collection.

Historians argue that for Cornell, objects were associated with the people, time, and places over which he obsessed. In his artworks often ballerinas, actresses, hotels, birds, or film stars are represented through objects metonymically associated with them or even belonging to them, such as ballerina's necklace or a bird's perch. Throughout his career certain objects such as pipes, bubbles, broken goblets, and sand repeated themselves, becoming motifs. These objects appear so often that they take on special meaning.

In addition to his collages, boxes, and films, Cornell also kept a journal of observations, dreams, and creative inspirations. He also developed extensive archives containing dossiers and explorations of various themes over the course of his career. The contents included ephemera, objects, clippings, postcards, notes, quotes, dried leaves and flowers, and illustrations that were stored in folders, boxes, slip folders, and suitcases. Cornell kept, added to, and edited his explorations and dossiers over the course of his entire career. He often referred to the collected material for his collage, three-dimensional, and film projects.

### **Cornell's Two and Three-Dimensional Works**

Cornell's early collages were inspired by and reminiscent of Max Ernst's collages or photomontages in which he "combined late-nineteenth century engravings into compositions whose elements differ radically in scale...he created a unified image from the collage fragments and assembled them so that they appeared to be a single entity" (Waldman 20). However, the tone of Cornell's work set him apart from Ernst and the Surrealists. While the Surrealists used found objects and juxtaposition to create startling and often unsettling contexts, Cornell used the

same techniques to create dreamlike environments that asked the viewer to transcend time and space imaginatively.

Though Cornell continued to make two-dimensional collages, his work transformed into object or memory boxes composed of found materials. Cornell's three-dimensional constructions often referenced architectural spaces such as hotels, pharmacies, palaces, aviaries, observatories, and theatres. A 1942 box entitled *A Pantry Ballet (For Jacques Offenbach)* took the form of a theatre with its curtains made from doilies and lobster ballerinas wearing mesh tutus. His famous *Toward the "Blue Peninsula" (For Emily Dickinson)* (1951-52), took the form of a stark white deserted aviary with a window looking out to the blue sky. The bird of the habitat seems to have just flown away.

Wooden boxes were not the only structures Cornell used in his work. He also transformed storage containers, chests, suitcases and cabinets into object boxes. *Untitled (Pharmacy)* (1942) was constructed from a wooden medicine cabinet with glass shelves. The shelves were lined with glass vials holding natural materials like marbles, colored sand, and seashells. Often within Cornell's boxes were more storage compartments such as drawers, bottles, and grids that held different found objects. The ordinary objects within container upon container were both displayed and protected. His museum boxes, for example, are constructed from chests holding vials holding found objects. Each vial has a slot to keep it secure within the chest or museum. Cornell intended the viewer to be able to pick up and explore each vial. This arrangement suggests "that the boxes are not just abstractions of specific types of environments but also compartments stocked for discovery" (Hartigan, *Shadowplay* 28). Cornell's boxes encouraged the viewer to interact through other senses than just the visual. Viewers are invited to open drawers, handle vials, or roll a ball. Often his interactive boxes would evoke arcade games,

reflecting his interest in turn-of-the-century mechanized entertainment. Boxes *Untitled (Penny Arcade Portrait of Lauren Bacall)* (1945-46), and the series of Medici boxes incorporate games found in penny arcades like pinball and slot machines.

### **Cornell's Filmic Works**

Although not as well known for his films as he was for his three-dimensional boxes, Cornell was an influential experimental filmmaker. Beginning in the 1930s, he made collage films from discarded film footage of Hollywood B movies and ephemeral films. His collage films include *Rose Hobart* (1936), *Cotillion* (1940s-1969), *Children's Party* (1940s-1969), *Midnight Party* (1940s-1969), *Bookstalls* (1940s), *By Night with Torch and Spear* (1940s), *Vaudeville De-Lux* (1940s), *Carousel- An Animal Opera* (1940s), *Thimble Theatre* (1940s), *Jack's Dream* (1940s), *New York-Rome-Barcelona-Brussels* (1940s), and *Cinderella's Dream* (no date). In the 1950s he began making original films in collaboration with experimental filmmakers like Stan Brakhage, Larry Jordan, and Jordan Lawrence. His original films document special locations and monuments in and around Manhattan and include *Centuries of June* (1955), *GniR RednoW* (1955-60), *A Legend for Fountains* (1957), *The Aviary* (1955), *Joanne: Union Square* (1955), *Joanne: Xmas* (1955), *Nymphlight* (1957), *Boy's Games* (1957), *Cloches A Travers Les Feuilles* (1957), *Angel* (1957), *Cappicino* (1957), *Mulberry Street* (1957-65), *Flushing Meadows* (1965), and *Children* (1957). Cornell also wrote several film scenarios that were never realized including *Monsieur Phot* (1933), *Nebula the Powdered Sugar Princess* (1941), and *The Theatre of Hans Christian Anderson* (1945). Although I was initially drawn to Cornell's boxes, I moved on to study his films. His films are especially important to this study because I am interested in how Cornell's filmic techniques can be used in conversation with

digital technologies. Several of the creative projects I contribute as part of this study incorporate the combination of analogue film and digital video technologies.

### **Cornell and Surrealism**

Prior to World War II many of the surrealists fled to New York City, giving Cornell direct access to surrealists such as Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp and their work. It made sense that Cornell, frequenting museums and galleries, made his way to the new Julien Levy Gallery. Levy's gallery focused on contemporary photography, film, and painting. Levy worked to bring Surrealism to the United States, and Cornell first encountered surrealist art in his gallery. On November, 11 1931, Cornell visited the Julien Levy Gallery where he saw Dada and Surrealist collages, sculptures, paintings, and photographs preoccupied with *objets trouvés* or "found objects" which appealed to his value of the serendipitous and natural transforming moments.

Hartigan explains found objects as the epitome of finding as a creative act:

Using the found object (or image) means giving it fresh purpose or context, but the found object can also give or deliver something new. This duality of the gift--from the artist to an object, from an object to the artist or the viewer--contributed to his variant idea of the '*objet donné*' or 'given object,' which informed [Cornell's] perception of art as a spiritual gift to humanity even in the early 1930s. (*Navigating* 46)

Cornell had been collecting found objects before his introduction to the Surrealists at the Levy Gallery. Around this time Cornell worked on collages inspired by Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929). He then began making three-dimensional assemblages from found objects. Cornell visited Levy to show him his own constructions including objects within a bell jar and pill boxes as well as his collages. Levy included his work in the "Surrealisme" exhibition at the gallery in January 1932, and then sponsored his first solo exhibit, "The Objects of Joseph Cornell" on November 26, 1932. Levy advertised the objects as "toys for adults" that would make good presents for Christmas.

*Joseph Cornell*, edited by Kynaston McShine, includes essays that analyze Cornell's work through twentieth-century art movements, mostly Surrealism. Cornell shared the surrealist idea that found and everyday objects can hold special, poetic meaning. With his use of found objects, collage, and *flânerie*, Cornell surely has much in common with the Surrealists; he was greatly influenced by Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Max Ernst. In "The Transcendental Surrealism of Joseph Cornell," Dawn Ades explains, "The chance encounters and disorienting juxtapositions of Cornell's early collages conform to the earliest definition of montage in the context of Dada and Surrealism" (16). However, Cornell maintained over the years that his work, although inspired by Surrealism, was not surrealist. Cornell sought not so much the incongruity that the Surrealists preferred as much as a "mysterious congruity, a thread of affinities, however intangible, rather than an illuminating spark struck from disparateness" (Ades 16). The Surrealists were dedicated to their dreams and subconscious desires. Their work was often overtly sexual, and objects within surrealist art often represent unconscious desires and fears. Cornell insisted that while the Surrealists were interested in making "Black Magic" with their art, his was "White Magic" (Hartigan, *Shadowplay* 47). Nevertheless, Ades concludes "that he belonged to the first generation of American artists to be profoundly influenced by the theory and practice of Surrealism, which he found stimulating and liberating, but that he quickly transcended this influence, although retaining to a considerable degree a Surrealist syntax in his works" (23). Diane Waldman explains, "The Surrealists gave Cornell a poetic license, as it were, to indulge in a fondness for the esoteric and the commonplace, a taste that should not be confused with the indiscriminate" (213).

## Bakhtin's Chronotope

In this section I conceptualize Bakhtin's chronotope, which I have chosen to use to help me explore Cornell's use of time and space in his works and processes. Because the chronotope focuses on time and space in embodied experiences, Bakhtin's language provides a critical approach to thinking about Cornell's processes of assemblage.

Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the specific embodied orientation to time and space within an artistic work as chronotopic: "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature . . . Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (*Dialogic* 84). In other words, space informs what events are possible in time; time imprints itself on space. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson add, "All contexts are shaped fundamentally by the kind of time and space that operate within them" and "Different social activities and representations of those activities presume different kind of time and space" (367). Bakhtin used the chronotope to understand how different times and spaces enable the potential for particular kinds of actions, valuing the chronotopes that were most responsive to human agency.

Bakhtin uses what he terms adventure time in the chivalric romance as an example of a distinct literary chronotope. In adventure time, the chivalric hero lives in a miraculous world. Everything in this literary world is extra-ordinary, causing the extra-ordinary to be the norm, or ordinary. Bakhtin notes, "The unexpected, and only the unexpected, is what is expected" (*Dialogic* 152) in adventure-time. The miraculous is the normal condition of the hero's world and so he behaves as if adventure were his "native element" (*Dialogic* 152). The hero travels to faraway lands in adventure-time, but while the lands are all "other" lands, they are all similar to



one another and have the same concept of glory and the heroic deed. Time is manipulated in chivalric adventure-time. Hours can drag out; years can be condensed to minutes. The hero's identity and his actions are only possible because of the kind of world that the adventure-time chronotope creates.

Bakhtin focused on chronotopes within literature. However, he explained that chronotopes exist in everyday life as well. For Bakhtin, aesthetics and everyday life were inextricably tied together. He tells us, "We might even speak of a special *creative* chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the unique life of the work" (*Dialogic* 254, emphasis in original). Morson and Emerson explain, "Chronotopes are not so much visibly *present* in activity as they are the *ground* for activity . . . They are not contained in plots, but make typical plots possible" (369). Although each has a distinct orientation to time, space, and human agency, they may overlap in practice and even, as Bakhtin argues, "compete for ascendancy." He explains, "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist. They may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (*Dialogic* 252). Chronotopes can enter into dialogue with one another. Further, chronotopes inform one's perceptions and interpretation of action. By doing so they also offer values.

### **The Chronotope of the Product versus the Chronotopes of Performance**

At the beginning of this project I was drawn to Cornell's aesthetic; the mysterious play of preservation and decay drew me in. There is a specific chronotope at work within Cornell's aesthetic, *métaphysique d'éphémère* or "everyday magic." This concept comes from nineteenth-century French Romantic poet and novelist Gerard de Nerval, who emphasized the importance of insignificant things once the imagination has transformed them (Caws 394). Cornell attempted to

make the ordinary or fleeting subtly magical or metaphysical. Caws explains that *métaphysique d'éphémère* “betokens the passion he devoted to the wandering portion of his days, tracking down the trivial elements in his boxes which he saw as linked to a greater philosophical system” (136). *Métaphysique d'éphémère* expresses Cornell’s investment in creating the perfect combination of the everyday and the eternal in his work. Additionally, Cornell referred to this tension in making his three-dimensional boxes and collages as the attempt to hold on to something that inevitably disappears, like people, things, places, times, memories, and dreams. I understand *métaphysique d'éphémère* as the textual chronotope operating in Cornell’s finished products.

Art historians such as Hartigan describe Cornell’s ways of orienting to time differently than most artists. He saw the past and present not as distinct, but as fluid and in conversation with one another. Hartigan explains, “His perception of the past as a form of history that informs the present and shapes the future considers time as a continuum and creative force. As a result, rather than dwelling on details and memories as a source of sentiment, he transformed them to project time’s multiple dimensions and effects” (*Shadowplay* 23). Additionally, space in Cornell’s works combines the miniature and the infinite. Hartigan suggests that the miniature size of his pieces allowed imaginative expansion for the viewer. A tiny vial holding a ribbon takes the viewer on a journey of a memory far beyond the dimensions of the box itself. Hartigan claims, “Cornell had to negotiate issues of scale within a space that he deliberately confined to the small and intimate” (*Shadowplay* 27). The boxes open an infinite imaginative space within the dimension of a frame, which often included mirrors, doors, or prosceniums that alluded to space beyond the box itself.

Cornell's boxes mix past and present and eras. They also incorporate multiple uses of space, ranging from multiple scales within a box to suggestions of the infinite within the dimensions of the box. Space in another sense also becomes important for Cornell to preserve, document, and intimately engage and interact with, particularly as New York's cityscape evolved.

But in addition to the senses of time and space (*métaphysique d'éphémère*) Cornell conveys *inside* his works, each of Cornell's practices of assemblage take on different orientations to time and space that may or may not be necessarily tied to *métaphysique d'éphémère* (Cornell's textual chronotope). These chronotopes of process include wandering, archiving, collaging, and assembling. Although critics like Lynda Roscoe Hartigan and Jodi Hauptman discuss time and space in Cornell's *works*, my study is interested more in spatial and temporal dynamics in his *processes*.

### **Cornell's Assemblage Chronotopes**

An assemblage artist collects found or ready-made objects and places the objects into relation with each other. William Seitz defines assemblage broadly as "A generic concept that would include all forms of composite art and modes of juxtaposition" (9). I use the term to refer to the general practice of taking pre-existing objects and/or images from one environment and placing them into a new context in relation to other objects and images in order to create a new artwork. Assemblage art includes three-dimensional compositions from found objects, two-dimensional collage, filmic montage, photomontage, and dossiers. Each art form requires embodied practices that combine drawing from the past while working toward a future creative potential.

In this study, I describe Joseph Cornell's works as assemblage art and then situate his

working methods as performances. In doing so I adapt Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to describe Cornell's artistic practices of wandering, collecting and archiving, collaging, and assembling as embodied performances.

Each of Cornell's assemblage chronotopes takes on specific qualities in relation to time and space. It is important to note that although I am separating and dividing the chronotopes to define and characterize them, artists move back and forth between chronotopes. The creative process is not a step-by-step process culminating with assemblage; the chronotopes of assemblage are fluid. They offer a means to understand the assemblage artist's creative work, but they also offer a researcher/practitioner methods for creating new assemblages. The assemblage chronotope is therefore heterochronotopic, meaning that multiple chronotopes are always operating within the larger chronotope of assemblage. So, the assemblage chronotope contains the wandering, archiving, collaging, and assembling chronotopes. The specificity of time and space of each chronotope is still at work within the larger chronotopes that contain the others.

### **The Wandering Chronotope**

In Chapters Two and Three, I explore the wandering chronotope. The wandering chronotope necessarily challenges daily routine. It upsets and disrupts it and thereby enables chance and spontaneity. Schedules and appointments are disregarded, and instead of traversing the city in order to accomplish a task or job, wandering offers one the chance to lose oneself in one's surroundings. The wanderer improvises and is satisfied with not knowing where she is going exactly. Time slows and becomes leisurely. The wanderer meanders through the day, going where she pleases, when she pleases, directed by her desires, whether conscious or not. The wandering chronotope opens the possibility to be inspired by one's surroundings. It allows

the opportunity to observe, discover, and imbue surroundings with new and special meaning. The wanderer is more connected to her surroundings. She does not simply rush by as she would in a car or train. She takes more time, sees more details. Space plays a particularly important role in the wandering chronotope as it becomes a vessel for memories. As we wander and encounter familiar places, memories flood back to us. In this way, time, in the wandering chronotope, is also layered. The wanderer simultaneously lives in the present and accesses the past as she encounters particular places. Space holds memories of the past, but time progresses and the landscape evolves.

### **The Archiving Chronotope**

The second chronotope, discussed in Chapters Four and Five, deals with archiving. The performance of archiving is solitary and intimate. As the archivist engages with the archive, time can pass unexpectedly; hours can pass in what seem to the archivist like minutes. Detail is magnified in this chronotope as the archivist can spend extended periods of time focusing on one object, document, or image within the archive. While physical seclusion or isolation characterizes this chronotope, an intimate connection occurs between the archivist and the archival material. So, while time can seem to pass quickly because the archivist is caught up in her work, time also slows in order for the archivist to interact with the objects with precision and care.

Susan Davidson and Ann Tempkin explain that the collector and archivist isn't only compulsive or obsessive but also has, "A sense of purpose, an attachment to the objects of desire, an appreciation of arranging, and a strong urge to share, whether to egotistical or unselfish ends" (222). The archivist has a close relationship to that which she archives; she experiences a thrill in the hunt for an object and has an intense desire to possess the objects. The act of archiving is

highly idiosyncratic. Each archivist has a particular way to organize and catalogue her archives. The archivist begins to make her own constellations of connections and associations between the objects within the archive and uses those connections to create her archival system. Though the organization of items in archives is subjective and often nebulous, it is not random. Archives are selective and often rearranged, reevaluated, and revised according to the archivist's intentions over time. A tension occurs between private and public when archiving because the interaction between archive and archivist is so intimate and idiosyncratic yet usually the archive is intended for a public audience. But, because relationships between archival materials can be so associative subjective to the archivist, they are often not completely accessible to a public audience.

The relationship between archivist and archive is a performative encounter between living, dynamic, corporeal bodies constituted by memory, history, and experience. These bodies are wholly interdependent while simultaneously existing in a state of what Bakhtin terms unfinalizability. Importantly, the avant-garde archive exploits that which the nineteenth-century archivists and historians fought to eliminate: contingency. Cornell's boxes, for example, although assembled in a form for presentation, open the possibility for alternatives or extensions of pieces of art. Cornell's archives use reused, found materials to be found and reused again. Cornell's archives and archival methods act as predecessors of contemporary archival practices of creative remixing.

### **The Collaging Chronotope**

The third chronotope, explored in Chapters Six and Seven, is collaging. Collage enables the artist to experiment with placing materials together from various sources. The performer in the collage chronotope is a joiner of things who pieces together multiple materials, often creating odd and juxtaposed images, stories, and interpretations. Breton describes collage as "The

marvelous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience, of bringing them together, and drawing a spark from their contact . . . and of disorienting us in our memory by depriving us a frame of reference” (177). The collage is made entirely of pre-existing objects and images that have been lifted from their original or previous context and put into a new context. The arrangement of the objects in relation to each other elicits subjective responses for each viewer. Norman Lilaberte and Alex Mogelon describe the interpretation of collage:

The symbols within the collage, montage, assemblage, and construction must be interpreted and related to human feelings, experiences, and values in order to evoke individual reaction and understanding on the part of the viewer. Thus the power of collage composition rests in the use of novel and many times unexpected materials, juxtaposition so as to elicit psychological response from the viewer. (11)

The technique of collage can be translated to techniques in film editing. Like collage, montage spatially and temporally creates the possibility for odd juxtapositions and the rough inverse of that, continuity and contiguity created where there is none in reality. The collaging chronotope is malleable and characterized by mutability of time and space. The performer has the ability to create new continuities and ruptures where continuity previously existed, sometimes simultaneously.

Working within the collage chronotope is often ad hoc. There are many mistakes and false starts. However, through the experimentation of arranging and rearranging diverse materials many surprises occur in collage. Some of the surprises are accidents that are unwanted, but many times collage is full of happy accidents.

## The Assemblage Chronotope

In the assemblage chronotope, explored in Chapter Eight, the artist plays with collage and montage in a three-dimensional space such as a box or theatrical stage. Notions of an original are blurred and called into question:

These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer primary. It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects. (Bourriauld 13)

Importantly, although the chronotope fixes and presents objects in a specific assemblage, it is not meant to be stable. Whereas the archiving chronotope suggested potential for what Bakhtin refers to as unfinalizability, the assemblage chronotope is more radically unfinalizable. Many of Cornell's boxes, for example, although assembled in a form for presentation, invite audience participation by dropping a ball through a secret slot or opening a drawer to discover the contents inside. Assemblage leaves open the possibility for alternatives or extensions of pieces of art. Finally, the assemblage chronotope is the one chronotope that contains the others (wandering, collecting, archiving, and collaging). Thus, it assembles not just materials but also these chronotopic practices.

Assemblage has long been a mysterious and somewhat threatening form to the more established art forms such as painting and sculpture. Assemblage can be considered a variation on adaptation, with the idea that, as Paul Edwards argues, "Adaptation has become an everyday art and a ubiquitous communication practice of digital consciousness, playing in improvisatory ways beyond the boundaries of the identified, sustained art work" (376). Assemblage is not just a description of the works of the twenty or so major artists who practiced it plus the lesser known ones; it is a dominant form of cultural expression. But like adaptation, assemblage is not well



understood; it is often thought of as lesser than or secondary to the “original” practices that made the works that are adapted (which, upon closer examination, are often themselves adaptations, too). William Seitz explains that assemblage “Has always been a threat to the approved media of oil painting, carving, and casting” (87). He explains that assemblage “is an established mode of communication employing words, symbols, and signs, as freely as it does pigments, materials, and objects” (87). Assemblage art reveals rather than conceals its process, thus demonstrating that process in a way that can be repeated by other artists.

### **Map of Chapters**

The organization of the chapters in this study reflects my process as a researcher and practitioner. The chapters alternate between my investigations of Cornell’s chronotopes and my own artistic projects motivated by that study. In Chapter Two I discuss the theoretical groundings that inform my development of the wandering chronotope along with Cornell’s own practices specific to that chronotope. In Chapter Three I discuss my performance of wandering to create my own Cornell inspired artwork, a website inspired by wandering in the city in which I live, New Orleans. In Chapter Four I deal with the archiving chronotope. I discuss Cornell’s subject-driven explorations as well his boxes in terms of the dynamic archive. Extending my study of the archive to Chapter Five, I discuss Cornell’s films as ephemeral archives and link them to contemporary practices of digital archiving. For the project portion of this chapter I combine analog and digital archives to realize a film scenario that Cornell wrote, but never filmed. In Chapter Six I outline the theoretical and historical groundings of collage as well as Cornell’s practices of collage. In Chapter Seven I cover a collage film that I made inspired by Cornell’s own collage processes. Finally, in Chapter Eight I incorporate all of the chronotopes to discuss assemblage art as heterochronotopic through my theatrical production and a later

restaging of *Métaphysique d'Éphemera*, a performance inspired by Joseph Cornell. Below, I provide more detailed descriptions of the terrain covered in each of the chapters.

In Chapter Two I track Cornell's wanderings in Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs. Wandering provided Cornell with the opportunity to collect found objects for his work as well as to be inspired by his surroundings. Drawing on Rebecca Solnit's *History of Walking*, I tie Cornell's wandering to historic practices of walking for creative inspiration such as Romantic and Surrealist wandering, the Parisian *flâneur*, Michel de Certeau's poetic walking, and the Situationist International's *dérive*. I then discuss wandering as a way to engage with the history of one's surroundings. Drawing on scholarship by Dylan Trigg, Rebecca Solnit, Gaston Bachelard, and Francis Yates, I argue that individual's memories are imprinted in the locations in which they occurred. Walking and interacting with spaces allows us to remember memories located in specific places. I argue that space was not only creative inspiration for Cornell but also locations stocked with memories. The evolving landscape of early and mid-twentieth-century Manhattan created a tension for Cornell that appeared in his work. I discuss Cornell's original films as documents that attempt to preserve a location that is disappearing. I then draw on Jodi Hauptman's work to argue that Cornell's collecting, archivization, and creative use of found materials from the city are a form of experimental map-making.

In Chapter Three, I describe a project in which I wandered my city, New Orleans, and collected memories. In the project I explored the connection between place and memory, using walking as a method of remembering. I asked several friends to take me on walks through their neighborhoods in New Orleans and as we walked I collected various found materials, recorded stories, took photographs, and even mapped GPS traces. Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans' geographical map by wiping out entire neighborhoods and leaving many buildings and

locations destroyed or abandoned. Since 2005, New Orleans has been rebuilt, but while many neighborhoods have gentrified, some are blighted, and others are still in the midst of reconstruction. This traumatic change in the city map of New Orleans has affected the memories individuals have attached to specific sites as they have been destroyed, are drastically different, or still abandoned. For the final stage of the project I created an interactive website using the collected materials from my wanderings.

In Chapter Four I discuss Cornell's extensive personal archives and archival practices. I introduce traditional roles of the archive as well as experimental archives that challenge the notion of the archive as a stable environment for outmoded objects and documents. I describe Cornell's archival explorations, and boxes and museums as examples of the archive as art. Over the course of his career Cornell added to his archives and used his archives as a source of creative material. Drawing on the work of Susan Davidson and Ann Temki, I compare Cornell's archival practices to Marcel Duchamp's. I focus on several of Cornell's archival explorations and dossiers to demonstrate how Cornell used archiving for educational as well as creative purposes.

In Chapter Five I turn to his original films to argue that Cornell used film to document places and moments slipping into the past, to archive the moment with the intent of preservation. Further, I argue that Cornell used film to document the contingent. Film decomposes over time, which fights against the notion of a stable, fixed archive. I discuss Cornell's archivization as a precursor for digital archivization art practiced by many contemporary artists. Practices of digital archivization and digital archive art pose new questions about originality, authorship, and ownership of digital archives as well as questions about stability and permanence. To study these questions I call on Nicholas Baurriault and Wendy Chun. I explore the possibility of using obsolete and digital technology together creatively to extend Cornell's archives. This kind of

archival art is increasingly popular in the widespread use of digital technologies and shared with a mass audience.

I then describe my creative extension of a film scenario from Cornell's archive: *Nebula: The Powdered Sugar Princess* (1941). Although Cornell wrote multiple versions of the scenario, he never realized the film project. I used old and new technologies to breathe new life into Cornell's archive. To create my project I combined the use of pre-cinema device, the zoetrope, and found digital video. Cornell's scenario deals with the astronomical phenomenon that the destruction of nebulae allows individual stars to be born. The scenario embodies a tension of *métaphysique d'éphémère*, and my use of a combination of obsolete and new technologies also enacts this tension.

In Chapter Six I discuss Cornell's roles as a film enthusiast, collector, and creator. In this chapter I deal with Cornell's experimental films, particularly his collage films. I argue that Cornell's use of artistic media to explore the relationship between presence and obsolescence and his turn to film allowed him to do this not only through subject matter but also in form.

In Chapter Seven I follow Cornell's techniques of collage by cutting and splicing together footage from various found films to construct my own film, splicing them together to create a surreal narrative, *Song of the Nightingale*. I conclude by discussing the conversion of my 8mm film to digital video, focusing on retaining my "accidents of deterioration" and the discoveries about presence and obsolescence that resulted.

In Chapter Eight I discuss assemblage art as inherently tied to the past, present, and future, or, in other words, as unfinalizable through a continuous process of de-and re-contextualization. I discuss *Métaphysique d'Éphémère: A Performance Inspired by Joseph Cornell*, a theatrical performance co-written by poet Christopher Shipman and myself and which

I directed in 2011 in the HopKins Black Box laboratory theatre on the campus of Louisiana State University. I discuss the construction of the production through the chronotopes of assemblage. I then demonstrate how assemblage art is meant to springboard into future creative work through a discussion of a new adaptation of *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* staged at Southern Illinois University.

### **Significance**

Studying assemblage as a method of creative and scholarly inquiry de-romanticizes both the creative and scholarly process of production. It fights against the idea of the individual pursuit of creative and scholarly work. Assemblage brings this expectation of creative and scholarly genius into question by offering everyday practices that lead to creative and scholarly production. Assemblage gives researchers and artists everyday tools to go out into the world and observe, critique, and create. It necessitates that artists and scholars look to the obsolete, the forgotten, the overlooked as sources of creative and academic merit. Assemblagists make the old new through their use of recycling and remixing.

The significance of this study lies in that it takes a performative, heuristic approach to studying Cornell through the analysis and deployment of what I term Cornell's chronotopes of assemblage. This is a dissertation devoted to discovery through practice. While scholars have approached Cornell's works from art historical (McShine, Hartigan, Vine, and Lehrman), psychological (Brink), and biographical (Solomon) perspectives, this study re-imagines Cornell's artistic processes and *enacts* them. While much has been written about the assemblage of everyday objects in Cornell's works, my study uniquely explores the performances of his chronotopic practices of wandering, collecting, archiving, collage, and assembling. The embodiment of each chronotope demonstrates a model for scholars and practitioners.

Additionally, my study provides a model for the research process generally by developing the chronotopes of creative research.

This study takes an alternative approach to Cornell and his work. It heeds Ameila Jones's call that the viewing or embodied reception of visual artworks should be a *process* that can be engaged as performative rather than the traditional 'disinterested' and objective interaction between audience and artwork (2). In this study performance offers a way of knowing and interacting with Cornell's work. Thus, this study makes practical scholars' perspectives and arguments in an embodied way.

Additionally, this study has merit in that although Bakhtinian analysis has been used extensively to study literature and culture (and literature *in* culture), it has seldom been used to study the creative process of the visual or plastic artist. One significant work that does engage Bakhtin's ideas to discuss painting and sculpture is Deborah J. Haynes's *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*. This study expands the areas of research that benefit from applications of Bakhtinian theory by applying it to visual/plastic art making. However, Haynes does not extend her analysis to actual practice, which is what I do in this dissertation.

Studying Cornell's works chronotopically and using these chronotopes as a basis for re-performances of Cornell's practices helps in the project of recovering what Bakhtin called "eventness" in the artwork ("Author and Hero" 189). Whereas phenomenology is limited in that it deals with one set of chronotopes--the time/space of the viewer--this study puts these in conversation with the authoring chronotopes of assemblage art in order to study Cornell and to use his methods as relays for my own assemblages, research, and ultimately, scholarly writing.

Further, I embrace Cornell's idea of exploring that becomes creative as well as the belief that assemblage art acts as educational and creative material for artists. Through the process of

embodying Cornell's chronotopes of assemblage I come to understand Cornell's practices and achieve new methods for creating my own art as well as for understanding the creative process. For example, by taking on the role of the wanderer I develop an approach to my surroundings that is both invested and critical, enabling me to make discoveries that I might not have otherwise made. I am influenced both artistically and academically through the environments I explore. I engage my own surroundings and environment as being full of potential artistic expression. Through my re-enactment of the assemblage chronotopes I acquire an appreciation for long periods of time spent on one project, the patience that is learned, and the connection one feels with the piece of work. I also embrace the idea of unfinalizability. Each component of assemblage is strategic although the final assembly might appear to be random; therefore my approach aims to move behind the finished assemblage and into the contingencies and strategies of the performance of assemblage. Thus through attending to the practice I understand and help my readers to understand that assemblage art is just as much or more about the process of making assemblage than it is the (un)finalized product.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. I focus on Cornell's processes more so than the boxes. As such I acknowledge that this is not a comprehensive study of his works. Cornell was a prolific artist; his works are collected in over forty public museums and collections, with numerous works owned by private individuals. I limit my discussion to individual works that inspire each of my analyses and creative projects. I study Cornell from the perspective of an assemblage artist—a wanderer, archivist, collagist and assemblagist—and as such my selection of which works to discuss is contingent upon the kinds of agency each of my chronotopes affords. These might not be the works that Cornell scholars have heretofore considered most

significant. As well, because I am interested in uncovering the repertoire within his archive and deconstructing the difference, this study potentially will not stabilize Cornell so much as destabilize prior perceptions of Cornell and his art.

Within each chapter no one theory prevails. Though I take a performative approach to operating with each assemblage chronotope, I allow the individual chronotopes to influence the particular conceptual-theoretical issues that arise in each chapter. By taking this approach I put discourses from performance studies, art history, and cultural studies in dialogue with one another in order to explore ways of understanding Cornell's processes that may have been overlooked or left out. I am interested not so much in the significance of Cornell's boxes and films in their final form as they have been studied by most art critics and historians as I am in the embodied processes by which Cornell assembled his works. He never considered his boxes complete, so to study his work as finished aesthetic products tends to bracket out what I believe is most compelling in his works.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE WANDERING CHRONOTOPE

In this chapter I focus on the wandering chronotope as embodied and practiced by Cornell. Cornell spent much of his time wandering the urban environment of Manhattan and his neighborhood in Queens. For Cornell, wandering was often aimless, done for the pleasure of becoming unfamiliar in familiar places. He had favorite locations that he visited frequently, but most of the time he did not have a predetermined destination in mind. Instead he drifted, letting his desires and emotions guide his path.

In the wandering chronotope schedules and appointments are disregarded and instead of traversing the city in order to accomplish a task or job, the wanderer can lose herself in her surroundings. The wanderer floats through the city, letting her whims and immediate desires navigate her through her surroundings. As the wanderer meanders, her attractions lead her to new and unfamiliar places to explore. This does not mean, however, that one cannot wander in familiar surroundings. If the wanderer embodies the wandering chronotope in her own neighborhood, for example, she takes on a new perspective. She slows down and becomes more observant, which allows her to see what was previously unseen. The familiar becomes unfamiliar as the wanderer approaches her surroundings with the openness of being influenced by her surroundings in the moment. Whether in new and unfamiliar or familiar surroundings, embodying the wandering chronotope opens the possibility to be inspired by and develop a connection with natural and architectural surroundings. Wandering enables the wanderer to imbue specific places with special meaning. As the wanderer passes places she has been before, memories are unlocked and become present in that moment. In this way, time, in the wandering chronotope, is heterochronotopic. The wanderer simultaneously lives in the present, while experiencing memories that return as she engages with places she encounters. The cityscape,

however, does not remain unchanged by time. Natural and architectural spaces evolve over the years by being remodeled or torn down and replaced with new structures. With the evolution of the cityscape memories attached to architectural and natural spaces can continue or be lost along with the changing cityscape.

Below, I cover Cornell's processes and related processes that inspired my project, the subject of the next chapter. I begin with Cornell's own wanderings of New York. Then I discuss artistic and social movements that influenced his wandering such as Romantic wandering (wandering for pleasure) and Surrealist wandering, which introduced chance and imbuing found objects with special meaning. I then discuss Cornell's boxes as experimental maps. Finally, I link wandering to memory, arguing that walking the city is an act of memory that resonated with Cornell emotionally and inspired him creatively.

### **Wandering as Aesthetic Practice**

Cornell visited Manhattan often as a child with his family in the 1900s-1910s and as an adult when he went to work as a salesman for William Whitman Company, a wholesale textile company on lower Madison Avenue. Although his business was located in the heart of the garment districts of Manhattan, Cornell left his building and deviated from his daily walking route while working as a door-to-door salesman. He spent much of his time "walking the city, walking anywhere, looking at whatever fell into his sight--people, the pigeons, the reflections glimpsed in the windows of buildings, the new steel skyscrapers rising out of nowhere, the crumbling brick houses where the city's Dutch settlers had lived so many centuries earlier" (Solomon 34). As Cornell wandered daily structures and schedules disintegrated, allowing him to drift by chance and desire from place to place, discovering his own New York.

Like the Romantics, Cornell wandered not only as a mode of transportation, but also for the experience itself. The Romantics walked for the sake of walking and the way it made them feel both physically and psychologically. Rousseau explains:

Never did I think so much, exist so vividly, and experience so much, never have I been so much myself--if I may use that expression--as in the journeys I have taken alone on foot. There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts. When I stay in one place I can hardly think at all; my body has to be on the move to set my mind going. The sight of the country side, the succession of pleasant views, the open air, a sound appetite, and the good health I gain by walking, the easy atmosphere of an inn, the absence of everything that recalls me to my situation--all these serve to free my spirit, to lend a greater boldness to my thinking, so that I can combine them, select them, and make them mine as I will, without fear or restraint. (qtd. in Solnit 19)

Romantic William Wordsworth and his companions are credited for walking for the sake of walking rather than as a means to an end as it was for many of their contemporaries. Rebecca Solnit tells us, "It is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile: it is both means and end, travel and destination" (6). It was the journey itself, the act of walking and interacting with their surroundings that interested the Romantics. Solnit argues that the Romantics "founded the whole lineage of those who walk for its own sake and for pleasure of being in the landscape, from which so much has sprung" (82). Further, walking became cultural act as well as an aesthetic experience for the Romantics (Solnit 82). As Rousseau explains, walking allows one to gain a new perspective. It provides the opportunity to be free of daily responsibilities, to forget personal situations, and to free the spirit temporarily. Cornell's personal circumstances were difficult and he was plagued with periods of deep depression. He was his ailing brother's caregiver and the sole earner of the family. Being out of doors and walking about gave him temporary relief from his daunting responsibilities. It lifted his spirits.

In the nineteenth century Walter Benjamin, inspired by Charles Baudelaire, describes the *flâneur*. The French word is understood as “stroller” or “idler.” Solnit argues that the *flâneur* emerged as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century city became “so large and complex” that it became unfamiliar even to its citizens (199). The *flâneur* is often described as a man, well dressed, and wealthy, as he has free time to wander aimlessly. The *flâneur* made his debut in nineteenth-century Parisian arcades through which he would walk and window-shop with no intention of buying. The *flâneur* wanders city streets with no route or destination. “He flows like thought through his physical surroundings, walking in a meditative trance” (Lopate 88). There is a myth that the *flâneur* was to stroll with a turtle, which was to set the pace, allowing the *flâneur* to observe his surrounding in the minutest detail. In his *Arcades Project* Benjamin describes the *flâneur* as a dreaming idler: “That anamnestic intoxication in which the *flâneur* goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge-- indeed, of dead facts--as something experienced and lived through” (417). The *flâneur* is an emotionally distanced yet active observer of the places where he wanders.

The Surrealists embraced Benjamin’s concept of the *flâneur* and extended it into an aesthetic technique. The Surrealists wandered the streets, letting chance take them from one place to the next. The everyday, including objects and places, took on special, extraordinary, even magical meaning. Solnit explains, “Surrealism prized dreams, the free associations of an unconscious or unself-conscious mind, startling juxtapositions, chance and coincidence, and the poetic possibilities of everyday life. Wandering around a city was an ideal way to engage with all these qualities” (206). The Surrealists were interested in investing the obsolete, forgotten, and debris of the everyday world with elevated meaning.

At times Cornell felt the detachment from his surroundings characteristic of the *flâneur*. He says in his journal, “Detachment . . . buoyant feeling . . . an abstract feeling of geography and voyaging . . .” (Caws 98). Although Cornell wandered the streets of Queens and Manhattan, he did not exactly embody Benjamin’s *flâneur*, who was often of the leisure class and thus had extra time to wander the city because his economic status meant that he did not have to work. Additionally, the *flâneur* might be considered a voyeur, visually consuming his surroundings and moving on. Though Cornell wandered his surroundings, observing his environment, he did not just visually absorb the city with an air of entitlement. He interacted.

His wandering was often aimless and exploratory in nature. He wandered the city to discover hidden nooks and crannies and to be amid the bustle of the city rather than removed. Having nowhere in particular in mind, he allowed himself to float along and let whatever caught his attention guide him. In this way, he came across many of the materials as well as ephemeral encounters he incorporated into his work. He spent his days wandering “Book Row” on Fourth Avenue, the shopping districts from Third Avenue to Broadway, and down into Washington Square and Greenwich Village (Hartigan, *Navigating* 19). Hartigan explains that many of the surrounding buildings predated 1900 and still had an air of nineteenth-century leisure with horse-drawn trolleys and antique and “Oriental shops,” ice cream parlors, eateries, bookshops, the famous FAO Schwarz toy store, piano showrooms, Grand Central Station, and the Flatiron building. Cornell often stopped at The Sign of the Sparrow book and ephemera shop, which specialized in theatrical memorabilia. His office was in Madison Square, and there was a park nearby on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street surrounded by the Flatiron building, American Parthenon, and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Building. As he wandered his favorite haunts he observed other pedestrians, stopped in ephemera shops, took in films, had coffee and pastries at coffee

shops, and lunched at automats. He would gaze out windows and track his daily path in his detailed journals. Like the Romantics, Cornell also enjoyed walking in nature, for example along the shore of West Hampton where one of his sisters lived. He collected objects and observations as he wandered.

### **From Creative Inspiration to Aesthetic Practice**

Cornell's wandering, which began as a mode of exploring the city, its structures, open spaces, and inhabitants, gradually turned into a highly personalized artistic method. He explains that wandering was "exploring that became creative" (Caws 155). Breton's idea of "complete happiness," Cornell later noted in his journals, was of "quickly being plunged into a world in which every triviality becomes imbued with significance" (qtd. in Solomon 92). As he leaves the city, Cornell recounts, "Elements of the commonplace (easily forgotten) recalled vividly" (Caws 136). Wandering challenged the Surrealists to live, move about, and observe their surroundings with a new perspective that opened possibilities of the everyday. Through wandering Cornell chanced upon locations, people, and objects that he invested with importance, which were often obscure, forgotten aspects of the world. Everydayness took on an almost magical meaning as he wandered through New York and the boroughs.

In 1957 Cornell collaborated with Rudy Burckhardt on a film to bring the essence of one of Cornell's favorite places, Manhattan's Bryant Park, to life. *Nymphlight* (1957) stars the young Gwen Thomas and is Cornell's most narrative film as it follows the young girl running through the park carrying a broken parasol. We watch her watch her surroundings: pigeons in flight and in trees, the spraying fountain, men sitting on benches. Our perspective shifts back and forth from watching her watch to seeing what she sees (her point of view or POV shot). The setting becomes a tranquil sanctuary in the middle of the bustling city. Time slows down as we take on

the girl's perspective and meditate on the surroundings. As the film continues the girl gradually disappears or withdraws from the park, leaving the viewer alone. Suddenly, another young girl wanders into the park. The camera follows her as she aimlessly wanders through the park, taking in the surrounding nature. She appears to be enchanted by the park and is completely unaware of the camera as pigeons swoop around her. The film ends with two shots: the first girl's abandoned parasol in a trashcan and an extreme close-up of the pool of the fountain as water drips from the stone. In his essay "The Cinematic Gaze of Joseph Cornell," Sitney argues that *Nymphlight* is a film about metamorphosis: "the cinematic occasion is an act of invocation to the spirits of places consecrated in Cornell's experience" (85). The film brings the park or the spirit of the park to life through the girl with the parasol. The inanimate becomes animate to express the magic that Cornell experienced in Bryant Park.

### **Poetically Engaging the City**

Michel de Certeau notes that walking offers a poetics of the city through an embodied encounter with the city rather than a detached view from above. He argues that a detached, all-encompassing view forces a "way of being in the world (to be) forgotten" (151). Instead, de Certeau suggests that the city walker makes the city his/her own. Walking gives citizens a tactic that subverts institutional power or strategies. Further, a walker applies his or her individual imagination to the city, which opens up possibilities for new meanings and directions of places in the city. Rather than passively walking along the intended paths, the walker creatively moves about the city in ways that undermine the original intention of the layout of streets and buildings. Solnit says, "Architecture limits where one can walk, but the walker invents other ways to go" (213). Walkers make their walking a poetic experience through the way they move about and the paths that they create as they walk through the city.

*Dérive*, a term made popular by Guy Debord and practiced by the Situationist International (SI), was inspired by de Certeau. Debord explains *dérive* as “A technique of transient passage through varied ambiances . . . . In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (62). The Situationist International (SI) formed in 1957 based on theoretical and avant-garde critiques of capitalism. They embraced Marx’s critique of capitalism and argued that the spectacle (à la Debord) leads to alienation. The SI embraced the everyday as a way to undermine capitalism’s control over society. SI sought ways to undermine or subvert political and economic control of urban space and “open one’s consciousness to the unconscious of urban space” (Hauptman 149). One of their methods was *dérive* or drifting through the city streets, surrendering to one’s desires to go where one pleases.

Cornell left his office building and explored neighborhoods in the city, poetically interacting with his surroundings and giving personal attachments and value to places as he moved through them. Though Cornell’s *dérive* was not intentionally subversive of the powers that be, his wandering inherently upset traditional understandings of moving through the city. From the perspectives of the Romantics, Surrealists, and Situationists, Cornell’s walking may be considered aesthetic practice in and of itself, but it also led to other aesthetic projects for him.

The fleeting moments of city life that Cornell observed as he walked inspired him. For example he rode the elevated trains, built in the 1800s, that ran through Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. As he rode he observed that the passengers had both a bird’s eye view of pedestrians below and an eye level perspective of people in passing buildings. These fleeting moments while traveling through the city inspired the Third Avenue El film.



Stan Brakhage worked with Cornell on a film project to capture the Third Avenue El before it was demolished. The Third Avenue Elevated railroad line was built between 1875 and 1878 and was in service until 1955. It was the last elevated line to operate in Manhattan. Brakhage finished a version of the film and titled it *Wonder Ring* (1955); however, Cornell was unsatisfied with the result and took several years to re-edit the film. Cornell rearranged shots, added shots, turned the film upside down, printed it tail-to-head, added an end title that reads, “The End is the Beginning,” and re-named the film *Gnir RednoW* (1960). There is no protagonist. We take the perspective of the wandering camera. We walk up the stairway to the platform where the camera tracks the architecture of the platform including doorways, stained glass windows, and reflections from the city beyond. A train arrives and zooms past the camera, allowing us to look inside the windows at passengers on board and through to the other side of the platform to passengers waiting to board. The quickness of the passing train is juxtaposed with the slow and methodical panning movement of the camera capturing the architecture. Suddenly, the camera is on the train as it pulls out of the stop. We pass buildings, and their windows are at eye level with the train, letting us peer into the lives of the inhabitants. We can see the streets below and the smallness of the people and cars going about their days. The window of the train becomes a frame through which we observe the passing world, New York. Passengers’ reflections appear in the window, creating a double view, the static inside and passing outside of the train. The speed of the film changes; suddenly everything is in fast motion. Passengers board and the train moves at an accelerated speed. Suddenly we are traveling in the opposite direction. Then our direction switches back. The images become more and more distorted as the film comes to an end. *Gnir RednoW* defamiliarizes the everyday, making it appear rhythmic, surreal, and otherworldly. We ride the train with Cornell or even as

Cornell. We view the film from his unique perspective. The film captures only what the wanderer observes.

### **Wandering: Place and Memory**

Cornell felt a strong connection with his surroundings whether it was the urban architecture of Manhattan or the quiet solitude of the coast. Personal history is bound to the places the we inhabit, places we have been, places we travel past on our daily jaunts, places we only see once, and even places in our imagination. As we encounter places to which we have attachments, memories of our histories come to us, making the past present for a moment. Perhaps the memories are never really gone, but stored in places, waiting for us to access them. And, at times memory is involuntarily triggered, as in the case of Proust's madeleine. In *À la recherche du temps perdu* Proust's narrator bites into a madeleine, causing a flood of memories to come instantly rushing back to him. Hornstein notes, "Proust was clear that any recuperation of memories could not be willed; rather, the only possible means of accessing them was involuntarily through a material object that could serve as a trigger to the past" (6).

According to Solnit, "When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back" (13). Solnit proposes a connection between place and the body that occurs when one walks through one's city's streets or the rural landscape. It is a relationship that cannot happen if one drives or takes public transportation. Dylan Trigg explains in his book *The Memory of Place*:

Being attached to a place means allowing memories to be *held* by that place. In turn, being held by a place means being able to return to that place through its role as a reserve of memories. Not only do places hold memories in a material sense-- as the archive of our experiences--but those same places crystallize the experiences that occurred there. Being in place is not temporally static. Rather, our memories pursue us as we pursue place, both forming an ambiguous zone somewhere in between. (9)

Trigg tells us that we locate memories in places to which we are attached. When we return to these particular places we can access memories that have been stored there. So, place and self becomes intersubjective for Cornell. Trigg explains, “Places are defined in their relationship with the particular subject who experiences them” (5). Places are the texture of memory and provide the defining character of memory. This relationship between person and place is an *event* for Trigg.

In *The Art of Memory* Francis Yates tracks the ancient practice of attaching ideas, words, and memories to physical locations. The practice stretches back to the Greeks and was formally practiced through the Renaissance. For example, orators would mentally spatialize their speeches. To memorize the speech they would imagine walking through the space where they mentally stored the speech. And, as they mentally encountered different areas of storage they would recall the words of that bit of the speech. Solnit explains, “There is a very practical sense in which to trace even an imaginary route is to trace the spirit or thought of what passed there before. At its most casual, this retracing allows unsought memories of events to return as one encounters the sites of those events. At its most formal it is a means of memorizing” (76). For practitioners of the Art of Memory, memories were stored in physical objects in a landscape. For Solnit, “To walk the same route again can mean to think the same thoughts again, as though thoughts and ideas were indeed fixed objects in a landscape one need only know how to travel through” (77).

Because places hold memories that are accessed as we move through space, the cityscape is experienced in a temporal *durée* for the wanderer. Rosalind Krauss explains *durée* as a meditation on perception: “Perception is announced thereby as something that takes places as a *durée*, an unfolding, a diachrony” (123). For Krauss, *durée* is an extended temporality that is

“involved in experiences like memory, reflection, narration, proposition” (153). This type of time allows the wanderer to see and interact with the evolving cityscape. As Becky Cooper suggests, “Each building has layers of history” (11): what used to be there but no longer is, what has changed to function differently, new structures in the place of old structures, etc. Cornell writes, “Different sights (pre dawn etc.) sometimes of the particular vs. abstract--the past become the present” (Caws 109).

As the twentieth century progressed the New York landscape rapidly evolved. Old buildings were piling up on top of each other or being demolished to make way for new structures. Old shops that Cornell frequented were sold and repurposed to meet the needs of the growing city. Suburbs spread to the rural coastline. The old and the new were blended. “The present city is built on the ruins of the past . . . the new and old are inextricably entwined” (Hauptman 154). The evolving cityscape was particularly emotional for Cornell because memory and place were intertwined for him. As the cityscape evolved memories were threatened.

Walking became a way for him to keep the Manhattan of his past alive. Solnit argues, “Walking is one way of maintaining a bulwark against this erosion of the mind, the body, the landscape, and the city, and every walking is on guard to protect the ineffable” (11). Cornell revisited the theatre district he went to so often as a child. He writes:

Into town late--bank--down to Lexington and 24<sup>th</sup>. Goldsmith's--assortment, Mexican midget, dancing bear, Hungarian cards, Bay of Naples litho. Colored. Over to Madison Square for bus. A brief swirl of snow suddenly came covering everything with a fine coat and then letting up before the short bus ride to Twelfth Street. Unexpected illumination and evocation of the past in these circumstances with feeling about Madison Square, etc. (Caws 99)

Jodi Hauptman tells us, “Although the city’s layering offers the history and memory to which Cornell was so attracted, the metropolis’s incessant covering of the old by the new provoked

anxiety” (153). In his journal Cornell notes that he was filled with the “terror of the encroachment of piled-up concrete in the city vs. remembered sites” (Caws 409). In this anxiety he evokes Benjamin’s angel of history:

His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [*verweilen*: a reference to Goethe’s Faust], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm. (*Illuminations* 257)

Cornell was Benjamin’s angel of history caught in the storm of New York’s rise to the world’s most powerful city. His Victorian city was being replaced with steel skyscrapers. The city threw out the obsolete, which piled up in second hand stores around the city. What Cornell could not see is that in reclaiming fragments of that obsolete, his practices would inform generations of assemblage and archive artists.

Although we feel intimately connected with a place, this does not prevent the place from evolving over time. This loss may be painful and can cause one to lose a sense of one’s identity with the disappearance of an intimate place. Trigg contends:

What emerges in this breakdown is the rise of *anonymous materiality*. Whereas we take it for granted that the places we value somehow mirror our identities, what we tend to overlook in this mimetic act is the cosmic indifference lurking beneath that materiality. All along, however, there exists the anonymous space that fails to look back at us, despite our attempts to imbue that world with value and memory. (218)

According to Trigg and Gaston Bachelard, imagination, tied to aesthetic creation, functions as a preserver of memory. “In sight of this alteration, a renewed value is conferred upon a given object. Only now, the tone is less of lamentation and more of preserving what remains of the past, with such an effect to conceal the erosion of time and space” (Trigg 175). And, as a result,

“Entwined with the past, the same past is re-experienced in the present as one of presence and absence simultaneously” (Trigg 175).

### **Immortalization of Place and Memory through Film**

Many of Cornell’s original films focused on the documenting and memorializing of locations such as private homes, public transit systems, and public parks on the verge of destruction in his community. Cornell was emotionally connected to these sites and thought of them as repositories or archives for specific memories. Many of his films are attempts to immortalize locations that would soon disappear; they document an evolving cityscape.

In these films the camera wanders or records the wanderings of the filmmaker. Additionally, the camera functions as a tool to preserve a location or moment slipping into the past. Sitney explains, “The camera movements tend to be slow and very deliberate, panning from one dominant point of interest to another of equal weight. They are edited in a leisurely rhythm, except when the cutting jumps to catch the flight of a bird or butterfly” (82). Cornell’s films are predecessors of the lyrical film, which Brakhage made famous, and which through “orchestration of imagery, camera movement, and editing brought to maturity the film-without-a-protagonist--or one whose protagonist is the fiction of the filmmaker behind the camera” (Sitney 84). In Cornell’s films, the protagonist is ambiguous or mediated through a young woman or girl. Often a protagonist is not present at all; instead the film is a first-person “encounter of the camera with special places” (Sitney 84). Perhaps filming was not only an attempt to save or immortalize the specific places, but also the memories that came to him when he visited the places. Time and space are preserved as the filmmaker observes and records them. Cornell often used repetition of shots and angles on the subject to attempt to capture its essence. In “The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory,” Wendy Chun describes repetition not

as wasted thought, but thought disseminated (192). The camera repeats the same movement over the same subject over and over. Through this repetition, I see Cornell attempting to capture the inner essence or his emotional connection and memories of a monument, park, or home. In Cornell's films the mundane becomes magical and safe from the destruction of time. However, as I discuss in the next chapter, film is not a stable, permanent document, but a medium that is as ephemeral as the fleeting moments it records.

Cornell's original films embody characteristics of the wandering chronotope through their lack of protagonist in favor of lyrical, improvisational movement of the camera. The camera focuses intently on whatever the filmmaker is interested in, which can be interrupted at any moment. The films themselves are creative products directly inspired by Cornell's wandering. Finally, the films are documents of the intersubjective relationship between people and their surroundings. They capture and preserve memories attached to particular places.

*Centuries of June* (1955), photographed by Brakhage, is a meditation on an old mansion in Flushing, Cornell's hometown, that was on the brink of demolition. In my mind this is a house he has known, been familiar with for years. Perhaps he passed it on his walk to the train or on his daily jaunts and bicycle rides. The film opens on a large tower house. The house is abandoned. The paint of the exterior is chipping and the yard is overgrown. Large trees full of birds and bushes fill the yard. The house looms over the yard; it is the kind of house kids tell scary stories about as they pass. The camera tracks the house, following the tower up to the rooftop, and then cuts to the trees in the yard that surround the house. The camera repetitively pans from the tree leaves down to the tower, repeating the shots as if making sure to capture the minute details of the exterior of the house. The camera gradually gets closer to the house. The shots are shaky and appear to be handheld as Brakhage's camera surveys the house and the yard. For a split second

we can see someone around a corner in the yard. It looks to be Cornell, but he disappears so quickly that it is impossible to tell one way or the other. The camera follows angles of the house: the angle of the staircase railing from the porch down to the sidewalk; close-up of the tower and then cut to the grass; slow pan from the grass, up a pine tree, and to the tower. Suddenly, a butterfly catches the attention of the camera. The camera is distracted from its slow, methodical survey of the house to follow its flight. Then a young boy kneels in the dirt yard with a stick. Schoolchildren walk home from school on the sidewalk next to the house; they are aware of the camera as they walk toward it. A shot focuses on a boy and girl picking up and throwing rocks across the street. As they walk away they turn and look at the camera. Cut back to the house shot from an extreme low angle. We wander the yard. We meander through the plants and trees and look at the architecture of the house. We walk and look where we please.

Suddenly, the perspective changes. We are viewing the world from inside the house. We are looking out the window. It is as if the viewer takes on the role of the house. We look out and see the world continuing as we fall further and further into disrepair. The leaves blow in the wind; birds and butterflies flutter about; schoolchildren play in the yard. Life continues outside. The window frames are used as the frame of the film. We are inside a Cornell box peering out as the camera approaches a window hinged open, and sunlight spills in and onto the wood paneling and tile floor.

The perspective changes again and we are back outside looking at the house. The camera follows the lines of the house side to side and up and down. Children play in the yard. The camera is distracted again and wanders to capture a butterfly and then a little blond girl in the grass. Children sit on the steps, get up, and slowly walk away.



Sitney explains that the film is a lesson in “organizing a film of silent images to evoke the poignancy of the loss of those very images which the film preserves” (84). As the camera travels over the surface of the house and around the surrounding yard, the film becomes a meditation on the entire space. As the empty house decays life continues in the yard as butterflies and children roam about. Sitney tells us, “The rhythm of the film reverses the relationship inscribed in the images: the house appears as the static center of a world in which everything else is in flux; but the structure of the film insists upon the uniqueness of the house and its coming destruction, while the insects and children will be repeatedly replaced” (86). Cornell never directly expresses his personal memories attached to this tower house. Like most of his work, the meaning is never fully knowable or recoverable. But it invites our own personal memories and associations.

### **Cornell and Creative Cartography**

In *Stargazing at the Cinema* Jodi Hauptman describes Cornell as a creative cartographer. She suggests that his creative cartography is derived from urban wandering and that collecting and collaging are Cornell’s version of cartography (147). For Hauptman, Cornell’s wandering is done out of a desire to find or capture an essence of a fleeting image. The objects he collects are referents for places and memories encountered during his wanderings. She explains, “A collage-map, a cartography of fragments, however, does offer more than a simple line, providing the viewer-walker-wanderer something physical to grasp, a starting point, at least, for a chain of reminiscences” (157). The collage becomes a map of the city as well as the time in which the wandering unfolded as well as the time(s) recalled. She explains:

Refusing pen and paper as tools to chart a particular route or mark an important site, Cornell arranged objects from his collection to “draft” a map based on emotion and memory. As both a flâneur and a cartographer, Cornell collected “mementos” or “traces” of the places and people he passed. Spurning souvenirs from renowned New York landmarks like the Statue of Liberty or the Brooklyn Bridge, the artist instead selected (or in his view, rescued) objects that could serve as memorials to an intimate experience of

the urban environment. . . By replacing inscription with collection, Cornell composes a picture of a city as it is lived, not an abstraction charted from a safe and sterile distance. Cornell's city is loud, bustling, and dirty, soiled with history. (Hauptman 151)

Understanding Cornell's collages and three-dimensional assemblages as maps fits into a larger practice of experimental mapping. Experimental mapping has its roots in Debord's *dérive* and psychogeography. If we understand his work in this vein then Cornell was a predecessor of the Situationist International's maps of desire, which were constructed based on the wanderer's emotional connections and impulses. Experimental mapping provides a subjective view of an environment rather than an objective, removed view. Additionally, this type of mapping is open to interpretation for each viewer. We create our own meanings and understandings and in this way, experimental maps are ambiguous and indeterminate. Experimental mapping allows individuals to map what is important to them.

Contemporary artists extend the concept of the experimental map. For example, Becky Cooper created *Mapping Manhattan* by distributing a map of Manhattan to people all over the city and asking them to map their Manhattan by mapping their memories. Each map is a subjective understanding of the urban landscape each participant inhabits. Further, new technologies allow digital experimental mapping projects such as the website *MapStory*, in which individuals use personal GPS trackers to track their paths. Participants can make maps of whatever they choose by uploading their coordinates from the GPS to a website and creating aesthetic maps. Other projects focus more on personal stories and histories within the city. *Yellow Arrow* is a project that began in Manhattan in 2004 and offers a new way to explore the city by allowing every structure to become an attraction. The project's website explains, "The project is built around the general philosophy that every place is distinct and engaging if seen from a unique perspective" (*Yellow Arrow*). In *Theatre/Archaeology*, Mike Pearson and Michael

Shanks call the project an example of “Deep Mapping,” which is “a cartography of the intimate, the everyday, the monumental, the ephemeral, the epochal.”(64). Participants travel through their city and place yellow arrows on special locations and objects. Then they send a text message with a story, a poetic fragment, or a prompt for action to *Yellow Arrow* with a code. *Yellow Arrow* attaches the code of the location to the specific story. When another person sees a *Yellow Arrow* logo he or she texts the code to *Yellow Arrow* and receives the story, memory, poem, or prompt that is attached to the specific place. Like Cornell, *Yellow Arrow* artists take advantage of multiple media available to them to create highly personalized maps of their environments.

In this chapter I discussed the characteristics of the wandering chronotope, the theoretical groundings that informed my development of the chronotope, Cornell’s own wandering practices, and how his wandering informed his artwork. I then discussed wandering as a way to access memories attached to specific locations, which is troubled when locations change over time. Then, I explained how Cornell’s original films are examples of documentation of wandering and immortalizations of disappearing places. Finally, I discussed Cornell’s collage and box works as examples of creative cartography and tied contemporary digital projects to Cornell’s three-dimensional works. In the next chapter, I discuss a creative project that took place in summer 2013 in New Orleans in which I asked friends to wander with me through their neighborhoods. The project is informed by the wandering chronotope mapped out above.

### CHAPTER THREE: GRAMMAR OF THE LEGS

The characteristics of the wandering chronotope inspired a three-part project. As the creator of the project I began by aimlessly wandering my surroundings, attempting to gain a new perspective. Out of all of the characteristics of the wandering chronotope, I was most intrigued by the connection of space and memory and how wandering is a way to access memories consciously or unconsciously. So, I took a variation on aimless wandering. I asked friends who live in New Orleans to take me on a walk through their current, old, or favorite neighborhoods, to places that evoked particular memories, and to recall memories as we walked. I collected as we walked. Inspired by digital experimental mapping, I used a GPS tracker to create digital traces of our paths, marking each place we stopped. I also recorded their stories, took subjective photographs, and collected found objects along the path.

The final portion of the project consisted of creating a Cornell box of my wanderings. Like Cornell, I found my exploring becoming creative. On my walks, New Orleans became my cabinet of curiosity, and I wanted to create a contemporary Cornell box to display the traces of my wandering. To do this, I designed a website to present the various materials I gathered. This part of the project was chronotopically different than urban wandering; creating the website was a process of collaging memory.

The different reasons Cornell wandered the urban and rural environment--walking for the enjoyment of walking, walking as creative inspiration, and walking as a method of accessing memory--all added different characteristics to how time and space functioned as he wandered. Conceptually, I followed Cooper's comparison of Manhattan to a cabinet of curiosity within which were "portals to hundreds of worlds" (11). Informed by these characteristics, I set out to

create a curiosity cabinet of New Orleans by wandering, observing, interacting, and recalling memories within the buildings, landscape, and objects throughout the city.

### **Wandering New Orleans**

I begin in my own home. I follow Oulipo writer George Perec's advice about how to engage with urban and domestic space by paying attention to the "infra-ordinary." He suggests, "You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless" (50). I walk from one end of my home to the other trying really to see my surroundings. I live with my husband in a loft apartment above a nail salon on Magazine Street in New Orleans. The stairway that leads to the entrance in the back of our apartment is made of black iron and is extremely steep. At the top is the platform where our door is located, but then an old stairway continues down and is blocked off by a large piece of plywood. We assume that this was the original stairway before the street level floor was converted into a storefront. I follow Perec's suggestion: "In apartment buildings in general: look closely at them; look upwards; look for the name of the architect, the name of the contractor, the date when it was built; ask yourself why it often says 'gas on every floor'; in the case of a new building, try to remember what was there before; etc." (45).

We have asked our neighbor if he knows how old our apartment is. All he knows is that his was built sometime in the late 1800s and functioned as a temporary home for sailors. He knows that ours was built later but he doesn't know when exactly. The entrance opens into the kitchen with wooden floors, a brick fireplace, and industrial looking appliances. Did this used to be a restaurant? Everything is stainless steel, including the piping on the ceiling and walls to protect the wiring. I walk down a long hallway. To the right is a large bathroom with another old fireplace, a claw foot bathtub, and a strange walk-in shower behind a wall. Continuing down the

hallway I enter the main living space. The ceilings are much taller, probably fifteen or twenty feet. The wooden floors are older in this room and there are two floor-to-ceiling windows at the end of the room looking out over Magazine Street. Since we have lived here there has been a large number of picture hooks on the wall. They are so high, however, that we can't hang anything from them or even take them down. Was this an art gallery? A studio space? I examine the objects that I have accumulated over the years and realize that much of what I own comes from my family: a music box chess table, a picture of a Victorian lady, a sun catcher hanging in the window, a Lee Ward sequined camel from the "Twelve Days of Christmas" collection, an angel bookend, a wooden birdhouse, a fringed lampshade, Mardi Gras beads hanging from the bookshelf, an old globe that includes the no longer extant USSR, a memory box my husband made for me to propose, a paper model of a building in the French Quarter that I found at a junk store in Illinois. Do I hold on to these objects because I find them aesthetically appealing? Yes. But I also hold onto them because they are referents for my past. As I drift through my apartment I stop at each object that catches my attention and in that moment memories come flooding back to my present: the radiator in the dinning room of my grandparent's home and the curtains that hung behind it decorated with handmade decorations at Christmas. The den full of special toys for the children during the holidays; the smell of my grandfather's garage where he built birdhouses with my brothers; the wheat field in France. I realize that the objects not only bring back memories of specific experiences, they also bring back the feelings of particular places. As I walk away, the memories slowly retreat back into the object, awaiting my next pass by.

I open the door to my apartment and walk down the steep metal stairs, round the alley corner and walk out to Magazine Street. It is around nine AM, early June in New Orleans, and I

want to beat the heat. I stand for a moment, deciding which direction to walk, choose the right and set off. I cross the street and peer in the silver shop, macaroon shop, and huge antique mall as I pass. I notice an eclectic collection of bizarre objects from different decades assembled in the window display together. A 1920s flapper hat and 3D glasses from the 80s. First things first: I stop in a Community Coffee shop and order an iced coffee. Leaving the coffee shop with cold coffee in hand I head into the Garden District. I walk slowly, admiring the large old homes with private balconies, porches, and gardens. The yards are detailed yet aged, a perfect combination. Well maintained, but not too pretty or perfect. I pass a house kitty-corner to Lafayette Cemetery No 1. I stop at the iron door and peer through to a set of antique wicker furniture arranged haphazardly throughout the yard. At that moment I feel like I am in another era, the century most likely when this old house was built, when all at once opera music blares from an open window on the second floor of the home. I am awestruck. Of course there would be crazy opera music coming from a mysterious second floor window. The music continues and I cross the street and head toward the cemetery as a man and woman's voice sing of love and loss in Italian. The music echoes into the cemetery.

I enter the cemetery and head to the left. There are lizards everywhere. Big lizards. They run this place. Thinking of the butterfly in *Centuries of June*, I decide to let them guide my tour of the cemetery, stopping when I see one, investigating the above-ground graves where the lizards lead me. Some of the graves are extremely old and some of them are cracked, falling apart, with vines growing up around them. I can't help but think of vampires. Faded, fake flowers sit on tiny edges of some of the graves while others are adorned with Mardi Gras beads, rocks, and other special objects. I weave through the catacombs, reading the epitaphs that are still legible. The one that strikes me most reads, "Not dead, just resting." I half-heartedly try to find

the oldest catacomb in the cemetery, but give up. I leave the cemetery and continue through the Garden District, heading up to Prytania to attempt to stop in a bookshop, but it isn't open yet this morning. So, I head toward the Lower Garden District, decide that I want to get back to Magazine Street, and cut down 4<sup>th</sup> Street to get there. The houses here are different, newer. There are fewer trees. I suddenly feel very out of place, like I just found a very upscale suburb with new, gaudy versions of the quietly grand, overgrown yards and homes of the streets I had explored earlier. Men leave their under-construction houses in suits with bowties and expensive straw hats. Women in exercise outfits wave goodbye to their spouses and go on with their business. I just want to get back to Magazine. When I do, I turn to my left and decide to take a break at the next coffee shop I pass. I reach another commercial stretch of Magazine and pass a men's hat shop, antique shops, and clothing boutiques and come to Reservoir Café. I sit at the front window, eat a slice of banana walnut bread, and take notes in my journal. I leave the café and decide that I want to go downtown. I walk up to St. Charles to catch the streetcar. It is early enough that the streetcar isn't too packed. The windows are open and the air flows through, creating a warm yet refreshing breeze for the passengers.

The streetcar stops at the intersection of Carondelet and Canal Streets. I walk up Canal toward Rampart. I want to see the State Palace Theatre up close. I have seen it many times passing it in my car, but I want to explore. The State Palace is one of the famous historic theatres on Canal. It is huge, occupying a square city block. The theatre itself is closed, abandoned since 2007, although several businesses remain open within the building. The box office is still there with movie posters pasted on the inside. I walk toward it and instantly smell urine. I keep walking to peer through the main entrance doors. I can see a lobby that has been unused for years. This once immaculate building is beyond repair. No one will buy it because it would be so



expensive to renovate. So, it slowly or maybe not-so-slowly deteriorates in the middle of the city. My heart breaks a little.

I cross Canal and enter the uppermost part of the French Quarter. The streets are quiet and spotted only with hotel employees on their smoke breaks or valet workers waiting to pull around someone's car. Smoke and exhaust fill the garages and back entrances to hotels. I become acutely aware that I am the only female on the street. The cop in my head tells me not to look uncomfortable, not to make eye contact, to walk a little faster, and to get to a more heavily trafficked street. It's the middle of the day, I tell myself, and I am being paranoid. But still, I turn the next corner and head to one of the busier streets of the Quarter. I cross Bourbon. I will not walk down Bourbon Street, especially in the middle of the day on a weekday; it's too depressing with its neon lights, doormen trying to get you to enter the sleazy strip clubs, and the stench of stale booze. I pass Royal with its antique shops and boutiques and turn on Chartres. I stop in a vintage clothing store and peruse the clothes and accessories from the 1970s through the 1990s. I like the store, but I don't buy anything. I keep walking. I decide that if the opportunity arises I will have my palm or Tarot cards or tealeaves read. I reach Jackson Square. The artists and performers are just arriving. Many are waiting until later in the afternoon, once the hottest part of the day has passed, to set up. But, some are here, willing to tough out the midday heat. I walk through the square and see two booths offering palm reading, but no one is there. So, I keep walking. As Perec advises, wander "until you have the impression, for the briefest of moments, that you are in a strange town or, better still, until you can no longer understand what is happening or is not happening, until the whole place becomes strange, and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street, buildings, pavements . . ." (53). I reach the edge of the square and see a man with a table and chair. I look interested, and he asks if I want my

palm read. The last time I had my palm read I was six or seven years old at a church Halloween party, and the palm reader was most likely someone's mother dressed up like a gypsy. The man takes my hand and begins telling me things that are vague yet specific such as I'm argumentative, critical and sarcastic, and that I usually turn these qualities inward and am harder on myself than other people. He tells me that I have always had a hard time with timing and that I have difficulty communicating my thoughts and feelings clearly to others. He tells me that I would be a good teacher or lawyer. He asks me if I'm writing something currently. I smile and nod. He tells me that I will have two or three children, live a long life with struggles at some points, and that I have two marriage lines. I look concerned and he asks if I'm Catholic. I say I was raised Catholic and he laughs and says, "Yeah, they usually don't like it when I tell them that." I give him ten dollars and say goodbye.

I continue down Chartres, reach the far end of the Quarter, cross Esplanade Avenue, and enter the Marigny. I walk down Frenchmen where the bars and restaurants aren't open yet. I'm disappointed because I wanted to stop at one of my favorite tapas restaurants and have a nice lunch. I keep walking. I'm getting tired, hot, and ready to head back. I turn around and head back to the Quarter. I cross Esplanade again and walk the opposite direction down Royal. I come to a Community Coffee house and stop to get an iced tea and take a little rest. I write in my journal and sip my cold tea. Rejuvenated, I walk back toward Canal on Royal, passing tourists taking pictures and basking in the glory of walking through the city legally drinking beer. Locals on bikes carrying artwork pass by me, and I wonder how they keep balance. Horse-drawn carriages clack down the streets. People on Segways roll by as a tour guide tells stories of historic buildings. Street musicians are setting up in the middle of the street on Royal. I reach Canal and see the uptown bound streetcar turning the corner of Carondelet and run to catch it.

As I ride the streetcar, I get so absorbed in enjoying the breeze and the view along St. Charles that I completely forget to pull the cord for the streetcar to stop where I need to get off to go home. I don't even realize it until three blocks past. I pull the cord and get off at Louisiana Avenue. Walking under the shady trees, I spot a cabinet near the sidewalk in front of an old house. It turns out to be a tiny community library. The cabinet with a glass door has two shelves, one shelf for adults and one for children. A sign says that anyone is welcome to take a book and is invited to leave a book as well. I stop and look at the books for a few minutes, then continue on my way home. I turn left on Magazine and pass familiar stores and stop in one to see if I can find a pair of shorts that I like. I don't. I leave and walk past restaurants with smells that make me realize how hungry I am. I reach my block and also realize that I'm drenched in sweat and very tired. I have been walking for five hours now. I walk down my alley and back up my steep stairs. I think about my husband slipping on the stairs while taking our dog for a walk after a rainstorm. I open the door and am so happy to be home.

After reflecting on my wandering, I decide to extend my project. I want to get both outside of my house and outside of my memories. I want to see New Orleans through other perspectives. I decided to extend the idea to my friends and to make the wandering targeted. I ask friends and neighbors who live in New Orleans to take me on walks. Their choices and desires determine the next phase of the project.

### **Wandering with Pierre**

We drive over the St. Claude Bridge into the Lower Ninth Ward, an area of New Orleans that sustained particularly heavy damage from the storms and flooding in 2005. I had forgotten that my friend, Pierre, grew up in the Holy Cross neighborhood there because since I have known him his parents have lived in Houma, Louisiana. We drive through the neighborhood

lined with homes ranging from upper middle class to low income. We park at a dead end, facing the levee, houses to the left and an open field to the right. We walk along the shell-covered dirt on the side of the road. “So, there’s where I grew up.” The home is a nice elevated double shotgun surrounded by a new fence. Pierre tells me his father was a mason and had a pile of bricks in the backyard that Pierre used to build castles. His father remodeled the house to make it more functional for a family. There used to be a tree house in the backyard that Pierre built with his father. Pierre points to two empty lots and tells me about the families that used to have homes there. A brother and sister lived directly next door. The neighborhood kids thought the sister was a witch, with her wiry grey hair and crooked teeth. The brother died and wasn’t found for four days after the neighbors realized they hadn’t seen him for a while. When the paramedics took away his bloated body they also took the sister, who had been in the house the whole time, to a mental institution.

We continue walking from the house through the neighborhood as Pierre recalls where his childhood friends lived and where their families relocated after the storm. We keep walking to a school surrounded by a fence with a no trespassing sign attached. A hole has been cut in the fence and we slip through. The original building of Holy Cross School is still there, boarded up and overgrown. Pierre’s father went to school here. The building was built and the school established in 1849. Supposedly the ghosts of the Catholic brothers roam the attic. The rest of the structures have been demolished, the pool filled in and replaced with FEMA trailers, also now abandoned. A marble sculpture garden remains in the middle of the property surrounded by huge old live oak trees. “Strange what stays,” Pierre says as he notes the sculptures and a metal flagpole still standing waiting for a flag to rise.

We walk around back and up the levee to the river. We walk the levee with the river to the left and fields and houses to the right. There is where the woman with the pet horse lived. Pierre's dog once stole the horse and led him, rope in mouth, to the St. Claude Bridge. We pass old buildings--churches his family attended, community centers they were members of--and Pierre's memories rush back to him, surprising him with things he hasn't thought of since he moved. We end our walk in the field across from his childhood home. The wind is blowing and the wildflowers in the field are the same as they were when he was young, but he can't remember their names. There is a mound in the middle of the field and Pierre says that it seems smaller. Was it lowered or is it different in his memory? This was the center of everything, he tells me. Such an open space in the middle of a metropolitan area. There used to be maple trees shading his house. They are gone now. One is still in his neighbor's yard. Pierre walks up to it and recalls how he used to get into trouble for hiding in the fallen leaves from the maple trees once in his yard.

### **Wandering with Lisa**

Lisa picks me up at nine in the morning. It is early June in New Orleans, which means you want to do anything outside either early in the morning or in the evening; it is hot even at nine. We drive from my apartment on Magazine to Race Street in the Lower Garden District. We park and stop in a coffee shop where I order an iced coffee and Lisa orders a regular coffee. We step outside with our drinks and begin our walk.

Lisa is trying to solve a mystery. She is trying to remember which apartment is the one she lived in when the roof collapsed. Her landlord was a judge who was a recovering alcoholic. He was trying to help others by employing them as workers for the property he owned, but, according to Lisa, he was taken advantage of by many of the addicts he tried to help. We come

upon a tall, three-story brick building with huge windows that open out toward the yard. This is the apartment. Before she lived in this apartment she lived in a really nice place a little further uptown, off of Prytania. But, the landlord accused her and her roommates of having secret babies in the apartment, which wasn't true. After this incident things got a little weird and Lisa and her roommates moved out to the place we are looking at now.

The apartment building is beautiful, but it is in the process of falling into disrepair. Lisa lived here before or after the flea-infested apartment that was also owned by the judge. There was a series of terrible living situations in the Lower Garden District that occurred within a span of a couple of months in the 1990s, and Lisa now has trouble keeping the series of events in order. We continue walking and pass the bookstore/café that the judge opened. The space hosted Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and was run by recovering addicts. There are strange combinations of murals on the outside: devils, fields, and characters from *Where the Wild Things Are* cover the exterior of the building, which is boarded up and appears to have been for quite some time. There are remnants of Christmas decorations around the door. Lisa tells me that the latest review of the café she read online was terrible, warning potential clientele that females shouldn't set foot in the place.

We cross over to the park between the lanes of Camp Street heading downtown toward the interstate. Lisa tells me that this is the path she would walk to her ice cream scooping job at Häagen-Dazs in the French Quarter, where she met her husband, Jim. We walk to a statue of Margaret, who opened the first orphanage in New Orleans. Surrounding Margaret is a gorgeous, overgrown rose garden with butterflies flying amongst the roses, set in a major road in the middle of the city. Lisa says that back when she used to live in this neighborhood it was sketchier than it is today: "You would have to look out for hypodermic needles as you walked."

We turn around and make our way back into the narrow streets of the Lower Garden District. We find the first house she lived in, where the landlord accused her and her roommates of having babies. The current tenants have turned the driveway into a little garden. Around the corner is a massive house that looks like it is right out of *Great Expectations*, with its old paneled windows and overgrown trees and plants. The windows are streaked and Lisa tells me that gravity causes glass to sink after time. When you look at old windows you can see the evidence because the glass is streaked.

### **Wandering with Jordan**

Jordan picks me up on my street and we drive over to the edge of the Marigny and the Bywater, neighborhoods below the French Quarter. Both neighborhoods are now in the midst of a sort of renaissance. Young artist types are moving in; art galleries, coffee shops, and restaurants are opening all over the place. According to Pierre, the Bywater is the fourth hippest neighborhood in the US. Anyway, that's now, 2013. Back when Jordan lived in the neighborhood the gentrification process was still in its early stages. We park in front of his former apartment, a bright green double shotgun. When he lived in this neighborhood he walked everywhere. He worked at the Court of Two Sisters restaurant in the French Quarter and would walk to work in his uniform, a checkered vest and bowtie, every day. Jordan associates the neighborhood with a specific time in his life: he had just finished his MFA in creative writing and had no idea what he was going to do with himself. Within a week of moving to New Orleans he was mugged in front of his house. Most of the time that he lived in this neighborhood he was depressed and spent much of his time walking around. The neighborhood represents a tension for Jordan: the excitement he felt living in New Orleans for the first time along with post-MFA depression.

He also associates the neighborhood with walking. We head down the block and around the corner to Hank's, a seedy convenience store where Jordan would buy beer and food and often encounter a shoeless prostitute and crack dealers. On the walk we pass a house that Jordan tells me used to be a crystal meth lab. Across the street from that run-down house is a newly renovated home that just sold for \$400,000. The rent has shot up in the past years as the Healing Center, a center that is dedicated to the rejuvenation of the community by offering physical, nutritional, and environmental programs to those in the surrounding neighborhoods, has been built and the neighborhood has slowly begun gentrifying. Jordan describes walking around the neighborhood looking closely at the ground and finding money, drugs, and interesting objects. We keep walking and pass the coffee shop where he would sit working on his laptop and Mimi's, a hip dance bar turned tapas bar. We pass a gorgeous Mimosa tree. Jordan tells me that when it rains it folds its leaves up. He doesn't know why.

One of the business owners in the neighborhood posts photographs of the neighborhood in the 1940s. Jordan tells me how interesting it is to see how the neighborhood still looks the same. We end with Jordan telling me about the graffiti in the neighborhood and how it has changed since he lived here. "Red Beans" was the main tagger when he lived in the neighborhood. Now throughout the blocks tags have been covered over and many of the new ones read, "Gay for Pay."

### **Wandering with Chin**

I have dinner with friends in the Marigny and after dinner we walk to R Bar, which is right across from the restaurant and then to Lafitte's, the oldest bar in New Orleans. As we walk we pass Frenchmen Street, scene of live music every night and the annual Halloween block party, Chin tells me a story of one of the most memorable Halloweens that played out on the



streets we are walking. A specific image has stuck with him over the years. Halloween in the Marigny is a subversive affair, according to Chin. People walk laps around the neighborhood, stopping and popping in and out of different places. The R Bar was Chin's favorite stop. His friend, who was seven feet tall, dressed that Halloween as Big Bird. His head was in the neck of the costume so all in all he was about nine feet tall. Frenchmen used to be known for nitrous tanks on the street during Halloween. Big Bird collapsed from taking a nitrous hit and decided to stay on the street while his friends continued to party. There he was, a nine-foot Big Bird passed out on the side of the street.

Hours later when the sun was coming up and Chin was leaving R Bar, in the distance he saw Big Bird pick himself up, scratch his now unmasked head, put the two-foot head back on, and wander off into the sunrise. It was the opposite of a cowboy western, Chin says.

### **Wandering with Chris**

In my own neighborhood the Irish Channel, I walk with my friend and neighbor, Chris, who wants to show me the house where he and his partner lived before we met. As we walk Chris tells me the story of how he and Josh wound up in New Orleans. Chris was a successful business owner in Portland, but during the economic recession his business failed. He was in his forties and had no idea what to do with his life. So, they decided to pick up and move cross-country to New Orleans. As we walk, Chris doesn't really tell me about specific places we pass such as the bagel shop where we met, the coffee shop turned restaurant across the street, the dog groomer, etc. Instead he explains that this house and this neighborhood and the decision to move to New Orleans represented a pivotal point in his life. His values changed from being business driven to searching for a more emotionally fulfilling career. This walk and the places we pass represent this life choice for Chris.

## Collaging Memory

After wandering the city, I moved on to the third stage of the project, creating my own experimental map of my wanderings. Like Cornell, I collected different media on my wanderings. I collected a mixture of objects including material and digital traces: physical objects that stood out to me on my walks along with digital GPS traces, photographs, and audio recordings. I decided to assemble my traces in an interactive website. I wanted to create a digital memory box that allowed viewers to explore and interact with each object within and to discover multiple worlds and histories within New Orleans. Gathering materials for the website became another version of wandering, this time in cyberspace. However, for the assembly of the website, I no longer operated within the wandering chronotope. Instead, I was operating within the archiving and collaging chronotopes in order to collage the memories gathered on my physical wanderings.

I began by choosing Adobe Muse, a web design software that didn't require the knowledge of code. I talked with friends with web design experience for advice and guidance. Inspired by Cornell's *Aviary Parrot Box with Wire Drawers* (1949), I wanted to create the website conceptually as a kind of cabinet with drawers that the viewer opens and virtually enters. Each walk would be its own drawer. Once I embarked on the creation of the website everything slowed down to accommodate my interaction with technologies that were new to me. First, I had to learn how to navigate the software and how to create the aesthetic I desired. I spent much time watching Adobe tutorials to learn the basics and the not-so-basics.

I scoured the Internet diligently searching for antique maps of New Orleans. The maps would be the wallpaper for each box. I also wanted the website to be full of vintage frames. So, I hunted for images of appropriate sized frames. I created hyperlinks on the homepage that would

open a drawer to a specific walk. I spent hours searching Google Images for jpeg files that would work as the knobs and serve as hyperlinks to the drawers. I found an antique illustration of a seashell for the walk through Holy Cross, a bowtie for the Marigny, a Victorian Halloween cartoon for Frenchmen, a dollhouse for the lower Garden District, and a vintage photograph of pugs in a basket for the Irish Channel. I downloaded each image, uploaded it to Photoshop, meticulously cut out each image, saved it as a new file, and prepared to paste it to the homepage (see Figure 1). The cutting and pasting work in Photoshop was tedious and time consuming.

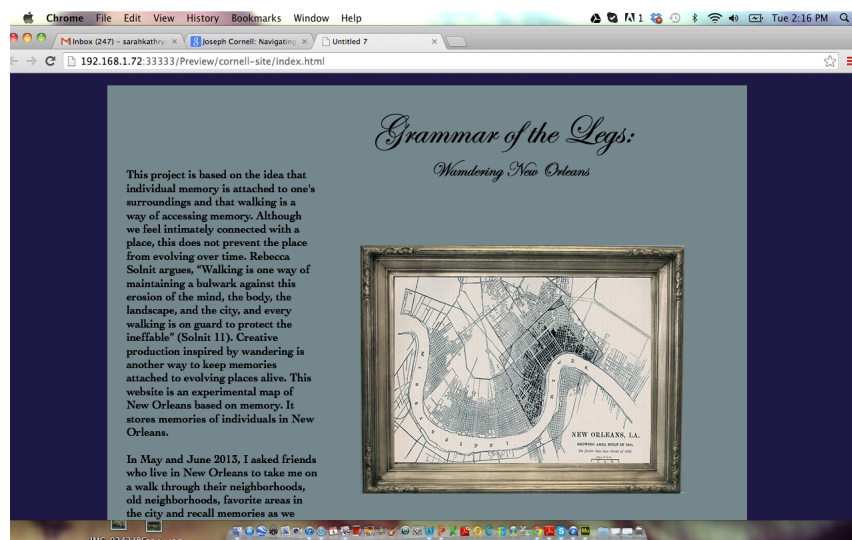


Figure 1: Home page

I sent my GPS tracks from my walks to my Dropbox and from there uploaded each trace to a Google map, creating a map for each walk. Within each map I created pinpoints to mark specific places along each walk. Each pinpoint was given a name and a description of the memory, thought, etc. that occurred at the location.

The process of the creating the website was also an embodiment of the wandering chronotope. Although not physically walking through different neighborhoods, I wandered the Internet searching for digital images that could represent my physical wanderings. Like the urban wanderer, I let my whims and curiosities determine where I linked next. I knew that I wanted to

collect digital images to create my website, but I did not set out with pre-determined ideas of what or where to find them. Instead I let chance, contingency, and desire guide my search. I was inspired as I wandered and like Cornell, collected bits and pieces as I went, dragging and dropping images to my desktop. I embraced the wandering chronotope as my method of digital exploration.

Once I collected and archived all of the materials I needed I began assembling the digital cabinet of curiosity. I began with the Home page by first importing an antique New Orleans map as the background layer or wallpaper of the entire page, then pasting all of the images I had Photoshopped to be the knobs and drawers leading to individual pages, arranging them over the neighborhoods on the map. I was digitally collaging, collecting pre-existing images, cutting them from their original contexts, and pasting them into my own work (see Figure 2).

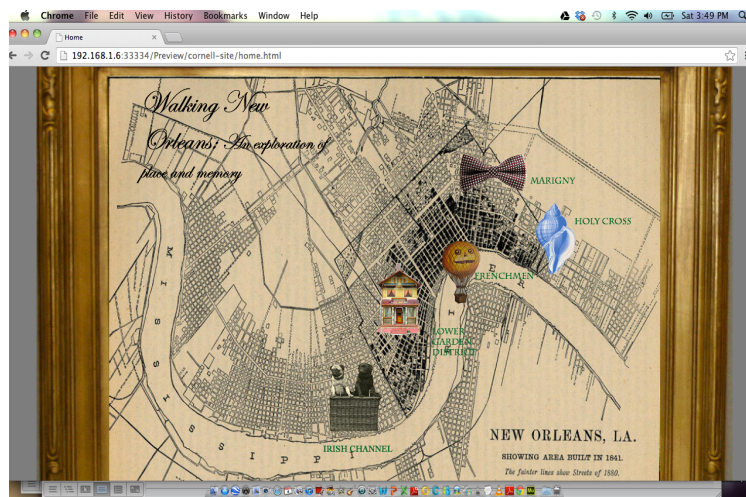


Figure 2: Map of New Orleans' Neighborhoods

Once each image was placed on top of its corresponding neighborhood I moved on to pages for individual walks. I began with Holy Cross. Creating this page was very much an experiment and involved a great deal of arranging and rearranging. It took many imports and deletes to get the effect I wanted. I imported photos as a slideshow and a frame to place on top of

them, realizing that I needed to reverse the order of importing the layers. Also, I realized that horizontal and vertical photographs needed individual frames just as they would on our walls (see Figure 3). This process was slow going through much trial and error.

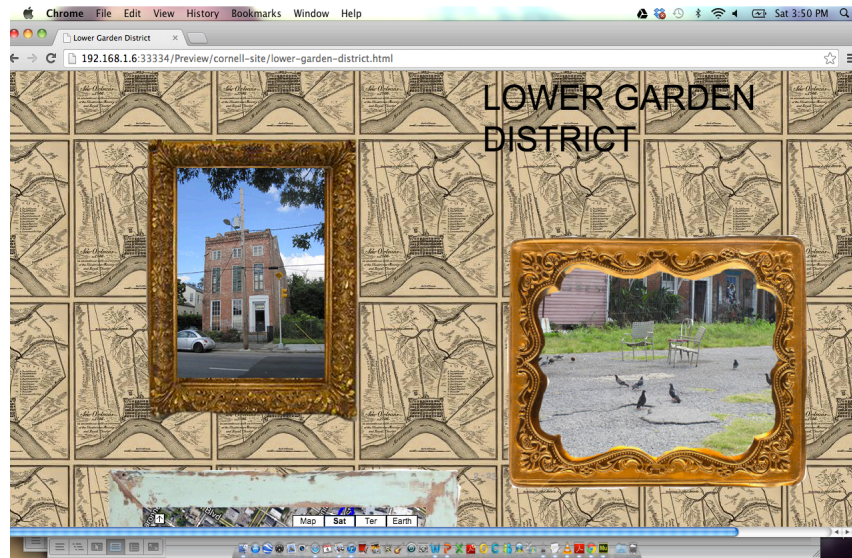


Figure 3: Images of the Lower Garden District

Once I figured out how to achieve the effects I wanted I realized that I didn't like what I had done before and deleted the entire page and started over. It was a steep learning curve. I figured out what worked and what didn't and let these experiments inform how I approached the following pages. As I completed the maps with locations pinpointed and my description of what happened at each pinpoint, I uploaded each to its particular page on the website. Once they were embedded I placed an antique frame around them, just as I had done with the photographs. Viewers would be able to click on each pinpoint and read about each location. They could follow our GPS paths, read the fragments of memories attached to particular places on the walk, and look at photographs taken on the walks (see Figure 4).

Once all of the elements were collected and added to the website I focused on the minute details of arrangement. I moved objects around and tried different types of fonts, until I was certain that every element was exactly how I wanted it.

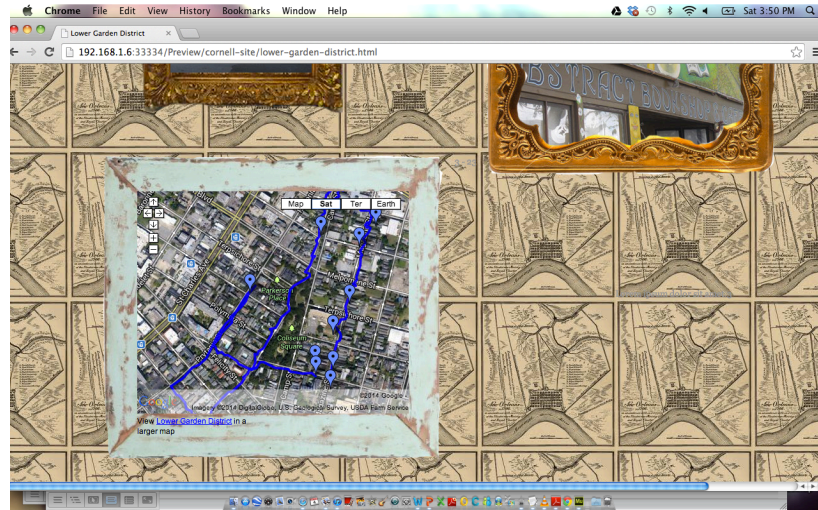


Figure 4: GPS Tracks of Lower Garden District Wandering

### Analysis of Project

As I wandered my neighborhood I drifted from interest to interest. I let my whims and desires motivate my movement through the city. I took my time, slowed down, and paid attention to my surroundings. And because of my attention to things that I typically pass without notice I interacted with my surroundings. The familiar became unfamiliar; I saw the city up close rather than quickly passing by on my way somewhere. The minute and overlooked became significant; lizards in the cemetery, music drifting out of a window, and chalk markings on sidewalks all took on special meanings. My wandering also became highly personalized. My thoughts wandered as I travelled from place to place. I experienced emotional reactions to places and things I encountered. I attached feelings, memories, and associations to places with which I interacted.



Asking my friends to take me on walks to places that evoked memories forced them to interact with their physical surroundings. Their movements and narration were influenced by their physical environment, evoking Jean Christophe Bailly's idea of the *grammaire generative des jambes* or generative grammar of the legs. In his essay "City Space, Mental Space, Poetic Space," Michael Sheringham notes that for Bailly, the city was "under threat from the tyranny of bad architecture, soulless planning and indifference to the basic unit of urban language, the street, and the '*ruissellement de paroles*' (stream of words), the endless stories, which animate it. Keeping the street and the city alive depends on understanding their grammar and generating the new utterances on which they thrive" (111).

The walks became a performance of remembering. If we understand memory to be spatial, then by walking familiar paths my friends accessed memories with each step. However, places evolve over time. Therefore, memories evolve as well, changing over time as the structure and environment changes. Memories become fuzzy, incorrect or just disappear as places change and disappear. But some memories remain even if the structures were completely gone. This lingering can disrupt our sense of self. Trigg explains that this "disturbance is grounded in the residual sediment of my (regular) place no longer being there, despite its occupancy in my body" (11). We attempt to document and hold onto the materiality of the disappearing or changing places in order to maintain our relationship with them. The embodiment of the wandering chronotope creates a multi-temporal experience for the wanderer, in which the past or perhaps the pain of a slipping memory becomes present.

The narration of the wanderers in my project transitioned between observations to recollections. The past and present merged as we walked. The wanderers provided a grammar of the legs, telling stories, bringing the past into the present, unfixing or bringing the past to life and

extending it into the future. My friends recalled and created their stories to share with me, and the sharing became an event in itself. Storytelling, in this project, created multiple histories within the city. Stories undermine or challenge the history of traditional mapping and narrating history. Their stories, as Della Pollock argues, “make history go” (1).

Private and public intertwined as my friends told me personal stories about their surroundings. They became creators, participants, and authors of the city. Their wanderings and recollections became my method of exploring the city. It was all new to me. However, for my friends, these walks were familiar, though I could see them recalling memories that they hadn’t thought of in years; their former homes, their neighbor’s house, a balcony, a tree, a piece of graffiti on the side of a building, a fountain, all brought back memories that had been stored away. As I walked the city, I learned the unknown histories of the people in my life, the ordinary or mundane that has become special to them over time. I also learned their subjective history of New Orleans, how they interact differently with the city now than they did in their former lives, the influence particular parts of the city have had on them. Their life histories are interwoven with their surroundings. Both change over time and as the materiality evolves or falls into disrepair so too do the memories--sometimes. Sometimes it is the opposite: the memory remains while the material has disappeared or been destroyed. This tension is particular to New Orleans because of the city’s social and environmental history and the sudden and violent change that reshaped the city in 2005.

The wandering portion of this project enabled a very different bodily and psychological experience than the website design half of the project because I was primarily operating in different chronotopes. As I walked through neighborhoods with my friends we were performing memory. I could see how time operates in layers. With my various tools I collected memories



and my personal observations of each experience. I felt like an explorer, like a person new to a totally unfamiliar place, even if I had been to these places before. I was seeing how other people experienced and connected to their surroundings. I was seeing New Orleans through different, unique perspectives. Creating the website, however, was a very individual endeavor. I had to figure out a way to archive all of the material I collected. As it is with all designing, the website creation was all about details, making sure that every aspect met my goals. I felt like Cornell in his basement, meticulously arranging and rearranging objects he collected in his surroundings. In this project I was a wanderer, collector, archivist, and collagist, each role providing characteristics and practices that enabled different aspects of the project.

In terms of my experimental map the digital layers don't work the same way as Cornell's material layers of his collage maps. Layers don't present temporal duration. Rather, digital layers can be approached in any order. Unlike material layers in two-dimensional collage, digital layers don't necessarily present a chronological order with the base layer the furthest past and the closest layer the most present. They are not ordered to represent the order or time in which I found each trace. Instead, the website is more like his memory boxes in that it is up to the viewer how to interact with the objects within. They still track particular journeys, histories, and memories, but the viewer isn't forced to view from most current to the furthest memory. The website deals with collaging memories accessed and collected via wandering. So, it focuses on the paths and traces (stories, memories, photographs, objects) collected while walking with each person. As in Cornell's boxes, the findings from the walks are personal associations, which are therefore not fully recoverable to an audience, but they are invitations for the audience's own associations. The website stores memories. It deals with the relationship between place and memory and the role wandering plays in accessing or performing memory. So, the website

encourages re-wandering in digital space. However, the memories and stories are not fully recoverable. They are past, but not absent. Or like the epitaph reads, “Not dead, just resting,” until someone wanders by and brings them to the present, momentarily, to discover the strangeness in what stays.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE ARCHIVING CHRONOTOPE

Although Cornell was classified as an assemblage artist, he could also be considered an archival artist. Cornell visited archives, archived his collections, created artistic works from archival material, and made archiving a key method of his artistic practice. For Cornell, archives were also educational. Cornell had a generative relationship with archival materials, treating them not as sacred materials to be stored away but as objects to be altered, manipulated, and extended into the future.

Archives serve as sources for research and artistic inspiration for future generations to use, adapt, and appropriate the material(s) within. Archives can be participatory and collaborative, connecting multiple authors across multiple decades. The distinction between art and archives and archives and museums can be blurry.

In this chapter I explore the archiving chronotope at work in Cornell's practices. As I research Cornell's archives and archiving techniques, I am informed by theorists and practitioners interested in the archive as it functions in art and memory. First, I discuss the traditional understanding of the archive; then I discuss how twentieth-century avant-garde artists challenged and critiqued traditional notions of the institutional archive. I then link their experimental archival practices to Cornell's and discuss several of his archival projects in detail including what he called his "explorations" and boxes as examples of the archive as art. Importantly, I discuss the value of Cornell's archives/art as generative and education material for future generations of artists and researchers. In the chapter immediately following I expand my notion of what constitutes an archive by discussing filmic and digital archives. Finally, I describe my own project that springs from this understanding.

## **The Archiving Chronotope**

The archiving chronotope is characterized by an intimate interactive relationship between archivist and materials. The archivist forms a personal connection with the materials she is archiving. She dedicates herself to spending an extended period of time working with archival materials, which causes her to form her own feelings and associations with the materials with which she interacts. She develops an “attachment to the objects,” and “an appreciation of arranging” objects in the archive (Davidson and Temkin 222). She is invested in the organization and preservation of the contents of the archive. As the archivist interacts with her archive time slows down, allowing for precision and attention to detail. At the same time, time can pass quickly because the archivist can become so wrapped up in her actions that hours pass like minutes. Archiving may be an idiosyncratic experience; the organization of the archive is often subjective and associative, causing the motivation of the organization or the contents of the archive to be not fully available to an outside audience.

Another characteristic of the archiving chronotope is its unfinalizability. Contrary to the traditional understanding of archives as locations for documents to be preserved once they are obsolete and remain untouched for all time, the archiving chronotope creates archives that evolve over time through addition and deletion. Further, archives are meant to be used by future generations. They are a source of education, an opportunity for interaction. They also may provide raw material or inspiration for future artists through recycling and re-mixing archival materials. Thus, the archiving chronotope embodies and documents contingency. However, it is contingency that traditional archiving practices sought to limit.

## Theorizing the Archive

Traditionally, archives have been thought of as locations in which to store objects and texts that are no longer in use. In this sense, archives are used to keep the past accessible to the present. They possess authority because the objects in the archives are evidence for the history that gets told. Archiving has its beginnings in the bureaucratic world as technological advancements produced an excess of documents that had to be organized and stored. Jacques Derrida traces the etymology of the word “archive” and explains that it has always been linked to authority: “Arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those in command” (2).

A key component of the traditional archive is the belief that archival materials transmitted and represented “sediments of time itself” (Spieker 6). Nineteenth-century historians approached the archive as existing in two orders. First, they saw the archive as they encountered it in the present. Second, they approached the archive in terms of the past or original interdependence of the objects. They believed that the past could be accessed through the archive in the present. Archives were thought to be topographic or relating to a concrete and linear past. In other words, archival materials could be traced back to an authentic origin. Nineteenth-century archivists and historians sought to create archives that were stable, fixed, with no possibility for contingency to enter the impermeable archive. With the introduction of technologies of reproduction such as photography and film, archivists relied on their ability to capture an unmanipulated reality and in turn authentically represent the past to the present. What nineteenth-century historians did not account for was the contingent in the archive.

In the twentieth century, avant-garde movements challenged and critiqued the traditional institutional approach to archives as stable, fixed, and tied to a linear past. Their techniques of

collage, photomontage, and assemblage challenged chronology. The insistence of a neatly separated past and present as well as single origins was challenged by these avant-garde practices. The archive was no longer thought to limit contingency, but to document change, the very thing it previously sought to limit. The same technologies that were used as institutional tools of mimetic representation were now used to challenge or subvert linear and objective archival representation. The avant-garde archive was non-hierarchical and non-linear. Rather, like montage, it was understood as a constellation or web of materials surrounding a theme, idea, or even a person. Duration, contingency, and process were introduced into the archive and the processes and methods of archivization.

Archives became multi-mediated or not media-specific. The composition of an archive expanded to include materials from everyday life. As in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, Cornell collected found materials and, in turn, archived them so as to be recycled over and over throughout his career. Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, composed of collected fragments and quotations, was not meant to be unchanging throughout time. Instead, he noted, "I, however, had something else in mind: not to retain the new but to renew the old. And to renew the old--in such a way that I myself, the newcomer, would make what was old my own--was the task of the collection that filled my drawer" (7). Benjamin's use of found quotations meant that they could be again edited and reused in the future. In this vein, Cornell, for example, used the same film footage in different contexts in multiple films as well as copies of the same images in different boxes. Cornell collected art books and periodicals, themselves archives, from which he cut out images that attracted him. Later he used other types of mechanically reproduced images such as Photostats, clippings of illustrations from magazines, and type. Cornell's work was centered on

found objects, in this case mechanically reproduced images and texts. Cornell never included original illustrations, paintings, or sculptures in his collages. Everything had been used before.

Michel Foucault's genealogy provides a way to problematize the governing power of the archive. For Foucault the job of the genealogist is to unearth disparate histories. He explains that the goal of the genealogist is to "study the beginning--numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by an historical eye" (81). For Foucault, genealogy is a form of carnival, which, as described by Bakhtin, inverts social norms and levels hierarchies of social class by challenging hegemonic history. As Bakhtin writes, the principle function of carnival is "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract . . . to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body" (*Rabelais* 19-20). By giving voice to overlooked, forgotten, and devalued histories genealogy disrupts capital "H" history.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance studies theorist Diana Taylor argues for uncovering or exposing the repertoire within archives. I am interested in Taylor's argument that, "Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge" (21). She explains: "Part of what performance and performance studies allows us to *do* . . . is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge" (26). For Taylor, embodied memory or performance is as valuable as what we think of as traditional archival material. So, the ephemerality of performance does not inhibit long-term transmission of personal and cultural memory.

### **Cornell's Archives**

Before Cornell officially began making his artwork (1926-1930), he kept a three-ring binder of clippings of images and texts that interested him including art, literature, philosophy, and music. As his method of collecting found objects grew and transformed into a creative

method, Cornell needed a way to store and organize the materials. For many years Cornell worked in his family's dining room after everyone else went to bed. Eventually, he converted the small basement of the family home into his studio. He described his studio as a "laboratory" and "experimental workshop" (Davidson and Temkin 225). The basement overflowed with Cornell's collected objects. After his death, his family and museum archivists discovered that there were "Easily three thousand books and magazines, a comparable number of record albums and vintage films, enough diaries and letters to now fill more than thirty reels of microfilm, and tens of thousands of examples of ephemera--from postage stamps to clay pipes, from theatrical handbills to birds' nests" (Hartigan, *Shadowplay* 15). Because of the quantity, the continuous collection, and the range of materials Cornell collected, he came up with his own archival system.

Originally three-dimensional and two-dimensional materials were archived separately. His taxonomy was determined by relationships. Three-dimensional objects such as shells, pipes, corks, and glass were stored close together in individual recycled containers such as old cookie boxes, jars, and cigar and stationary boxes, which he whitewashed and labeled, indicating their new contents with blue paint. He shelved cartons with similar contents close together and labeled the general type of material. Two-dimensional materials usually were stored in envelopes, folders or bags on which he made notes. In *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp... In Resonance*, Susan Davidson and Ann Temkin state:

Maintaining an internal sequence was simply not a concern, especially when items tended to come and go--into artworks, magazine layouts, other files, other hands, even trash. In Cornell's files, the vintage and the contemporary mingled freely in the form of photographs, Photostats, lithographs, engravings, postcards, excerpts from books, newspapers, and magazines, and notes--often lots of notes--on everything from envelope flaps to typing paper. (224)

These files were subject driven and included ballerinas, actresses, singers, artists, writers, astronomy, romantic and modern ballet, birds, films, literature, music, plants, and science. Often



written notes were included in the files, notes that included the date, time of day, the weather, as well as possibilities for projects, reminders, and drawings of works in progress. The relationship between the images in each file was complex and associative. “This was an artist for whom browsing, collecting, and sifting were, at heart, experiences to be savored and lingered over for equal measures of stimulation and reverie” (Davidson and Temkin 222).

## **Explorations**

Cornell began mixing media by assembling archives he called “explorations,” which included both two- and three-dimensional ephemera centered on a topic, idea, or person. Assembling his explorations entailed researching, collecting materials, and putting together files on his subject. Explorations were stored in folders, slipcases, and old suitcases. Davidson and Temkin explain, “He credited most of the ‘explorations’ to a specific momentous event, which he wrote about over time--in his diaries, in correspondence, and usually in notes incorporated into each ‘exploration’” (228). Cornell’s explorations often spanned decades as he continuously added to them whenever moments of inspiration struck. These explorations created dynamic archives, formed from moments of personal inspiration leading to collecting and researching materials relating to the subject. Although the explorations offered materials for Cornell’s formal artwork throughout his career, they were also art in themselves. Davidson and Temkin note that Cornell believed in the communicative and educational power of his archives. He thought of his explorations not only as materials for future projects, but also as a way for future artists to enter into communication with his work and, “pursue beauty and knowledge in the ‘warp and woof of daily life,’ just as he had” (233).

## GC 44 Exploration

His first exploration began in spring 1944 when Cornell began working at a nursery called the Garden Center (GC) in Queens. His job amidst the flowers and plants at the GC was a source of personal and spiritual joy as well as creativity for Cornell. He wrote, “There flowed such a never ending series of surprises connected with flowers, forgotten paths, experiences on bicycle through fields heavy with summer and mellow with autumn” (qtd. in Hauptman 22). Cornell wanted to capture, communicate, and represent his experiences at the Garden Center with the same intensity of the original moment. He explains, “I devised a method in the attempt to hold fast that overflowing ‘bouquet’ before the ‘full flavor faded’” (qtd. in Hauptman 22). His method was collecting. He collected “magazine and newspaper clippings, reproductions of artworks, postcards, quotations from books read, descriptions of scenes in movies viewed, leaves and flowers, illustrations cut from children’s fairy tales, scraps spied in flea markets or along city streets” (Hauptman 22); all centered around the Garden Center, as one object alone could not represent his experience. He writes:

Standing upon the threshold of the world of authentic visions and being allowed to linger . . . all this can never be satisfactorily recaptured and communicated. But as much as can is herewith presented as it unfolded in the aftermath of the above experiences adding whatever pictorial or literary image, souvenir, or anything that served my purpose to this end. (qtd. in Hauptman 23)

Cornell accumulated material for the exploration he called *GC 44* for ten years. At first he simply gathered material, but slowly his accumulating turned into a creative method. Hauptman explains, “Expanding beyond the recapitulation of a recent event, *GC 44* began to offer more than a demonstration of a technique to capture particularly visceral experiences; it became, ultimately more important for Cornell’s oeuvre, a way to document and preserve history, memory, and the past” (24). Cornell planned for *GC 44* to be composed of seven chapters

revolving around specific themes. Each chapter would include an image with corresponding writings. The exploration never took the form Cornell originally conceived. Instead it remained more casual and consisted of newspaper clippings, art periodicals, photographs, medieval manuscripts, a photo essay on English dairy farms and other images in portfolios. Cornell mounted some key images on album size white paper accompanied by writings underneath the images. This was as organized as *GC 44* ever was. Instead, through his work on *GC 44*, Cornell discovered a method for accumulation and assemblage that he would use throughout the rest of his career.

Cornell turned to the ballet as the subject of his next exploration, *Portrait of Ondine*. Cornell was particularly drawn to the nineteenth-century Romantic Ballet. He attended the New York Ballet, befriended famous ballerinas, and researched famous, historical ballerinas in the Museum of Modern Art's dance archives. Inspired by his research, Cornell began to bring nineteenth-century ballerinas to life in his twentieth-century work. The historically obscure Fanny Cerrito became one of Cornell's favorite Romantic ballerinas. Perhaps it was her obscurity that attracted Cornell to explore her life and career. She was known for her role as Ondine, an immortal creature of the sea in the ballet *Ondine, ou La Naiade* (1843). Starr tells us, "The retrieval of Cerrito from old prints, dusty books, and a long-forgotten ballet became his personal crusade for over twenty-five years. In his journals, Cornell writes of a series of epiphanies, in which she rematerialized to him in everyday life" (19). Once, as he wandered through the bookstalls of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, she appeared to him. He also describes catching sight of her through a window while riding a train to Long Island. These moments of epiphany or imaginary encounters were of great significance to him and inspired the production of his *Portrait of Ondine* exploration. Cornell described his Ondine exploration as an "unauthorized

biography” or “imaginary portrait.” Starr explains, “*Portrait of Ondine* highlights Cerrito’s life and career as it subtly slips in and out of time and place from nineteenth century Europe to twentieth century New York and the settings and images that brought her to life again for Cornell” (25).

When Cornell began the Ondine series, he encountered Ondine-type characters in different genres including the aquatic ballet at the Hippodrome, “The Little Mermaid” by Hans Christian Andersen. His film scenario *Monsieur Phot* (1933) included a mermaid submerged in a tank of water while reading from a book. *Monsieur Phot* was likely inspired by a Georges Méliès film, *La Sirene* (1904). These multiple encounters of an Ondine type of character contributed to Cornell’s fascination and conceptualization of his *Portrait of Ondine*.

The Ondine exploration is an example of how Cornell’s archives did not refer to a single origin but instead offered fictional and multiple inspirations as origins. It is also an example how Cornell used and reused materials in new and multiple contexts throughout his career. He demonstrated creative freedom as he gathered, mixed, and remixed found materials and inspirations to create his own biography of Cerrito. The exploration included “Images mounted on white paperboard sheets, in the tradition of album pages as well as bookplates . . . excerpts from nineteenth-century books, nineteenth-century watercolors of Naples, Kodachrome postcards of New York, European maps, a Cerrito autograph, and drafts of explanatory notes” (Davidson and Temkin 226). The exploration was archived in different ways over the years. First, the materials were stored in an album and then, “moved into a suitcase, made a public appearance in a shadow box, and wound up (but did not end) in the lidded paperboard slipcase that we encounter today” (Starr 19). In 1945 *Portrait of Ondine* was put on display at the Auditorium Gallery at the Museum of Modern Art. The exploration was put on exhibition again

a year later in the exhibition, “Romantic Museums at the Hugo Gallery/Portraits of Women: Constructions and Arrangements by Joseph Cornell.”

In *Joseph Cornell and the Ballet*, Sandra Starr notes that Ondine took on many different forms in Cornell’s work over the years. From the Ondine archive, Cornell created boxes, collages, and scenarios, constantly remixing his collected materials. In the souvenir case *Untitled (Fanny Cerrito in Ondine)* (1940-42), Cornell incorporates a cutout illustration of Cerrito from an album titled, *Les Beautés de L’Opéra* (1845). The same cutout appears in a later box titled *Untitled (Cerrito in Ondine)* (1947). Some of the boxes created from the exploration are overtly Ondine, while others are more abstract and associative. For example, *An Owl for Ondine* (1954) contains an owl in a dimly lit forest but does not overtly make a visual homage to Ondine. However, if one knows the inspirations for the box, Ondine references are overflowing. In the box Cornell combined the poem “Ondine” by Aloysius Bertrand, in which Ondine is described as raindrops falling on a building, with another Bertrand poem “La Pluie,” in which the poet describes a storm in a black forest and birds within the forest. Cornell enjoyed the way Bertrand evoked the mood of Ondine. The initial inspiration for *An Owl for Ondine* (1954), was Jean Girardoux’s play *Ondine* (1954), which incorporated a barred owl that Starr argues represents Cornell, and who is ready to announce Ondine’s appearance at a moment’s notice (Starr 25-30).

In *Window Façade* (1953-56), Cornell brought Cerrito to Manhattan by creating a box inspired by a moment of imaginative inspiration as he peered at the Manhattan Storage and Warehouse building across from his office. He wrote in his journal that each night guards would appear in the windows to close the blinds simultaneously. One night, many Cerritos appeared in

the guards' places. Ondine is nowhere to be seen in the box. The box is a whitewashed grid suggesting the windows through which Ondine appeared to Cornell.

Starr argues, "As an artist Cornell became Cerrito's custodian, and his work on her marks an effort to convey her spirit fully in a manner less and less dependent on the specifics of her life and work" (34). Over the course of his career, Ondine began to be a word that evoked a specific feeling and mood for Cornell. She haunts his work as she comes and goes in and out of it for twenty-five years.

### **The Duchamp Dossier**

By 1913, Marcel Duchamp had established his ready-mades, which were artworks made from commercially produced objects that Duchamp selected and displayed. Perhaps the most famous example is his *Fountain* (1917), a urinal reframed as artwork. His adjusted ready-mades were made from commercially produced objects as well; however, Duchamp extended simply selecting the objects to selecting and combining multiple commercial objects in relationship to one another. For example, his *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) was assembled from a metal wheel mounted on top of a wooden stool. Cornell met Duchamp in Manhattan in 1933 at a show that Duchamp organized at Brummer Gallery. A few years later, they met again and established a close friendship and working relationship from about 1942 to 1946. Cornell and Duchamp shared interests such as collecting and archiving flotsam and jetsam, obsolete or forgotten and overlooked everyday materials. Davidson and Temkin tell us, "The essentially solitary nature of their archival pursuits made them kindred spirits" (15). Duchamp hired Cornell to assist him in the assembling of his *Boite-en-valise* (1935-41), which is a small leather valise containing miniature reproductions of Duchamp's works. Cornell's turn to explorations, the multi-media subject-driven archives, might very well have been inspired by working with Duchamp.

Davidson and Temkin argue that this turn in his work was critical for several reasons: “First, it tied the dossiers generically to Cornell’s other, better known box constructions. Second, the volumetric format provided greater flexibility, expanding to include mismatched contents and even three-dimensional objects, while, third and conversely, it enforced at least marginal limitations on the scope of his rapidly bloating files and folders” (246).

During the span of their relationship, Cornell composed a Duchamp exploration called *Duchamp Dossier*. In this exploration, he collected correspondences between himself and Duchamp, clippings, ephemera associated with Duchamp from that time period, even trash that Duchamp disposed of and Cornell retrieved from the garbage: Cornell kept receipts, laundry tickets, and sugar wrappers (Davidson and Temkin 248). Cornell’s *Duchamp Dossier* was put on exhibition in 1998 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

### **Dynamic Archiving or The Archive at Play**

Cornell’s museum and pharmacy boxes are linked to the twentieth-century avant-garde’s critique of traditional archives and museums. Beginning with the avant-garde and continuing into contemporary art, artists questioned the traditional art museum in terms of what was considered art as well as the layout, viewing practices, and other visitor decorum. Cornell’s work addressed these critiques through the contents of his work as well as the formats and media he used. The boxes and cases were not simply objects used to display the content. They were not frames or pedestals holding a painting or sculpture. Rather, they were central to the conceptualization of his work.

Cornell’s value in and reliance on alternative media and viewing formats have been tied to a wide variety of practices that preceded him. As noted above, Cornell was greatly inspired by Duchamp’s *Boite-en-valise* (1935-41), a small leather valise that contained miniature copies of

pieces of Duchamp's work; Cornell's own museum boxes were lidded wooden cases that stored glass jars containing ephemera such as colored sand, coins, fragments of maps and pages of books, beads, and mechanical springs. Like Duchamp, Cornell incorporated photographic reproductions in his museum boxes. André Malraux introduced the idea of "The Museum without Walls" in which art would be an assembly of meaning informed by different voices across time and place. Although Malraux had not yet read Walter Benjamin's *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, we can understand Malraux's expansion of the idea of the museum in light of Benjamin's understanding of the democratization of art through mechanical reproduction. Cornell certainly benefited from reproduced art as he spent his early years searching, learning, and exploring art books of works he had never seen in person. Davidson and Temkin explain that both Cornell and Duchamp used images that fall in line with Malraux's idea of the museum (240). And importantly, Cornell often considered his works incomplete. Works would span years, even decades, as would his archives. Mechanical reproduction was a key element in this ongoing transformation.

Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak compare Cornell's boxes to cabinets of wonder: "Cornell's boxes have affinities with the *Wunderkammern* and *Wunderkabinette* of the seventeenth century, in which the wonders of the physical realm were gathered-natural and artificial curiosities, paintings, small works of art, coins and medals, automata, and scientific instruments-with the naïve intent of creating an encyclopedic in miniature" (282). Wonder was a key descriptor of these collections because it referred to "both the objects displayed and the subjective state those objects inevitably induced in their respective viewers" (Weschler 77). El Lissitzky began designing galleries that focused on the observer, "By turning the visitor into the dynamic agent of a continuously shifting viewpoint whose movements create the space in which



they unfold” (Spieker 109). Lissitzky’s Demonstration Rooms focused on creating an active viewer in the art gallery. To achieve this Lissitzky created spaces that allowed the viewer’s perspective of the artwork to constantly shift. There was no one correct position from which to view works, but rather multiple angles and perspectives were created as the viewer moved through the gallery. Spieker argues that Lissitzky’s Demonstration Rooms directly challenge the nineteenth-century’s archives and museums. The rooms function more like filmic montage. He explains, “Just as montage subjects traditional representation to time and movement, so the Demonstration Rooms also suggest that time is the museum’s most essential element” (109). One key characteristic of the Demonstration Rooms was that they were “optical[ly] dynamic” meaning that the backgrounds of the rooms were not just support for pieces of art, but also active parts of the experience. For example, the background would be a different color depending on where the observer stood. The observer engages with the rooms, creating an aesthetic experience in itself. Spieker argues that Lissitzky’s Demonstration Rooms embody the idea that vision is a construct created from division, interval, change, motion, and difference. Spieker notes, “The experience the Demonstration Rooms made available to their visitors is analogous to the one Benjamin claimed for film; instead of an illusion of continuity and flux, they permit a glimpse at the archive of differential moments--their oscillation and differentiation--that represent that illusion’s phenomenological horizon” (Spieker 124). Cornell referenced this connection of perspective in his boxes in which he includes film stills. Further, his boxes were built for interaction. Many of his boxes such as the optical toys, *Sand Trays* (1930s-1950s), and *Medici Slot Machines* (1940s-1960s) were to be held and played with by the viewer. Interaction and participation was key in creating the experience of Cornell’s boxes.

The practices of these artists described above incorporate the idea of the archive as artwork, which “challenges the notion of history as a discourse based primarily upon chronology and documentation” (Osthoff 12). The archive is no longer a stable, impenetrable place full of dead material. Instead, archives become a source for creative extension. In *Performing the Archive*, Simone Osthoff explains that because the boundary between art and archive is blurring, the archive has become a source for creative output. Therefore, history and theory are more frequently included in artwork (12). Hal Foster uses Liam Gilliam’s idea of “promissory notes” to claim that archives function as “Promissory notes for future elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios” (5).

In the following chapter I discuss Cornell’s films as ephemeral archives and then extend my argument of the ephemeral archive to contemporary digital archives. Then I combine analogue and digital technologies along with Cornell’s archives and use them as promissory notes to produce my own multi-media work.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE FILMIC AND DIGITAL ARCHIVE

In this chapter I discuss Cornell's original films as archives. I then argue that like the objects the films were meant to preserve, filmic archives are ephemeral. I then extend my discussion to the digital archive. Finally, I describe how I combined the analogue and the digital in a film project that realized one of Cornell's unrealized film scenarios from his archives.

### **Film as Ephemeral Archive**

Throughout his career, Cornell often felt an inconsistency between the embodiment of an experience and its documentation. With film, Cornell was able to collapse the moment of inspiration and execution. Film became a way for Cornell to archive contingency, duration, and the ephemeral. The butterfly in *Centuries of June* (1955) and the birds in *Nymphlight* (1957) discussed in Chapter Two are examples of the collapsing of inspiration and execution through contingency.

Mary Ann Doanne explains that film could record "a fleeting moment, the duration of an ephemeral smile or glance" (3). It follows that film can also capture accidents and surprises, or what Doanne refers to as contingencies that shock us. Doanne explains, "Film was perceived as the imprint of time itself, a time unharnessed from rationalization, a nonteleological time in which each moment can produce the unexpected, the unpredictable, and temporality ratifies indeterminacy" (23). However, once contingency has been recorded or archived it becomes part of the past. Doanne argues that film functions first as a record of what happens in front of the camera. Thus, time itself becomes archived. However, we think of film as occurring in our present because it "exists" when it is screened for a present audience. So, the past is archived and the viewer's experience is an experience of presence. But, as Doanne argues, it is a presence that is haunted by historicity (23).

The medium of film itself captures and freezes a person or moment in time and space yet continually moves forward. Though it is captured on film, the moment is past. Spieker notes:

As media technology whose goal is the archivization of time in flux, film produces a living present from a mechanically accelerated series of stills. Thought of as a series of discreet recorded moments that aim to register the contingent, film partakes of the Real; as a continuous motion projected on a screen, however, it is part of the Imaginary, translating the discrete series of still images into more or less coherent visual flux. (52)

This theorization of the archivization of the contingent in film is challenged by French Philosopher, Henri Bergson. Spieker continues to explain that for Bergson, “the contingent present cannot be archivized; first, because we cannot speak it without slippage and, second, because there is no point in time that could be said to be independent from what preceded it or from what follows it” (66). For Bergson, there is no disembodied past, and the present only exists as duration from one’s past to one’s future. His understanding of the contingent presents the idea that film, “as a chronology of legible moments neatly separated from each other by regular intervals, may turn out to be less clearly structured and defined than we would like it to be” (Spieker 66). Although presenting a repeatable present, the archival process of filmmaking incorporates multiple temporalities.

Hauptman describes this desire for the past as a similarity between historiography and surrealism though the desire itself differs: “The historian collects fragments in an attempt to reach the past while the surrealist scans the walls of the city searching for signs of love and wishes that it never be fulfilled” (41). Cornell embodied a combination of historiographer and surrealist. This mixture creates a tension for Cornell’s desire to preserve the past or *métaphysique d’éphémère*.

As a filmmaker, rather than adhering to a strict, straightforward, linear script, Cornell followed his fancies and whims, allowing contingency to play a large role in his films. His films

had an inherent tension of archiving the ephemeral. As I have discussed, Cornell used film to document and memorialize structures that were on the verge of destruction, such as a house in his Flushing neighborhood or the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue El. Documenting contingency was a way for Cornell to preserve the disappearing around him. The film or rather, each still frame, was a physical document of the place and time in which the film was taken. With each viewing of the film the place and memories attached to that place came to life. Understood in this way, each of Cornell's original films were archives of memory that were preserved and repeated even after the locations changed and disappeared. However, once these vanishing places were captured on film, they were not forever preserved from decay.

In June 2012 I visited the Anthology Film Archive in Manhattan for an exhibition of their Cornell film archive. As I sat in the theatre and watched his films that are not the originals, but copies, I became mindful of the deterioration of the films themselves. Though captured on film, that which he has immortalized was disappearing. With each repetition of the film the subject of the shot slipped further into the past, making the fixing of it that much more impossible. We can watch these moments of preservation, but time keeps moving frame by frame. And, with each repetition the materiality of the film decomposes little by little. The attempt of preservation is futile, but it is meaningful.

In "Making History Go," Della Pollock introduces the idea of "preserving the vanishing," which she describes as the space between performative presence of a place or event and its impending absence (11). For Pollock preserving the vanishing does not mimetically represent the past, but finds ways to engage creatively with the past that lets the past speak for itself. She explains, "It is in the moments of the most intense performative play—the moments when the gaps between signifiers and their avowed signifieds are widest—that history creeps back into (or

perhaps more accurately, out of) representation” (27). Cornell’s original films achieve Pollock’s idea of preserving the vanishing both in their production as well as in their editing. Cornell’s direction for filming required that the filmmaker not try to capture a whole or truthful representation of the subject (often a location) of the film, but rather an essence or a feeling evoked from the place. The filmmaker creatively engaged with the disappearing location and let it speak for itself. Further, in the editing of his original films, Cornell left in slips and mistakes. This choice to leave in ruptures embraces the embodied performance of the filming and editing experience and refuses the pressure of mimetic representation. Finally, in my viewing of Cornell’s films at the Anthology Film Archives, the effects of time were evident in the films. Rather than trying to reconstruct the films to their original quality for the screening reproductions of the films, the archive left in the evidence of decomposition, allowing the films to speak for themselves as cultural artifacts.

Cornell was an artist trying, desperately, to preserve a moment of beauty in its time and space, but always facing the futility of his attempt. His turn to film as an artistic medium is particularly interesting in that the technology of film inherently deals with ephemerality, a theme that was central to Cornell’s work. Cornell used artistic media to explore the relationship between presence and obsolescence, and his turn to film allowed him to explore it not only through subject matter but also in form. Sitney explains, “All of Cornell’s work speaks of the aesthetic mediation of experience. To encounter anything in its fullness was to come into nearly tangible contact with its absolute absence, its unrecoverable pastness, its evanescence” (69). That which is gone or disappearing is potently present in Cornell’s films. What I find particularly interesting is that this quality also seems tied to the materiality of film itself. The science of celluloid insists that the repetition of the image only makes it disappear faster. According to

Spieker's understanding of Johaan Droysen's book *Historik*, "The past we come to inspect in an archive is fully contingent on the conditions (and constraints) of the process of archivization itself" (26). Celluloid inevitably deteriorates over time. Usually, films are carefully stored or archived in order to preserve them. However, even in archival conditions films slowly disappear. Eight-millimeter film, for instance, is made of tri-acetate cellulose, which over time chemically breaks down and causes the film to decompose. It can warp, become brittle, or acquire an oily or powdery coating as it decomposes.

Diana Taylor identifies the archive as, "supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)" and the repertoire as, "embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (19). She explains that although archives are supposedly resistant to change, the value, relevance, and even meaning of the archive does indeed change over time. Cornell's technique of wandering and creatively documenting locations on the verge of destruction and evolution put the archive and the repertoire into play together. While Cornell was concerned with preservation of special locations as he experienced and remembered them, his films captured and embodied the ephemeral. Though captured on film, the content could not be stabilized. Just as his films could be reproduced and repeated long after the landscape changed, each viewing weaves together past, present, and future of the cityscape. Films document memories of what it was, what it is, and the inevitability of it evolving or disappearing in the future. Hauptman argues that Cornell chose his artistic medium based on his subject. I argue that film was another, perhaps more potent way, for him to express the chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphémère*.

## **The Digital Archive**

With artists turning to digital archives as well as archiving their art via digital technology, the issue of the permanence of digital archives is becoming a heavily discussed topic. New technologies are thought to make information more stable and accessible. It is often assumed that digital memory is permanent, allowing for anything and everything to be archived with no threat of decay. However, this notion is at odds with the material transience of information and the Internet. Wendy Chun argues that information is only stable for the moment(s) our eyes take in the information. Then it continues to move and change. It is because digital memory degenerates (and has to be refreshed) that digital memory is possible. Computer memory fades just as other material objects do. Chun suggests, “The always-thereness of digital media was to make things more stable, more lasting. Digital media, through the memory at their core, were supposed to solve, if not dissolve, archival problems such as degrading celluloid or scratched vinyl, not create archival problems of their own” (188). Contrary to wide beliefs, digital media are not stable, fixed, and always there. Chun continues, “Digital media are degenerative, forgetful, erasable” (192). This condition creates an interesting tension in digital archival art and archiving digital art, particularly when the digital artworks such as video collages and mash-ups are assemblages made from various digital archives. Digital assemblages composed from found material from multiple digital archives bring new meaning to Malraux’s Museum without Walls, expanding the archive from collaboration across specific times and people to multiple people simultaneously worldwide for a presumably infinite amount of time. Chun famously notes, “We must analyze, as we try to grasp a present that is always degenerating, the ways in which ephemerality is made to endure. What is surprising is not that digital media fade but rather that they stay at all and that we stay transfixed by our screens as their ephemerality endures” (200).



Although Cornell worked with analogue technology, his chronotopes resonate with contemporary uses of digital technologies. Looking to old technologies to understand new technologies in a new or better way is a central value of those invested in the field of media archaeology, a field of study that asserts that new technology is informed by obsolete technology. In the next section of this chapter I take the idea that old technology informs the new and put it to the test in an experiment to realize a film scenario from Cornell's archives through a project that combines pre-cinematic techniques, analogue film, and digital video.

### **Nebula: The Powdered Sugar Princess**

The characteristics of the archiving chronotope inspired a video project that combined material from Cornell's archives, "obsolete" analog technology, and digital technology. Using Cornell's unrealized film scenario, *Nebula: The Powdered Sugar Princess* (1941), as the subject of my project, I adapted the film scenario into an experimental video using existing video, stop-motion animation, and animation from a replica zoetrope. I used the process of the project to experiment with the idea that archives are not fixed and permanent. Rather, archival materials are sources for creative and educational extension made by scholars and artists, creating a dialogue between their times and spaces. Though I worked individually and meticulously by adapting, extending, and manipulating archival material, drawing from Cornell's archives as raw material for my own creative extension allowed me to enter into conversation with Cornell's work.

In 1941 Cornell wrote the film scenario titled, *Nebula, The Powdered Sugar Princess* (hereafter *Nebula*). The scenario blended astronomy and fantasy to create a script for a ballet film. Like *Monsieur Phot* (1933), the scenario was never filmed; however, Cornell gave the film "tangible form in collages made in conjunction with the project" (Hoving 73). *Nebula* consisted of six pages of notes that described three acts of the performance.

In the first act a young ballerina, Nebula, refuses to put on her costume and dance *La Sylphide* (1832). In response, her ballet teacher conspires with a magician to turn her into a real sylphide. She is turned into the winged spirit and floats through what Cornell described as “the kind of world that one see thru the microscope/Floating cells magnified to gigantic” proportion (qtd. in Hoving 74). Because of the strange creatures floating past her, the ballerina cannot dance as she did on earth but moves as if she is swimming.

The second act of the scenario is more impressionistic and is comprised of three tableaux. Cornell pairs Claude Debussy’s music with blue and green lighting. He describes:

Snow falls, and, as the princess floats and dances, she ecstatically spreads her arms open to welcome the snowflakes. The light shifts to green, and the set resembles a glorified fairy aquarium. When the lights move to dark green, they flash like shooting stars. Perfectly at home with the heavenly bodies, Nebula now stands on a balcony slowly fading away as she looks straight into the camera and blows a kiss at the audience. (qtd. in Hoving 74)

As the view shifts from the close-up of Nebula to a more distant perspective, the outlines of constellations appear and disappear. The stars in Nebula’s tutu, her hair, and her forehead become a constellation. Nebula disappears, but becomes a part of the cosmos.

The third act was to be filmed in Technicolor and consisted of close-ups of snow falling and melting on Nebula’s face and hair with shapes floating past her.

Cornell’s *Nebula* parallels the story of a nebula in astronomy, which has a very specific operation of time and space. In *Nebula*, the disappearance or finiteness of the woman is inextricably tied to her preservation, just as nebulae, enormous clumps of gas and dust, disintegrate. The decay of the nebula creates individual stars.

My realization of *Nebula* (2013) consisted of a combination of the second and third version of Cornell’s scenario. I downloaded a video archive of Anna Pavlova dancing her famous “Dying Swan” dance from *Swan Lake* (see Figure 5). (Cornell has made homages to

Pavlova dancing the dance of the Dying Swan.) I collected sequins, feathers, glitter, and sand. With this material I created handmade strips to fit inside a replica zoetrope, a pre-cinema device that consists of a rotating cylinder with vertical slits through which the viewer watches a sequence of images rotate and appear become animated. The strips I made were not traditional in the sense that in historical examples of the zoetrope they followed a sequence of a particular motion such as a horse galloping. Instead I created multiple strips of various designs, not worrying to make sure that the sequence would create the illusion of sequential movement. As the zoetrope rotated I filmed at an extreme close-up angle through the slits in the device. As a result the strips were animated and interrupted by the momentary darkness of the rotating zoetrope. Incorporating the momentary darkness created by the zoetrope allowed me to make the viewer aware of the technology itself rather than the illusion created by the technology.

From the video of Anna Pavlova I created still images and printed material photographs. By deciding to create material photographs to incorporate into my digital video I called on Cornell's use of Photostats in his work. Rather than using original prints in Cornell's case, he used reproductions that he could manipulate. Similarly, I used Photostats from digital archives to create a different material effect in my video. I cut out Pavlova's body from the rest of the photo and created a series of stop-motion movements. As I filmed, the ballerina would slowly move across her stage via stop-motion with sand, glitter, and jewels creating a trail of stars around her. At the end of the stop-motion Pavlova is consumed by the nebula, which then explodes into a constellation. Once I was done with each of these pre-cinema techniques I uploaded each image to non-linear video editing software and began digitally manipulating them (see Figure 6).



Figure 5: Video Layered with Zoetrope

First, I layered the video of Pavlova's dance underneath the zoetrope video of the strip with the feathers circulating. I then added the stop-motion photographs and set the frames per second at a speed that would animate the images. Layered on top of this sequence is a zoetrope strip with white paper and sequins as well as the feathers.



Figure 6: Stop Motion Ballerina

In the video, the dancing Nebula fades in, growing larger as she dances toward the camera. Though I have used a video, it has been converted from a film from the early twentieth century. The age is apparent. She flickers and fades as she dances the dance of the “Dying Swan.” The zoetrope feathers fly past, and sequins spin behind her creating shadows into which she disappears and reappears. The sequins become stars, and the feathers are a part of the swan slowly disintegrating and becoming the stars. She dances her dance of destruction and creation. The zoetrope becomes her stage. Digitally manipulated, she dances within the pre-cinematic device. As she concludes her dance her image fades out as the last feather passes. Only the sequins are left within the zoetrope. She has become the cosmos. Darkness. Feathers.

Suddenly Nebula reappears as a cutout photograph. She begins her stop motion dance across the frame as sequins, sand, and jewels shower around her costume. As she dances her costume disperses across the frame, creating constellations. Feathers begin to fall and consume her. She breaks free and begins her exit. As she concludes her dance she is no longer whole, but is entirely made of stars.

### **Analysis**

Pavlova danced the “Dying Swan” for the first time in 1905 and repeated the performance nearly 4000 times. She was one of Cornell’s favorite ballerinas; he had an archive file dedicated to her. The video I appropriated from YouTube became the raw material I used to create my extension of Cornell’s scenario. I was also inspired by his box *A Swan Like for Tamara Toumanova* (1946), in which a single swan framed in white feathers sits in front of a starlit background, and his collage of Toumanova dancing, frozen in space and made from rhinestones that look like stars. Toumanova was Pavlova’s protégé. Michel Fokine created the Dying Swan dance for Pavlova. When Toumanova was young she premiered onstage alongside

Pavlova. When Pavlova died Fokine passed the legacy of the dance to Toumanova, but not without paying tribute to Pavlova. It became a tradition on the anniversary of Pavlova's death to have a single spotlight accompanied by the Dying Swan music metaphorically dance across the stage. In Cornell's Toumanova collages and boxes there is likewise homage paid to Pavlova (Starr 66).

My realization of the scenario is reminiscent of some of Cornell's work relating to cinema. First, the incorporation of the zoetrope resembles Cornell's use of another pre-cinema machine called the praxinoscope. The praxinoscope consisted of a spinning cylinder with sequential images attached to the inside. In the center were mirrors constructed in a circle. As the praxinoscope spun, the mirrors reflected the images in motion, creating animated images. In *Thimble Forests* (1948) and *Jardin de Marie Antoinette* (1949) Cornell manipulated found circular boxes and transformed them into praxinoscopes. This transformation created an intimate interaction for viewers who, as they peered into the box, saw endless reflections of the contents because of the mirrors surrounding the perimeter of the box.

In *Jouet Surrealiste* (1932), Cornell altered images to be used for a thaumotrope. The thaumotrope was invented in 1825 and demonstrated the effect of persistence of vision. The device rotates a disc with an image on each side; as it spins the two images seem to blend together to create one coherent image. Cornell used commercial discs that were meant for the thaumotrope, but he would add paint and collage other images on top.

The box *Black Hunter* (1939) shows multiple, nearly identical cutouts of a hunter shooting his gun. The images are in line vertically and at a slight curve. Each gun smokes, but the amount of smoke varies in each cutout. It seems as though a camera captured each moment of the hunter shooting a target. On the far right of the box hangs a string with four round balls

attached. It is as if the hunter is using them for target practice. The images evoke Eadweard Muybridge's series photography, which produced the first photographic sequenced frames of moving images in the 1870s. The scene is layered with glass, which Cornell painted red.

Hartigan explains that this technique emulates painting glass-plate negatives and slides and stereo-synthesis, which is an obscure technique developed by cinema pioneer Louis Lumière.

Hartigan explains, "Multiple, slightly varying positives of an image were printed as photomontages on the glass plates, sandwiched together in a wood frame" (*Navigating* 176).

This technique was used in order to give static objects a sense of depth and movement.

My film also recalls Cornell's souvenir boxes *Lucile Grahn as La Sylphide* (1945) and *Homage to the Romantic Ballet (for the sylphide Alicia Markova)* (1947). Both boxes contain glitter, spotted wings, a piece of a headdress and white beads. The ballerina has disappeared, but remnants of her remain. The contents of each box shifts as the viewer picks up and interacts with the box.

The rotation of the zoetrope in *Nebula* (2013) creates limited or selective viewing through the spaces in the device, and thus functions like the windows in Cornell's boxes.

Further, this selective viewing is representative of Cornell's worldview, which was a narrow and deep interest in very selective things. The windows or spaces in Cornell's work are strategic and methodical, giving the viewer a deep but narrow view of the subject.

Cornell believed that an artist's archives should be accessible to future generations of artists. For him the archive was not a fixed and sacred space, but a source for creative extension. As such, Cornell's film scenario acted as my artistic inspiration. As I read the scenario I wanted to adapt his story using archival footage, found materials, and digital film and editing technology. Because of the unfinalizable quality of the archive, I was able to take Cornell's film

scenario along with digital archives to create a piece that straddles the past, present, and future through its content and form (digital and analog technologies). By taking on this project I came into conversation through time and space with Cornell and his work. I formed an intimate connection with the archival materials I used. I became familiar with Cornell's film scenario and took my time imagining how I wanted to bring his intricate and oneiric *Nebula* to life. I worked for extended periods arranging, rearranging, and manipulating film footage and photographs. Like Cornell's incorporations of objects that held highly personal and associative meanings, I included material objects in the project that I associated with the film scenario, making interpretation of the film not entirely available to the audience. I looked to Cornell's analog processes to inform how I approached a project that combined both analog and digital technology. And, rather than attempting to create a mimetic representation of Cornell's film scenario I gave myself freedom to create a piece that I felt embodied the mood of Cornell's original writing. As Pollock argues, it is through creative, non-mimetic performative play that the past comes alive in the present.



## CHAPTER SIX: THE COLLAGING CHRONOTOPE

A major source of inspiration for Cornell's work was the cinema. Over the course of his life Cornell became a film enthusiast, collector, and avant-garde filmmaker. In many ways, Cornell's maturity both personally and artistically paralleled the coming of age of cinema as a legitimate art form. As a boy he saw early experiments with the form and grew up witnessing its advancement from optical toys to vaudeville acts to silent films to "talkies." He preferred films from the silent era, saying, "Among the barren wastes of the talking films there occasionally occur passages to remind one again of the profound and suggestive power of the silent film to evoke an ideal world of beauty, to release unsuspected floods of music from the gaze of a human countenance in its prison of silver light" (qtd. in Sitney 73).

Cornell's deep interest in film as an art form segued into experimentation with film. Beginning in the 1930s he worked on collage films, which he made by cutting, rearranging, and mixing together found films. The collage films include *Rose Hobart* (1936), *Cotillion* (1940s-1969), *Children's Party* (1940s-1969), *Midnight Party* (1940s-1969), *Bookstalls* (1940s), *By Night with Torch and Spear* (1940s), *Vaudeville De-Lux* (1940s), *Carousel- An Animal Opera* (1940s), *Thimble Theatre* (1940s), *Jack's Dream* (1940s), *New York-Rome-Barcelona-Brussels* (1940s), and *Cinderella's Dream* (no date). Though the filmic term for footage that is cut and spliced together to create unexpected association is montage, I use the term collage because I study the practices he used to make these films, which are best expressed through his process of collage. As I discussed earlier, in the 1950s and 60s, Cornell authored and directed his own films, often working with a collaborator such as Stan Brakhage, Jordan Lawrence, and Larry Jordan. Cornell also wrote film scenarios using filmic language that allowed for events to occur that could only be accomplished via film. The scenarios were to be imagined rather than made

into actual films. The scenarios include *Monsieur Phot* (1933), *Nebula the Powdered Sugar Princess* (1941; discussed in the previous chapter), and a scenario inspired by the writings and illustrations of Hans Christian Anderson titled *Theatre of Hans Christian Anderson* (1945).

In this chapter I survey the multiple ways that time and space perform in each of Cornell's relationships to film: the enthusiast, the collector, the original filmmaker, the scenario writer, and the collage filmmaker, devoting more extensive study to the collage films. Time and space function in specific yet different ways in each of these relationships, calling for different kinds of filmic chronotopes. I argue that Cornell's films operate within Roland Barthes' third meaning. Barthes argues that film can move past informational and symbolic meaning to the third meaning, which fights against interpretation and the visual's reliance on the verbal.

Cornell's films exceed linear narratives by focusing on the manipulation of time. As I discuss below in the section on a transition from still to moving images, film is used to capture or document events that unfold in front of the camera. It captures contingency. However, through collage, film can be edited and rearranged to challenge continuity of time and space as well as to create multiple chronotopes within one collage film. The process of collage thus creates a heterochronotopic film. Further, as I have addressed above, film is not a deterioration-proof medium that provides infinite playbacks of performances captured on film. Film fades, deteriorates, and is vulnerable to damage. Ultimately, I argue that Cornell's interest in the obsolete is made highly poignant through his use of collage films because of the material ephemerality of film itself.

### **Time and Space in Film**

Our experience of time and space transformed with the technological progression from still to moving images. Cornell was born in 1903, the year that cinema began to move towards

narrative storytelling with Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). In the same year, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company built the first artificially lighted film studio on 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, and Luna Park opened on Coney Island. Cornell played with optical toys such as zoetropes, kinetoscopes, and mutoscopes, which animated still images, and stereopticons, which created the illusion of three-dimensional photographs (Hartigan, *Navigating* 35). Kinetoscopes and Mutoscopes were installed in arcades and vaudeville theatres in the late 1800s with huge popularity. Viewers would drop a coin, look through a single lens, and rotate a handle that moved still images so they appeared to be in motion. Coming of age during the transition from still image to the moving image clearly had an impact on Cornell's understanding of the functions and possibilities of time and space in film.

Back in 1877-1878, Eadweard Muybridge applied ideas of persistence of vision to photography. He is famous for his use of multiple cameras to take sequential shots of a running horse to prove that at some point all of the horse's legs were off of the ground. He made the Zoopraxiscope, which was a glass disk on which individual images were copied from his photographs via paint. He projected the disk in rotation, creating the illusion of continuous movement. He is quoted, "I am experimenting upon an instrument that does for the Eye what the phonograph does for the Ear, which is the recording and reproduction of things in motion" (qtd. in Wood 170).

A few years later, Étienne-Jules Marey worked with sequential photography, which he referred to as chronophotography. He recorded successive movements on a single glass plate. Gaby Wood describes the effect: "A beautiful ghostly sequence, as if the person in the picture were a spring, slowly being pulled apart across the frame" (171). Marey moved from glass plates to celluloid film. He was interested in the movement of the human body and used a camera to

break down human movements into what looked like mechanical segments in order to “see what the naked eye couldn’t” (Wood 174). The films were viewed as stills though they are indeed images of sequential movement.

Edison and the Lumière brothers made the earliest films that were for entertainment purposes. By the early 1900s films were being projected at vaudeville theatres as novelties in between live performance acts and later in storefront theatres or Nickelodeons, which were dedicated to film projection. To see the cinema progress from optical toys, to moving image machines such as the Kinetoscope, to projected moving images would have been a kind of magic for Cornell. The process was a perfect blending of science and magic. When animation through the movement of sequential photographs was introduced, it brought with it, “A whole new range of monstrous or magical possibilities” (Wood 175). People flocked to movie houses to experience the magic of the moving image.

In a dark theatre strangers crammed together to watch individual images move through a projector that created the illusion of movement. The new motion pictures were a novelty to experience. It was a place to take the kids to see, to take a date, to slip into after work or during a lunch break. Everyday time was suspended as audiences entered the theatre and experienced a new entertainment form that functioned on the basis of manipulating time. It allowed the audience to live temporarily in an imaginary world whether it was the past, present, or future.

Film thus challenges an audience’s understandings of past and present. As Doanne argues, film inherently exists in multiple temporalities. Film archives time; paradoxically, it archives the contingent. Audiences understand that what they see on film has already happened, but they are seeing it in their present. For Doanne, there is the “mechanical” temporality, which is the linear running of the film through the apparatus. There is the “temporality of the diegesis,”

which refers to the way in which time is organized in the image. Not only could audiences travel via the screen to the past or future for the length of the film, but time could be condensed or expanded, and films could move between past, present, and future. Finally, there is the temporality of reception, which includes the temporality (and spatiality) spectators experienced while viewing the film.

People had to learn how to read--or experience--time in films. Cinema and its predecessor, photography, along with other new technologies such as phonography and typing, were all emerging technologies that recorded reality, which linked them to science and objectivity rather than subjective representations of art. This put cinema in a precarious position. While film was thought to be a tool to record reality, it was also used by artists to make fictional stories that manipulated reality. In other words, like the new archival practices I discussed in Chapter Five, it was used precisely *for* what it was used to fight *against*: ambiguity and subjectivity.

Robert B. Ray explores the cultural and perceptual training involved in reading moving images. Writing during the silent film era, Boris Eikhenbaum suggested that we learn how to read films, to make sense from one clip to another, with inner speech, which means that we create a narrative in our heads that connects separate shots (Ray 33). Paul Willemen explains that we translate visuals into our dominant meaning system, language, in an attempt to rid visuals of ambiguity (Ray 33). Therefore, in early cinema, many silent filmmakers relied on structures and formulas that triggered readymade inner speech. Readymade inner speech used stock characters, actions, and storylines. For example, villains had moustaches and squinty eyes and heroines had petticoats and blonde hair; there was a chase scene, a lover's meeting, the stroll, the rendezvous, the murder, the deathbed vigil, etc. These actions and characters provided what

Roland Barthes describes as “a code of actions [that] principally determines the readability of the text” (qtd. in Ray 35). Each of these generic formulas operated within a particular chronotope, causing the audience to have particular expectations of actions, plots, and characters within each film.

Ray explains that in the early 1900s most films were made using theatrical conventions: the action was filmed twelve feet away, which showed the actors in a full shot, much like watching them on a stage. Films were special features at vaudeville performances and were often travel films and one-point gags. As the demand for new films grew, narrative plots replaced vaudeville turns. Audiences wanted stories told through the images. Chase films, which were easy to follow visually, achieved this early. Chase films came with various readymade plot lines, action sequences, and shot set-ups that directors could include in their films to achieve that particular genre efficiently. Other popular genres were melodramas and comedies. Sound also contributed to the ways people read early films. Some films came with scores to be played along with the film. Full orchestras and organs were installed in some theatres. Machines that could produce sounds of applause, crying babies, gunshots, marching feet, and animal noises were installed. When synchronized sound was introduced to cinema these techniques were not abandoned. Instead, every component of the film was grounded in a particular genre chronotope. Cornell’s collage films borrowed material from these genre films, but rearranged them into strange chronotopicities, explored more fully below.

Cornell was attracted to the magical possibilities through the manipulation of time and space the new medium of film offered. Later, he would become interested in the manipulation of the materiality of film to further manipulate time and space. However, Cornell was also attracted to the qualities of pre-cinematic devices with their illusions and wonder. Often, with these

devices the viewer was also the operator and could manipulate how he or she viewed the images. The viewer had an intimate relationship with the images viewed due to the size of the devices, the space between viewer and device, and the interaction between the two. Combined, pre-cinematic devices and film offer multiple and complex possibilities to manipulate time and space, to mix, re-mix, and rearrange chronological sequences to create a sense of mystery and a hint of magic for the viewer.

### **Cornell as Film Enthusiast**

Hartigan provides important details about Cornell's cinema going (*Navigating* 41-50). As an adult, Cornell went to the cinema on nearly a daily basis for entertainment and escape from his daily life. He read technical histories of the film industry as well as fan magazines. Cornell's taste in film was typical of his time. He liked movies such as D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919). *Broken Blossoms* stars the ingénue, Lillian Gish, who escapes an abusive father and finds shelter with a Chinese man who falls in love with her. When the father discovers her whereabouts he tracks her down and kills her. When her friend finds her dead he builds a shrine and takes his own life.

The movie houses in New York occasionally screened foreign films that Cornell made a point to see such as Ernst Lubitsch's *Sumurun* (1920), which tells the story of "the favorite slave girl" of a tyrant who falls in love with a cloth merchant, which puts her life in danger. He also saw Dimitri Kirsanoff's *Menilmontant* (1926), which tells the tragic story of two sisters, and Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928). These films were significant for Cornell because the cinematography was so inventive.

Hartigan explains that these filmmakers placed more importance on image over narrative. These directors were more interested in the experience of emotion and the poetic nature of film

rather than narrative structure and generic readability. American D. W. Griffith transformed cinema by telling stories and manipulating visual images. He split up scenes into fragments that could be reassembled for emotional and dramatic potency. He emphasized images through precise framing and juxtaposing images and the speed with which they were edited. The “Lubitsch effect” was characterized by a compression of ideas and situations into single shots or brief scenes allowing the audience to interpret meaning themselves. Dimitri Kirsanoff’s *Menilmontant* (1926) used sophisticated techniques of montage, hand-held shots, superimpositions, and dynamic shots and angles. Hartigan says, “Kirsanoff deleted explanatory intertitles and used montage, superimposition, and hand-held camera shots to create a purely image-based, poetic experience” (*Navigating* 24). Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is filmed almost entirely in close-ups to get the emotional and psychological state of Joan; severe lighting and angles are also used. Hartigan continues, “Dreyer’s approach to photography elevated unconventional angles and close-ups of faces-a hallmark of silent films-to new expressive heights” (*Navigating* 24).

In the early thirties Cornell attended film programs that Levy’s Film Society offered. The programs were very eclectic and “encapsulate[s] his exposure to the period’s multivalent testing of the medium” (Hartigan, *Navigating* 68). Many filmmakers experimented with montage and superimposition. Their films challenged the popular film with its fixed meanings and instead used filmic techniques that encourage the possibilities of complexities and ambiguities that would prove to be so influential to Cornell’s work.

### **Cornell as Film Collector**

By the mid 1930s, Cornell bought a projector and began collecting films. Owning a projector meant that Cornell could screen films in the privacy of his own home and that he could



watch them at his convenience and as often as he pleased. Cornell was his brother, Robert's, caretaker, a role that he played until Robert's death in 1965. Robert was born with cerebral palsy. After attending boarding school, Cornell moved home, where he would watch over his brother at night, washing him, feeding him, and keeping him company.

Cornell was dedicated to entertaining his younger brother. The brothers shared a deep interest in art and film. The brothers had nightly film screenings, watching everything from George Méliès's trick films to Hollywood classics. The brothers would rescreen their favorites over and over. With the repetitiveness of viewing the same films, they noticed different things and read new meanings into scenes they had seen many times before. From the anticipation and excitement of picking the nightly films, the Cornell brothers' film screenings were a deeply personal experience for them. This experience was very intimate from the minute movements of reeling the film through the projector to the two of them sitting together to watch the projected films.

Collecting and preserving or "saving" films from obsolescence was also important to Cornell. Hartigan explains that at some point after 1931 Cornell realized that the early silent films he loved were in danger of obsolescence and so he began collecting them. By 1940 he was involved in an international network of film buffs and scholars who were committed to the preservation of films (Hartigan, *Navigating* 68). He acquired films from other collectors as well as from junkshops and flea markets. He kept them archived in his personal collection, and every once in a while screened the films. His collection was admired by international film collectors and critics. However, he rarely shared public screenings of his collection. Cornell gave his collection to the Anthology Film Archives in 1969. Sitney explains that the Archives made a catalogue explaining which films were complete, which were able to be projected, and which

were too damaged to be projected. After Cornell died and the Archives began going back through his collection they realized that many of the films they had originally presumed to be fragmentary were actually incomplete collage films (87).

His personal collection gradually became substantial and included science and nature documentaries, goofy newsreels and exotic travelogues, early cartoons, slapsticks and melodramas. He also owned several works by Méliès and Feuillade (Sitney 72). He was particularly drawn to early French trick films. Cornell said that he admired, “their release, their escape, their flight, their defiance of the limitations of the physical world: their amiability; the subtler sense of light and air” (qtd. in Sitney 73).

Georges Méliès was an important figure for Cornell. Méliès was a magician before he became a filmmaker. He began his conjuring shows with the famous “Vanishing Lady” and other tricks including a body chasing after its head and an animated skeleton. Méliès often ended the performance with a magic lantern show. The Lumière brothers rented a workshop on the second floor of Méliès’s theatre and began constructing a device to project moving images. And on the famous day of December 28, 1895, Méliès was in attendance when the Lumière brothers projected the train pulling in to the station, which caused many audience members to run or duck in shock and horror of the approaching train. The next year Méliès traveled to London to buy his own projector and by the following year began making his own films. He made 500 films between 1896 and 1912 (Wood 187).

What distinguished Méliès from other filmmakers was that he saw the possibilities that film offered were connected to conjuring. Gaby Wood explains, “In his own movies at least, the camera would never tell the truth” (176). Wood continues, “He immediately saw it as an extension of what he did at the theatre: not just another trick in his bag, but a way of bringing

illusions to life in a way that had previously been impossible” (184) with filmic techniques such as fade-in and –out, overlapping dissolve, and stop-motion photography. He combined these cinematic techniques with live stage magic. Méliès “made the human body do impossible things, and proved how mechanical or puppet-like our celluloid selves could be” (Wood 176). He used these techniques in his films to achieve disappearance, dismemberment of body parts, transformation, and animating inanimate objects.

Méliès made a film adaptation of *Pygmalion* (1898). In it a sculpture works on the statue of a woman who suddenly comes to life. A real woman nearly identical to the statue stands in an identical pose. She begins to move around the studio, taking various classical poses as the sculpture watches in disbelief. They play a game of cat and mouse as the sculpture reaches for the woman at the moment she disappears and reappears across the room. After taunting the sculpture she returns to her pose and turns back into stone. Wood argues that this film was Méliès’ story of cinema itself: “what was still comes to life” (189).

Méliès is most famous for *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), which came to be admired by the surrealists. In *Artificially Arranged Scenes*, John Frazer argues that Méliès’ stop-substitution was, “entirely dependent on the ability of the camera to interrupt and reconstruct time” (193). He blurred stage magic and film magic in *The Vanishing Lady* (1896). In the film, Méliès enters the stage with a woman. He places a newspaper on the floor, sets a chair on top of the paper, gestures to the woman to sit down, and covers her with a cloth. When he removes the cloth the woman is gone. Suddenly, a skeleton appears in the woman’s place. Frazer points out that up until the skeleton the trick is a theatrical illusion (the woman exits through a trap door). However, the appearance of the skeleton marks the transition from the stage to the screen because the skeleton is made using his stop-substitution technique. Both of these films deal with

making the inanimate animate as well as appearing and disappearing women. Jodi Hauptman argues that through the combination of cinematic techniques and live magic, Méliès exerted his control over the human body (92-93).

Méliès's blending of science and visual magic was inspiring to Cornell as was his manipulation of time in his films. Méliès was credited for being the "father of narrative film," however his narratives dealt with the fantastical and the magical. He used film to experiment with ways that the medium itself can transform and transcend our understanding of time. His use of fades, stop-motion, layering, and juxtaposition are techniques that created an experience of time that is different from our traditional and everyday understanding of time. The impossible becomes possible in Méliès's cinema. People and objects can disappear and reappear at the drop of a hat; objects can transform before our eyes. He used the form and all of its possibilities and limitations to experiment with new and alternative modes of representation that embraced whimsy and the poetic. Additionally, Méliès used film to capture illusions or tricks of vision/perception, i.e. making static images move, which is the trick of cinema itself. It is temporal paradox: film is composed of hundreds of still photographs, but when run through a projector they become animated. In the Mark Stokes film *Cornell: Worlds in a Box* (1991), Cornell is quoted as writing in his journal, "Perhaps the definition of a box could be as a kind of forgotten game, a philosophical toy of the Victorian era with poetic or magical moving parts." Like the pre-cinematic optical toys, Méliès's films function as little trick boxes that exploit film's illusion of movement. Hauptman explains that through Méliès, Cornell discovered that, "film need not obey the laws of empirical reality, as his predecessors had supposed, because film was in some sense a separate reality with structural laws of its own" (93). Through studying Méliès' techniques, Cornell learned that he could use film to upset traditional readable filmic

chronotopes. Film could operate within its own set of rules. Film could challenge received understandings of space and time, allowing the filmmaker to work within a chronotope specific to the materiality of film and the potentials, limitations, and manipulations specific to it as a medium.

### **Cornell as Filmmaker**

In the 1950s Cornell began directing films and working in collaboration with Stan Brakhage, Rudy Burckhardt, and Larry Jordan. The nature of these collaborations ranged from Brakhage following detailed instructions from Cornell to photograph the El film to Burckhardt claiming that the work was a collaboration split sixty-forty between the artists. In the original films Cornell never operated the camera himself. Rather, he had Brakhage, Burckhardt, or Jordan as his cinematographer, giving them copious notes on how and what to film.

Time and space operate differently in Cornell's original films than they do in his collage films, which I focus on in this chapter, because he is working within a different chronotope that allows for different kinds of events to occur. I discussed Cornell's original films as performance of memory in Chapter Two and as archives of the ephemeral in Chapter Five.

### **Film Scenarios**

Cornell wrote three film scenarios, two of which were published, one in *Dance Index*, the other in Julien Levy's *Surrealism* (1936). I have discussed *Nebula: The Powdered Sugar Princess* (1941) in detail in Chapter Five. Like closet dramas, the scenarios were to be read and imagined, not to be literally filmed. In his scenarios Cornell drew on stereopticon images, daguerreotypes, and other still images of the past as beginning points for his imagination to create moving images. Obsolete technology inspires Cornell to write scenarios that would be imagined as filmic rather than fixed images of the past

## **The Collage Films**

Although the exact date is unknown, at some point in the 1930s, in order to vary the film screenings for his brother and himself, Cornell began altering films in his collection. He added scenes or changed endings of films to create a new and surprising endings. This technique originally used for personal entertainment became the basis for his practice as a filmmaker of collage films. In her online essay, “A Slot Machine for the Solitaires: On Joseph Cornell’s Films,” Imogen Smith explains that in 1936 Cornell came across a warehouse in New Jersey that was selling off old film reels, which most people bought to melt down for silver nitrate. Instead of melting the films down, Cornell recycled the footage and used it to make found footage collage films. In his collage films Cornell works intimately with found footage to manipulate or illuminate spatial and temporal dimensions. Once he found old films, he deconstructed them, cut them apart, rearranged them, and reassembled them to create new narratives or even non-narratives. Hauptman notes:

Cornell ignores strict chronology, freely mixing subjects from different contexts, countries, epochs, comfortably placing living and long-dead figures side by side. By joining them inside his museum--a storehouse for monuments to long-gone eras--Cornell imposes a certain temporal organization onto his subjects: he sends them, together, into the past . . . . (17)

He manipulates time and space from film that already has manipulated time and space. He rearranges someone else’s rearrangement of time and space and makes his own where the expectation of what can occur is drastically different than in the original. Breton explains that collage works by “disorienting us in our memory by depriving us a frame of reference” (177). The collaging chronotope is malleable and characterized by mutability of time and space. The collage artist has the ability to create ruptures where continuity previously existed as well unexpected associations between collaged materials.

Cornell's first and perhaps *the* first collage film, *Rose Hobart* (1936), was compiled from scenes from the 1931 jungle drama, Universal Picture's *East of Borneo*. He screened *Rose Hobart* at the Julien Levy Gallery along with Marcel Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1926) and Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer* (1928). Salvador Dali, who was in attendance along with other European Surrealists, became enraged and exclaimed, "Joseph Cornell, you are a plagiarist of my unconscious mind!" (Levy 231). After that moment, Cornell very rarely screened his films for public audiences but did show them privately. He would show his films at the New York Public Library around Christmas time to the staff of the Picture Collection.

Cornell created the collage film by cutting, rearranging, and reassembling clips from *East of Borneo* (1931), as well as adding sequences from scientific documentaries from his personal film collection. Melford's *East of Borneo* told the story of a woman, Linda (played by Rose Hobart), who travels to the made-up island of Marudu to find her husband. Her husband is a physician who is working for the kingdom's evil prince. The prince claims to be a descendent of the island's volcano. The physician has become a drunk because he believes that his wife has been unfaithful to him with the prince. The prince attempts to seduce Linda as the volcano is about to erupt, at which point Linda shoots the prince. Then husband and wife return home, happily, and the volcano destroys the island.

The film is a cheaply made B film with a poorly constructed volcano and "an assortment of jungle terrors" (Sitney 75), including crocodiles, a python, and a panther. Additionally, the acting is typical of a B movie, that is, overly dramatic without a storyline to match the level of dramatic facial expressions. Sitney explains, "Hobart can only make quick, nervous gestures with her hands and quickly shift her expression from terror to laughter at herself when she see that her fright is unfounded" (75).

B films were very popular in the 1930s as studios needed revenue and there was a high demand for quick turnover of new pictures. Usually, B films were put on a double bill with a big budget movie with stars, high production value, and decent scripts. B movies on the other hand were cheaply made with pre-existing sets, B list actors, and formulaic plots, and fit into an easily identifiable genre. The Jungle film was a popular genre for B films with stereotypical plot lines and characters. As Eikhenbaum would say, *East of Borneo* triggers readymade inner speech with its predictable storyline and generic actions.

*East of Borneo*'s lead actress, Rose Hobart, was the subject of Cornell's film. Cornell's film is his attempt to save the actress from the B film jungle chronotope. He does this by extracting her from the film and putting her into a new chronotope that uses the poetic fragments or "passages to remind one again of the profound and suggestive power of the silent film to evoke an ideal world of beauty" (Sitney 73) to create a new portrait of the star.

Susan Sontag, one of Cornell's friends, called for an erotics of art. In *Against Interpretation*, she argues, "Real art has the ability to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable" (8). Though *Against Interpretation* was written thirty years after *Rose Hobart* was made, the film does what Sontag calls for. Cornell condensed and re-edited the seventy-minute film into a twenty-minute short film. He extracted scenes that she was in as well as certain action sequences and discarded the rest of the film, effectively doing away with the "readability of the film" or the readymade inner speech of the jungle film with its villain, heroine, challenge, and happy ending for the good and bad ending for the evil.

The action or plot of *Rose Hobart* revolves around an impending eclipse. The film begins with music, Nestor Amaral's *Holiday in Brazil* 78 RPM recording. The first image is of a



crowd looking skyward. Cornell mixes characters' responses to personal interactions with responses to natural phenomena. As a result we see Hobart repeating poses, facial expressions, movements, and interactions throughout the entire piece. She often appears looking upward or off-screen. Often her actions don't match up with the action that accompanies her. She looks worried and then laughs at herself. Cuts in the film cause her to appear suddenly in a similar stance, but in an evening dress rather than equestrian riding clothes. One of the most beautiful images of the film is when she walks in slow motion down a long hallway directly toward the camera. She stands behind airy curtains then suddenly appears in the same point of the film frame, but in a different room, in a different costume, arguing with the prince. She looks worriedly at the sky, then crocodiles, then monkeys, and finally at the volcano.

Tension in the film escalates as a solar eclipse occurs and suddenly the sun seems to fall from the sky to a puddle, which Rose overlooks. The film cuts to the sky and the sun, then cuts to Rose looking upward and then talking with her husband. It cuts back to the sky. Suddenly, Rose is again with the prince. She looks upward and to her husband, and the film cuts back to her and the prince. Cut to the prince lying down and Rose looking coldly at him. Cut to Rose in her overcoat, then her evening gown. Then the sun is eclipsed. Cut to the sun appearing to fall from the sky into a puddle. The puddle ripples. Cut to Rose in her evening dress looking down sadly. End of film.

Hobart is cut out of *East of Borneo* (1931), where the chronotope requires that the female lead travel to the jungle of Borneo to search for her husband, be challenged by jungle animals, be seduced by an evil prince, and live happily every after. She is pasted into Cornell's collage chronotope where jungle and scientific documentary genres are combined, and narrative and readymade inner speech are abandoned in favor of poetic expression. Cornell's film is not only

an attempt to “save” the actress from the jungle chronotope, but an attempt at creating images that elicit Barthes’ third meaning, which he describes: “the epitome of a counter-narrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative)- an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet ‘true’” (63). The third meaning frees the visual from the verbal. It emanates from moments that are fleeting, but prick us or stick with us. The climax, the eclipse, is an example. The editing trick of the eclipse is also reminiscent of Méliès. The sun is small in the sky as it is eclipsed. After the eclipse passes the film cuts to an image of a glass sphere (the same size as the sun in the previous sequence) falling through the sky and landing in a puddle. Cornell creates the effect through montage. The sun has fallen from the sky and landed just before Rose in a puddle rippling in slow motion.

For *Rose Hobart* (1936), the third meaning arrives in the editing. Cornell exerted control over the human body as did Méliès; however, he exerted his control in *Rose Hobart* through his editing process. He controlled how the audience perceived Hobart through editing her gestures, facial expressions, speed of movement, and juxtapositions of her action in different scenes. Hauptman notes, “By forcing the actress to speak with her body rather than with her voice, Cornell transports Rose into the past and revives her as a silent diva” (99). He deconstructed a film that had little artistic merit, extracted the parts that reminded him of the beauty of silent film, and collaged them together on the basis of a vertical reading or filmic moments. He also stripped away dialogue and added mood music, and filtered the film through deep blue glass. He screened the film at MOMA running the projector at a slow speed (the speed silent films were projected though the original film, *East of Borneo*, was a talkie and talking films were projected

at a faster speed). Liotta describes the effect in a pamphlet for an exhibition of Cornell's films: Cornell "transforms its banality into an oneiric mystery."

For years *Rose Hobart* was thought to be his only collage film. However, in 1968 Cornell gave his collaborator/assistant Jordan Lawrence specific instructions to finish a series of three films he began in the 1930s, which together make *The Children's Trilogy: Cotillion, The Children's Party*, and *Midnight Party*. These three films are all collaged from the same found footage including shots of ballerinas, vaudeville acts, a children's party, circus acts such as trapeze artists and animal acts, and scientific footage.

The first film of the trilogy, *Cotillion*, opens with an upside down and backwards title, "The End." A curtain opens to reveal the heavens and a young boy peering out of frame as if up to the heavens. Personified constellations appear (Orion, the Bear). Then we arrive at a children's party with vaudeville performers and children watching happily. The children's party is spliced with different types of performers such as vaudeville performers, tightrope walkers, acrobats, animals, a chorus line, and child dancers. Freeze frames are used to capture the children's reactions to the performances. The children look directly at the camera. They perform for it by smiling and laughing; they look surprised, as if the camera caught them off-guard. The performers, on the other hand, are not aware of the camera. There are two images that "prick" me. One is a slow-motion shot of a tightrope walker with an umbrella bounding on the tightrope. The second is a woman swinging mid air, suspended by a rope that she holds in her mouth juxtaposed with an image of birds flying. The image of the woman seems painful if not violent, as if she is trying to fly and can only achieve it through pain.

The middle film in the trilogy, *Children's Party*, uses almost no footage from the other two films in the trilogy. The film begins with an observatory. A telescope rotates as a title

appears but disappears before the audience can read it. By slowing the film down and freezing it I am able to read the title or prologue: "Photography is the best means of studying the heavens. Very long exposures are required." The observatory opens to the heavens, then the film cuts to a still image of a girl sleeping and holding a baby doll. The film cuts to an animated comet crossing the sky and then to another title that vanishes before it can be read, "A speed maniac in a world of speedsters,--a comet caught in the act." The comet fades into the heavens and a distant moon appears. Back in the observatory (presumably) gears rotate at a rapid pace and the film cuts to a girl with long hair on a white horse (Lady Godiva) in a dark and enchanted landscape surrounded by stars, trees, and a distant castle on a hill. The film cuts to get a close-up of the girl looking over her shoulder. After a few moments she leads her horse out of the frame.

The third film, *The Children's Party*, remixes images from the first film, *Cotillion*. The three films of the trilogy share editing strategies such as splicing together images from multiple sources, repetition, upside down and reverse footage, and freeze frames. Freeze frames are used to stop the movement of the image as well as freezing time.

The chronotope in *The Children's Trilogy* is one in which relationships are made between unrelated times and spaces through montage. Cornell took what appears to be home movies of children's birthday parties, various films of performers, and documentaries of constellations and wove them together to create an imaginal contiguity. The performers perform for the celebrating children. Children peer back at us and look through windows to the constellations above. Like Méliès, Cornell "abandons narrative for association" and mixes whimsical editing of disparate footage to create a sense of the magical on film. Time and space become fragmented while simultaneously becoming linked and metaphorically infinite through the incorporation of

astronomy. The ephemerality of the performers is made infinite by fading into the stars above the big top.

Cornell mixed still images and moving images. For Barthes, the third meaning is achieved through extraction and fragmentation, i.e. a still image rather than a film in movement. He explains, “The centre of gravity of the film is not between shots, but inside the shot. It is not a specimen chemically extracted from the substance of the film, but rather the trace of a superior *distribution* of traits of which the film as experienced in its animated flow would give no more than one text among others” (67). Cornell invites Barthes’ third meaning by incorporating still photographs that cause the image to pause for a few moments before giving way to movement. The photographs come across as moments to which Cornell wants us to pay particular attention, moments that perhaps prick him. Additionally, the stills disrupt the flow of time and allow for vertical readings. Barthes continues: “The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time (which is only an operational time); it teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific filmic and which is the ‘indescribable’ meaning” (68). Within a collage film that already disrupts traditional conceptions of time, Cornell adds in a technological wink that time can be manipulated further not only by rearranging sequences, but also by manipulating the collaged sequences themselves. The still images draw attention to the deterioration or damage to the film occurring though the image is not moving. The audience can still see the scratches though the image remains “still.” The image is still changing, fading, disappearing.

*The Children’s Trilogy* and *Rose Hobart* are examples of how Cornell embraced the filmic collage chronotope to create heterochronotope films by splicing together films from different genres that operated by their own rules of time and space.

### Cornell's Collage Process

Most of Cornell's collage work happened in his studio, which he used as an editing room. He used techniques such as cutting and splicing, which means to feed film through a viewer, find the frame to cut, cut the film, scrape the silver nitrate off of the edge, apply glue, and attach the strip to another strip of film. As he cut and spliced, he often rearranged scenes, included clips from multiple sources, reversed and flipped the film, stripped away the dialogue, slowed the film down, and tinted the film.

For example in *By Night With Torch and Spear* (1930s), we see an upside down steel factory. The images are beautiful and disorienting. Images move both backwards and upside down. Sparks from the steel fly upside down and backward, making them look like stars or sparkly rain. Titles and typed narration appear backward. The materiality of film allows Cornell to manipulate time and space intimately. The films become oneiric and otherworldly through Cornell's process of collage. The manipulation of the film takes the viewer out of the linear narrative of the original films that he took the footage from and into a collage chronotope that creates routes of narrative escape in favor constellations of associations. Central to his technique, Cornell leaves in slips, mistakes, and accidents. By leaving in the mistakes that occur during the collage process, Cornell's collage films also document contingency just as his original films do.

Sitney speaks of Cornell's techniques, "Despite its illusion of crudity; the editing is never haphazard" (76). He goes on to explain that his editing procedures were "unorthodox in the extreme, and probably incorporated accident as much as deliberation" (76). Manipulating the film, including projecting it could cause damage resulting in visible deterioration. Sitney notes that, "While most collectors regard these [accidents] with horror and would prefer to ignore

them, Cornell made these accidents of deterioration the formal model for his first film” (75). Leaving in the accidents forces the viewer to remember that the film itself is not permanent.

### **The Heterochronotopicity of Cornell’s Collage Films**

We experience the past, present, and future simultaneously and constantly. Time is not clean and linear, but confused and circuitous. Cornell is known for dreaming and reverie and being taken with people and arts of eras that passed before he was born or when he was young. He experienced his life as multi-temporal and so made films that challenge the linear notion of time and space and make it impossible to experience the past, present, and future as distinct. Instead they flow into one another and affect each other. Artist Stan Douglas refers to this multiple consciousness as “temporal polyphony” (Birnbaum 91).

Though he is better known for his boxes and although he rarely publicly screened his films, Cornell’s films have been influential for younger experimental filmmakers and praised by film critics. They were revolutionary in that they dealt with issues of source material, authorship, ambiguous use of time and space, and narrative structure as well as experimental techniques that anticipate avant-garde techniques of assemblage. Stan Brakhage, who collaborated with Cornell in the 1960s said, “I think Cornell’s contribution to the art of film far exceeds anything he did in any of his boxes or his collages” (qtd. in Rowin). In “Tokens and Traces of Chance: Thoughts on the Cinema of Joseph Cornell,” Michael Rowin notes, “These short, almost unassuming films are exercises in pure reverie and wonder, attesting to the sensibility of a man at once enchanted by the magic of film and entirely aware of its bittersweet nostalgia.” And finally, Sitney notes Cornell’s influence on future experimental filmmakers: “Just as Cornell himself was an intuitively brilliant reader of the poets he admired, seeing complexities and tensions in their expression which could inform his visual dialectics, so these

(Stan Brakhage, Larry Jordan, Ken Jacobs, Jack Smith, and Jonas Mekas) quickly apprehended hints and directions in Cornell's films that they could explore on their own" (87).

As I watch Cornell's films I am met with the same difficult-to-describe feeling that I have when peering into his tiny three-dimensional boxes. His films resist interpretation. They fight against the inner-speech of narrative films and instead evoke moods, emotions, and associations. It is difficult if not impossible to put the experience of watching Cornell's films into words. And perhaps that was Cornell's goal, to make films that asked questions about the importance of meaning making and interpretation. Cornell's processes of collage allowed him to take films operating within pre-existing chronotopes with readymade inner-speech and free them from language. He challenged narrative, the concept of time as chronological, and sense-making through cutting and splicing found footage based on these motifs, ideas, and associations. As a result, Cornell developed a model for producing heterochronotopic films, films that have multiple chronotopes operating simultaneously. This model developed through Cornell's practices of filmic collage is central to my project in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: SONG OF THE NIGHTINGALE

In this chapter I describe my process of creating a collage film, *Song of the Nightingale* (2011). Like Cornell, I acquired obsolete films and used the cut and splice method in order to make an original film made from pre-existing footage. After studying Cornell's processes, techniques, and motifs for creating his collage films, I took cues from each. *Song of the Nightingale* draws on Joseph Cornell's collage chronotopes to create an original film that challenges our notions of memory.

I began by adapting "Maria," a story by Cornell that concerns the tension between creation and decay. Cornell's story is about how nightingales lead short but beautiful lives because in the midst of their beautiful song they die. The tension between creation and destruction is central to the nightingale's existence. Cornell's story is inspired by Keats's romantic "Ode to a Nightingale," which explores themes of mortality, ephemerality, and death or disappearance inherently tied to beauty.

Rather than searching for films in secondhand stores I looked online for vintage 8mm films to use for my collage film. I bid on several films on eBay and won three of them including *Camera Magic*, a film distributed by Castle Films presenting 1940s photography tricks; *Deep Sea Adventures* produced for Castle Film's *Adventures and Animal Movies* series from the 1950s, and a film about the Ice Capades called *Gay Nineties* from the 1940s. These small-format films were produced for home projection. Much like the Cornell brother's home viewings, families would have gathered around for their evening entertainment with these films. And I, like Cornell, sat in my darkened living room watching these films, looking for moments that struck me because of their beauty, moments of escape from narrative, and ways to deconstruct and reconstruct to create my own non-linear collage film. As I watched the films, I took notes on

specific scenes that intrigued me. Working from these notes, I began to cut the films. I labeled the clips and hung them with clothespins from the blinds in my living room.

Next, I obtained film editing equipment including a viewer, splicer, and cement. When I began assembling the film I selected clips one at a time. I did not want to create a narrative from the found footage that I included. I wanted to create a film that did not rely on readymade inner speech but evoked moods, associations, and oneiric mystery. So, I took the narratives of the pre-existing films apart and began to reassemble them. I did want to include motifs Cornell often incorporated in his work such as birds, women, children, magic, and natural history so I tended to select clips that focused on these themes. As I pasted them together I would re-wind the next entire film, re-watch it up to its current point and pick the next section based on visual qualities that created interesting relationships to the prior clip(s). The result was that the collaged sections began to converse with each other and/or create interesting juxtapositions.

As the finished film opens, the sound of the film reeling through the projector begins as Philip Glass's *Metamorphosis I* fades in. A sepia toned image of hundreds of birds taking flight towards the sun appears. The image shakes, revealing that the image is a projection of a film. The shot cuts to a long shot of birds in flight over the ocean and shoreline. It is blurry, out of focus. The birds are only identifiable by their flapping wings. Women in bathing suits saunter towards the camera with sly grins. They are overexposed, causing their bodies to fade into their surroundings. They stop and look into the camera as the image cuts to shadows of birds in flight on the sand. The film flickers and jumps, revealing a moment of deterioration. Time and repeated use have damaged the film, leaving scratches and holes in its surface. A close-up shot of a blond woman blinking and looking at the camera reveals that her head has been doubled through a camera trick. Perhaps a mirror was used? A child picks up an unidentifiable sea creature from the

sand and displays it to the camera. An overweight man wearing a formal suit and hat walks across the screen. He passes behind a tree and disappears. Three women in formal dresses, fur coats, and hats walk out from the behind the tree in mid conversation and exit the screen. A man and woman in sequined costumes spin, one clockwise, the other counterclockwise. Their movements mirror each other. The screen flickers and cuts to a title that reads, "Escape—to the protection of the deep." The camera is now underwater tracking fish as they swim about the algae and coral. Above, a man in a boat holds a spear and looks into the water as the camera bounces up and down with the waves. Fish flit about underwater, creating moments of light against the dark background as the sun catches and reflects their scales. Above, two men in a boat toss fish into the water only for the fish to jump back into their hands and the boat. A woman in sequins leaps towards a man who catches her and holds her above him as they spin. A child pokes at a sea creature he has found or trapped on the shore. A woman in a swimsuit sits in profile with her hand reaching out in front of her. There is a miniature man in the palm of her hand. She drops her hand and the man is still there. We see that our perception has been tricked. She laughs and looks toward the camera. The body of a clown is seemingly drawn into existence. Once he has arms he picks up and takes a bite of a sandwich. He is deeply moved by the taste. A single baton twirler does a routine for the camera. A caption reads, "The Mirror Trick" as an unseen person's hands set up a mirror and old still camera to enable the trick. The baton twirler is multiplied. Five or six images of the same woman twirling a baton and wearing a sequined costume rotate around the screen clockwise and counter-clockwise. Deep sea divers follow a blowfish to show it to the camera, continuously poking it with a stick. The blowfish seems to have human looking eyes. A stingray slowly glides through the water and makes its way through fish toward the illuminated surface, and the baton-twirling woman continues her solo dance. The

image shakes again. The baton twirler tosses her baton and it flies through the air and descends to the depths of the ocean amongst the fish. A giant octopus twists its enormous arms about. The film cuts to the multiplied baton twirler catching her baton as if it had only momentarily been lost and is now returning to her from the depths of the sea. A title appears: "Hook baited to fool the fishiest eye." A single female ice skater glides across the ice in all white. She jumps, and spins, and smiles. As she spins the image cuts to a stingray elegantly floating through the water. It moves like a bird and ascends toward the sun through thousands of tiny fish. The ice skater continues her spin, extending her arms and legs to look more and more birdlike. Suddenly her partner is assisting her in her spin. He embraces her and dips her as if to give her a kiss. But just before he spins her again she tosses her arms into the air and falls backwards into his arms. Their routine is over. One of the women who appeared from behind the tree earlier repeats her movement but something is different. She stops and looks behind her toward the tree. The man in the suit finally reappears from behind the tree and follows the woman out of frame. A deep sea diver ascends through the fish toward the sun like the stingray. The tiny fish turn into dozens of seagulls flying above the water. The screen returns to darkness as the projector sound and piano music continue for a few seconds before fading out.

Birds turn into fish and female ice-skaters twirl like birds in flight. There is a link made between the various habitats portrayed: the deep sea, the sky, and a performance space--an ice rink or stage. Cornell often linked women to birds or other animals and children. Deleuze and Guattari argue that children, animals, and women are "characters who offer a mode of escape from fixed signification or static binaries" (Leppanen-Guerra 124). They "Allow escape routes within the narrative itself, segues into other scenes within the film"(124). Analisa Leppanen-Guerra says that Cornell often conflates women, children, and animals. Perhaps he not only

incorporated these beings to offer a mode of escape from the narrative, but also as an escape from materiality to eternity. Perhaps he uses them to preserve the vanishing. As I was cutting and splicing together images of women and animals I realized that they in themselves do not inherently offer escape routes from narratives. Instead the technique of collage creates opportunities for escape for these characters that are often locked into a specific type of performance. In her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey argues that traditional Hollywood narrative cinema uses conventions that cause women to play inferior roles to men. They are subject to the “male gaze,” or the object of desire, while male characters drive the narrative. In collaging found footage I learn how to combine images to create moments, however short or extended, that challenge readymade inner speech. For example, rather than baton twirlers catching their batons or ice-skaters landing their double axels, they transform into seagulls flying in formation or deep sea divers following stingrays. In other words, I learn the techniques of collage that create moments outside of readable narratives and instead function within Barthes’ third meaning. And I learn that perhaps by making women, children, and animals the subjects in his film collages, Cornell was able to free them from their often limited role and stereotypical performances in traditional film.

Once reassembling was completed I ran the film through an 8mm film projector to watch my work. As I watched the projected images I noticed something I had not when I ran the films through the viewer: the images were deteriorating. I saw sections of the film with holes from the heat of the projector light bulb. The chemical make-up of the film as a whole was deteriorating, creating images that were grainy and unclear.

In order to screen the film for an audience I needed to have a digital version of the film. I was taking the film to a conference in San Francisco and it was not possible to bring along the

film projector. Additionally, I planned to submit the film to online journals, which required digital files of video. No one accepts 8mm films anymore. Because I didn't have a converter I opted to project the film and use my digital video camera to record it. This was no simple task. The projector that I used was at least fifty years old, and as I was recording the film it would malfunction, making it necessary to re-wind the film and begin again. The projector would cause the film to skip, slip, and repeat at times. The transferring of the film to video took several attempts, and I was never able to get a completely clean run. As I projected and recorded the film I played music in the background. I wound up having to edit digitally or splice together the first and second halves of the film because of the projector's willfulness. Though this editing is not immediately apparent in the digital image, it is noticeable in the sound. The song is incomplete: it repeats, skips. It doesn't sync up. This digital detail is juxtaposed to the mechanical sound of the projector.

Following Cornell, I chose to leave in the evidence of the messy transference from film to video, analog to digital. Slips in the footage, deteriorated images, external sound, and the sound of the projector are all present in the digital version of the film. What Sitney calls "accidents of deterioration" are inescapable in this process, and rather than attempting to escape them, I chose to feature them. Cornell embraced these accidents and even used them to create his aesthetic, so I did as well.

The camera trick footage became particularly significant because it highlighted the tricks of film in general and collage in particular. Sitney explains, "As an illusionist, the maker of collages always exposes all his tricks. The synthesis he creates is an ad hoc illusion for the viewer who wants to experience the transfiguration of substance into something less tangible" (82). The image of the photographer attaching a mirror to a camera to create the visual tricks

along with the captions “Mirror Trick” and “Hook Baited to Fool the Fishiest Eye” became ways for me to acknowledge my process reflexively.

Like Cornell, I used found footage that is already obsolete. I chose footage from the 1940s and 50s that I felt aligned with Cornell’s aesthetic. Many of his collage films incorporate performers as the subjects (film actresses such as Rose Hobart and circus performers in the *Children’s Trilogy* films). The films I chose had performers as their subjects including ice skaters, deep sea divers, and camera trick performers. My film, through both subject and form, allowed me to be reflexive. I was able to comment on what I was doing as I was doing it.

I chose footage that was kitschy, which marked my film as “retro” or “vintage.” But in addition to this quality, it carries five to seven decades of decomposition. That is, the films themselves have begun deteriorating. They are blurry, tinted with age; some frames have blemishes or holes. Some of the films are brittle and fragile. I was not just giving these films a new life. I was acutely aware of the death of a technology as well as decaying film as I constructed the piece. The presence of obsolescence marks *Song of the Nightingale*. However, I transferred the decomposing, collaged film to video and though I had the digital ability to clean up the film and cover up the mistakes and accidents that occurred during transfer from film to video, I let the edges show, I left in my mistakes, “accidents of deterioration,” and traces of obsolescence.

Each time the projector malfunctioned, the film was damaged. I saw that my own attempt to capture the fleeting was undercut by the attempt to see what one has made eternal, which inescapably leads to its disappearance. For me, the relationship between recording and disappearance in film was troubled by digitization and through my option to leave in or edit away the evidence of deterioration, as well as by the fact that I was essentially using video to

capture and represent the analog project. However, digital technology wasn't strictly used as a representational format or simply as a way to show my project to an audience without an 8mm projector. I left in clues of digitization such as the unsteadiness of the video camera and the accompanied sound. In other words, rather than smoothing away the messy materiality of working with the 8 mm film, digitizing added another layer of traces of its own materiality.

Cornell's collage films predate other attempts at collage films by avant-garde artists by thirty years. He was experimenting with the possibilities and restrictions of technology to explore theoretical and aesthetic issues that were already central to his work. I am not experimenting with new technology, but combining the digital with obsolete technology. But even the notion that some technologies are "obsolete" is troubled in my process. Not only are the viewer, splicer, and projector obsolete to me, they are also new in that I have to learn how to use them. I am used to using computer software for such endeavors. So, my use of the analog technology was often ad hoc and inefficient. My unfamiliarity with analog technology is portrayed through the mistakes that I chose to leave in the digital film.

Like Cornell's collage films, *Song of the Nightingale* (2011), intertwines the past and present. Cornell began making his found footage films in the 1930s. However, the footage that he used to make his films was already dated. Similarly, I drew from obsolete images to create my film. Multiple temporalities are experienced simultaneously through the combining of films from different decades ranging from the 1940s to the 1950s. Even if the viewer did not know that the films came from different decades it would be evident through the performers' costumes and hairstyles. Additionally, all of these films are operating within their own chronotopes including the ice capades, deep sea



adventure, and camera trick chronotopes, which all have different characteristics. For example, the ice capades must take place on an ice rink, must include extravagant costumes, and a story of love performed between the male and female skaters. The deep sea adventure must take place under the sea, includes divers in diver gear, and the divers must track elusive deep sea creatures to capture on film. And, the camera trick chronotope is characterized by defying viewers' expectations to create a "How'd they do that?" effect for the audience. The camera trick chronotope at first masks the trick, making it seem like magic is happening before the audience's eyes, only to reveal the secret and thus satisfy the audience's curiosity. By combining each of these genre-specific chronotopes the viewer experiences heterochronopcity, meaning they experience multiple chronotopes simultaneously.

Further, in *Song of the Nightingale* the process of digitization adds another level of chronotopcity. For example, the digitization process is revealed through accidents that occurred during the transferring process such as the camera moving revealing that we are watching a recording of an analog projection, and accidental sounds that occur in the recording that I chose not to edit out, as well as the digitized editing of originally analog footage such as fade-ins and fade-outs. The decision to digitally manipulate some footage while leaving in some mistakes highlights the potentials and limitations created by each technology. So, in a sense each technology provides its own chronotope, which interact through the digitizing process.

Cornell's films escape stable meaning. They exist somewhere else. Moments prick me, give me shivers, and stick with me: Rose Hobart walking toward me in slow motion down a long corridor with her dress billowing in the wind. A tightrope walker's feet bouncing in slow motion. I am left with moments that I can identify, but my description fails.

Instead I try to respond creatively by embodying Cornell's practices of collage. Additionally, I try to create a piece that is similar in mood to Cornell's collage films: oneiric, otherworldly, magical, whimsical, and a little unsettling. I made a number of significant discoveries through my process. This project allowed me to manipulate time and space through cutting, splicing, and re-mixing multiple films. The processes of collaging film together made me realize that the processes itself allows not only the potential for rearranging time within film, but also for creating narrative escape that contributes to films that foster Barthes' third meaning. Further, creating *Song of the Nightingale* gave me the opportunity to create my own temporal polyphony through collaging films from different decades and through the digitation process. And finally, I find that film itself is an ephemeral medium and the attempt to capture the ephemeral present is full of contingency and immediately slips into the past. To make it present, i.e. to watch it, inevitably contributes to its deterioration. Film, as a medium, contributes to Cornell's complex chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphémère*.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE ASSEMBLAGE CHRONOTOPE

To create his work Cornell performed in multiple chronotopes, constantly wandering, archiving, and collaging. Each of these performances produced different ways of being in the world, orienting to time and space, and creative insights and output. Ultimately, Cornell brought together all of these performances to create assemblage art.

In this chapter I focus on the assemblage chronotope. I begin by reviewing various conceptualizations of assemblage. Then I discuss how my understanding of the performance of assemblage engages the wandering, archiving, and collaging chronotopes. Next I turn my discussion to a description of my own assemblage, the theatrical performance *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* (2011). I describe the assemblage chronotope's quality of openendedness by discussing a restaging of *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* three years after the first staging. Finally, I theorize assembled performance as re-assemblage and re-re-assemblage. To conclude I discuss the significance of using the method of assemblage to produce live performance.

### Theorizing Assemblage

Traditionally, an assemblage artist collects found or ready-made objects and places them in relation to each other within a three-dimensional space. Assemblage differs from collage in that it extends the two-dimensional plane of collage to an environment within three-dimensional space. This distinction between collage and assemblage draws our attention to the work of art, but not the process of its making.

I understand assemblage as an activity, performed within a chronotope that also assembles the wandering, archiving, and collaging chronotopes. I also understand assemblage as a method that can be used for the creation of creative and scholarly projects. My conceptualization of assemblage insists that it is heterochronotopic. The assemblage artist moves

among the wandering, archiving, and collaging chronotopes and sometimes operates simultaneously within more than one of them to create a piece of work.

Assemblage is also heterochronotopic because although the assemblage chronotope fixes and displays objects in a specific artwork, it is not meant to stabilize them within space and time. The simultaneity of times (the past via the objects that have been taken from their prior contexts, the present via the current piece of artwork, and the future via the potential for creative extensions and responses) is fundamental in the assemblage chronotope. The spectator is always aware that the objects that make up the assembled artwork originally existed in entirely different contexts. When they are re-purposed to create an assemblage, they create new meanings while always carrying traces, at least partially, of their pasts.

While the objects come together to create a piece of art and work together to create a particular aesthetic, they remain independent. In *New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, Manuel DeLanda explains, “Assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage” (18). The relationships created by the placement of the objects evoke multiple, different, and unexpected associations for the audience. Because decontextualized objects are recontextualized within an assemblage, the work does not appear entirely unified, nor is unity a goal of the assemblage artist.

The assemblage chronotope is open to change or “unfinalizable.” Assemblage leaves open the possibility for alternatives or extensions of works of art. The assemblage chronotope values collaboration between artists and sharing or borrowing creative and intellectual property, and the recycling and remixing of materials.

One does not have to be a trained artist to work within the assemblage chronotope.

Assemblage art is a set of practices that sees the past not as nostalgic or sacred, but as a place for creative interpretation and production. Additionally, assemblage art reveals rather than conceals its process thus demonstrating that process in a way that can be repeated by other artists.

Cornell's boxes demonstrate that we can lift images and objects out of one context and place them into new contexts to make new ideas. Cornell's use of found, everyday materials and placement of them into a box invites me to do the same.

Currently, artists are exploring the archive via digital media. In *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud argues that DJ culture operates by assembling pre-existing digital audio texts and images in order to radicalize decontextualization. He calls this type of art "postproduction," offering that "an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products" (13). Though contemporary digital artists have politicized this move through challenging questions of authorship and ownership of images, their techniques are drawn from traditions of assemblage art that predate the digital era. Cornell was in this sense ahead of his time; his practices of assemblage anticipated assemblage practices to come with the production of digital technologies.

### **Assemblage Performance**

Performance studies scholar Amy Kilgard offers a paradigm of performance as collage.

She explains that components of performance have a double function:

Doubleness functions in several distinct ways in thinking about performances as collage. For example, components of performance often have distinct lives outside of the performances. When we use the elements as props, costumes, movement sequences, or texts, they each bear traces of their previous worlds in the performance. Each

performance choice we make for a staged work carries with it its history in a world or worlds outside the performance. And we, as critics and audience members, carry our histories with these choices/fragments into the performance too. (7)

I extend Kilgard's paradigm to consider performance as assemblage. Audiences gather for an event, bringing their pasts and a multiplicity of perspectives with them, while never creating a singular understanding, and finally disperse taking traces of the performance with them for the potential of future productions. Performance allows a rich mixture of chronotopes because events also carry their own chronotopicity, framed within which the audience sees the multiple chronotopes unfolding within the artwork before them. The audience experiences the simultaneity of the chronotopes in motion as multiple temporalities intersect with the present. Performance guided by assemblage maximizes this heterochronopicity.

Live performance has its own chronotopicity. Theatrical performance chronotopes may consist of many theatrical conventions with which we are familiar, such as particular spatial and temporal demarcations. For example, in many genres of live performance the audience understands how to behave when they enter the theatre by taking their seats, turning off their cell-phones, and not talking as the lights dim. Audiences recognize that they are expected to suspend their disbelief and use particular meaning making structures based on the framing of the performance. Some performance practitioners have challenged and critiqued these conventions. For example, Bertolt Brecht devised techniques of alienation to challenge the passive interpretive role of the audience. Rather than linear narrative structures, Brecht worked within different chronotopes; he utilized montages of episodic scenes, which challenged the audience to interpret the meaning created in the juxtaposition of the scenes. In Brecht's Epic Theatre, audience members simultaneously participated in the time/space of theatrical performance while maintaining a critical self-awareness. So, while there are traditional theatrical chronotopes there

are also theatrical chronotopes that experiment with those conventions. The theatrical chronotope is assembled into the mix of the other chronotopes at work in an assembled performance. The assemblage chronotopes unfold within the particular performance chronotope, which itself may be heterochronotopic.

Assembled performance includes live bodies within the assemblage. The performers move about and continuously manipulate the performance so the assemblage is constantly changing. With live bodies on stage, contingency plays a huge role. There is always the chance of the unexpected occurring live. Performers may adapt to contingency through improvisation on stage. Audience members may either subsume contingency into the established frame of meaning or the suspension of disbelief is disrupted.

Further, audience members apply their own memories and associations to the objects and events on stage. The individual cannot stand in for the whole in the case of assemblage art. Only through combination and the individual associations that occur from the combinations does assemblage art occur. As such, the performance is located as much in the audience as it is the materiality. Different iterations of the same assemblage could evoke drastically different effects. Therefore, spectators have a fragmented understanding of stage elements that opens the possibility of interpretation rather than limiting components of a performance to a singular understanding.

A performance does not end and become generative only in the published critical essay that is written in response to the creative work. It also disperses into the memories and bodies of the audience, the cast, the director, and anyone that was involved in the production. And because of this, bits and pieces are repeated and extended to create future artwork. Chronotopicity may

cling to these bits, thereby potentially adding to the complexity of the heterochronotopic mix in subsequent re-assemblages.

### ***Métaphysique d'Éphémère: A Performance Inspired by Joseph Cornell***

In the following section I discuss a live performance inspired by Cornell and created by embodying each of Cornell's chronotopic practices of assemblage. *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* was a reassemblage of Cornell's assemblages in that I de- and recontextualized elements from his work to create my own original piece of work. Ideas, language, objects, motifs, and themes are recycled, remixed, and repeated in the assembled performance. The interactions and juxtapositions of many different objects, costumes, props, and performers created an entity that evoked Cornell. Alone, none represent Cornell.

I co-wrote (with poet Christopher Shipman) and directed *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* for performance in April 2011 in the HopKins Black Box laboratory theatre on the campus of Louisiana State University. My process as director mirrored that of Cornell's processes of creating his work by wandering, archiving, and collaging found materials to create a new piece of work.

### **Assembling the Performance**

#### **Wandering**

Like Cornell, I began by wandering. I read scholarly books, art historical books, and biographies about Cornell's life. I read his journals, which included his dreams, memories, moments of reverie, letters to friends, and moments of inspiration. I also read creative extensions of his work such as books of poetry and short stories inspired by his work. I watched his films and documentaries about him. I searched for sources that Cornell referenced in his journals. I explored the Smithsonian's digital archives, The Cornell Papers. I went to museums to



visit his work in person and studied reproductions of it in art books. In many ways, the research for this artistic project doubled the research for the present study. (I will have more to say about that aspect of my work in the concluding chapter.) Initially, my approach was not predetermined. Rather, wandering brought about inspiration. I followed my interests and let chance guide my journey through Cornell's work as well as people who have written about him.

Over the course of wandering through research on Cornell, I encountered a theme that was very important to Cornell's understanding of time, memory, the material world, and ultimately his artwork: "*métaphysique d'éphémère*." This concept explained the feeling I have when looking at Cornell's work and what attracted me to him in the first place: the mystery and the tension of wanting to remember and hold onto the past and wanting to let it go at the same time. With this discovery, I knew that the production would be based upon this concept that troubled and intrigued him throughout his career and life. From here I moved into collecting by searching for sources that expressed this tension. I expanded my research to artists including musicians, poets, and authors whom I felt also touched on my theme. I explored artists admired by Cornell as well as artists whom I admire.

### **Archiving**

As I wandered, I collected fragments of songs, poems, literature, quotes, associations, and moments of inspiration to include in the show. By the end of my wandering, I had filled a notebook with notes, a bookshelf with books containing earmarked pages and sticky notes, and my computer's hard drive with multiple digital files including typed texts, copied and pasted images, lyrics, and fragments from online sources. I had accreted an archive of my findings during my wandering. In a sense, I created my own Cornell Exploration with both material and

digital collections. I used the materials, ideas, themes, and motifs that I collected and archived through my wanderings as source materials for the creation of the script and stage elements.

## **Collaging**

At the same point at which my explorations and discoveries made through wandering, collecting, and archiving became generative, I was no longer working alone. I brought other researchers, artists, and performers on board to help with the next steps in the process. This part of the process was characterized by a company of artists and performers collaborating to produce an assembled performance. And it was my job as the wanderer, archivist, and now director to communicate my vision of the performance to my collaborators.

At this point I began to work with my co-author, poet Christopher Shipman. I shared with him the overall theme that I wanted to explore in the show and the general mood and aesthetic within which I wanted to work, and together we came up with a cast of characters and the world they would inhabit.

I came up with the initial premise for the world of *Métaphysique* by spending time gazing into Cornell's mysterious tiny boxes and imagining the world inside. Partly influenced by my scholarly and biographical research and partly inspired by surreal daydreaming, I imagined animating the miniature worlds and characters. The story Shipman and I wrote unfolds inside the decaying memory of a voyager prince. In this surreal space a bird, a ballerina, and a rabbit are surrounded by a once pristine but now decaying landscape. The show is a voyage into Joseph Cornell's imagination and memory as well as our own. It explores how we link memory to objects and images, how memory can be beautiful but also how it can trick us, creating gaps and confusions between different states of consciousness that are halfway between nightmare and fairytale. The prince travels into his imagination, where there is no distinction between past and

present, where stars hold secrets of the universe, animals can speak, and people and objects are repositories for memories.

While Shipman was responsible for writing the poetic dialogue, I worked on creating texts compiled from various sources including songs, poems, fiction, and Cornell's original writings. Some of the scenes that I created were compiled from one or two different sources while others were compiled from four or five texts. I wove in my own stories and experiences, included passages from stories such as Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943), song lyrics, and Cornell's journal entries and original writings. Rather than treating Cornell's work as sacred and mimetically representing it, I gave myself the freedom to create a new piece of art. The script of *Métaphysique* is a collage in the sense that much of it is compiled from a variety of sources along with the co-author's original dialogue. While the dialogue is original, it is inspired by our interpretations of Cornell's boxes and the miniature yet magnificent worlds within.

Together with the poetic dialogue and the compiled texts, each scene was an embodiment of *métaphysique d'éphémère*. I began to think of the show as a large memory box with a compartment within for each scene. Each scene was its own vignette with its own aesthetic and mood that contributed to the overall tone and mood of the whole, yet each was individual. Rather than contributing to a straightforward, linear narrative, each scene in the performance evoked an emotion, a feeling, or an impression like a dream. The relationships of the contents in each scene are associative. Individually the contents do not represent Cornell, but assembled together they evoke the tone of his work. The writing was highly poetic and associative as if the audience entered one of Cornell's boxes, but the boxes slowly turn from one into another without clearly demarcated boundaries.

## Assembling the Characters

In a sense we created the characters by taking them out of Cornell's boxes and placing them into the show. All of the characters are subjects that Cornell used and reused throughout his career including a prince, a bird, a rabbit, and ballerinas.

The Prince (see Figure 7) is influenced by Cornell's life and his Medici Box series. The character is also inspired by *The Little Prince*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Peter Pan*, all of which Cornell admired.



Figure 7: The Prince

The Rabbit (see Figure 8) is inspired by the rabbit from Cornell's boxes that were in turn inspired by his brother's drawings of rabbits and thus often represent Cornell's brother and innocence in Cornell's work. In *Métaphysique d'Éphémère*, the Rabbit represents responsibility to the Prince and eventually triggers the Prince's anger because he forces the Prince to face reality. The Rabbit experiences moments of intense, genuine anger and sadness toward the Prince for not accepting his reality.



Figure 8: The Rabbit

The Bird (see Figure 9) is adapted from Cornell's Aviary Series. The Bird, as opposed to the Rabbit, is concerned with imagination. Since the Rabbit triggers the journey from reality and the Bird is the symbol of imagination, the Rabbit and the Bird could take turns narrating and commenting on the action.



Figure 9: Bird in her Perch

Sometimes they intertwine. The Rabbit always represents the way back to reality; the Bird, to imagination. They are sometimes in conflict and sometimes work together to pull the Prince in opposite directions.

The Ballerinas (see Figure 10) are based on three female archetypes over which Cornell obsessed and to which he dedicated much of his art throughout his life. They include a childlike, ethereal fairy ballerina, a playful sylph avant-garde ballerina, and a tragic, temperamental, seductive ballerina. Marie Taglioni, Fanny Cerrito, and Tamara Toumanova were our inspirations for these characters.



Figure 10: The Ballerinas

The ethereal childlike fairy was inspired by the story of Marie Taglioni dancing beneath the stars for a Russian highwayman. Fanny Cerrito inspired the playful sylph ballerina in her famous role as the water nymph, Ondine. And finally, the tragic seductress ballerina was inspired by Tamara Toumanova's character in the ballet *Le Papillon* (1860), in which the main character plays the role of a butterfly who perishes in the flame. The ballerinas can be interpreted as three distinct characters or as different sides of one female dancer. The Ballerina(s) is present but she is always moving away from the Prince. She is innocent, sweet, witty, ethereal, angry, sad,

irrational, abusive, and seductive. She is always changing. Her mood toward the Prince can change immediately from sweet and innocent to irrational and angry. She sparks a momentary intense relationship with the prince only to resent him quickly. He cannot hold on to her; she refuses to stay locked in his memory. The Ballerinas also comment on Cornell's obsession; they resent that he has turned them into objects.

### **Assembling the Stage**

The next step in the process of creating the show required another chronotopic shift. I moved from collaging the two-dimensional script with my co-author to assembling the three-dimensional stage with a crew. The set designer, Ariel Gratch, and I spent time drafting the set and eventually settled on making a large-scale box made of cardboard inside the theatre. The stage is a box constructed from found cardboard boxes of various shapes and sizes pieced together by rope with the seams left showing and suspended from the theatre's light grid. Looking into the box, the observer sees three large wooden boxes with curtains made of feather boas. The Ballerinas are stored within these boxes. On the opposite side of the box is a wooden perch elevated three feet above the stage. The perch is covered with twigs and leaves and is enclosed by three suspended window frames. The Bird is stored in this enclosed perch. On each side of the box are small projection screens that play a looped video of found footage I assembled and which created odd juxtapositions and associations with the action on stage. The stage (see Figure 11) is lit by Edison bulbs dangling from the light grid just above the performance space. These illuminate the stage but also create the stars. A phonograph horn and cardboard leaves hang from pulleys, and a disco ball hovers above.



Figure 11: Cardboard Walls

Inside this box set, objects are piled up and overflowing out of their storage boxes. They include a chess board, skates, movie reel, rotary telephone, lunch pail, decanter, chord organ, music boxes, tins, scarves, boas, fan, suitcases, bread box, baby doll, slide projector, film projector, watering can, carrots, table lamp, lantern, Mardi Gras beads, picnic basket, trunk, ottoman, birdhouse, dollhouse, washboard, mannequin head, aviator hat, children's books, lampshade, typewriter, and windows. *Métaphysique d'éphémère* includes the idea that memories are attached to physical objects.

I had collected all these objects during the past few years and wanted the stage to be filled with objects that meant something to me. As I collected objects over the years I did not foresee that what I collected would be a part of the production. Rather, as I began assembling the set I realized that many of the objects in my house could become the objects in the performance (see Figure 12).





Figure 12: Collected Objects

### Reassembling Cornell's Boxes

Mixed in with these objects that carried personal significance, I duplicated bits and pieces of objects found in Cornell's boxes for the performance. Objects from his boxes become props, costumes, or effects. Examples of specific stage elements that were inspired by Cornell's boxes include:

The entire set is inspired from *Untitled (Pink Palace)* (1948), with its cardboard structure, mirrored windows, and glittered branches overtaking the decaying castle.

Cornell's white feathers and glitter from *A Swan Lake for Tamara Toumanova* (1946) become the white feather boa curtains for the ballerina's boxes, and the glitter becomes falling snow from the snow machine above the stage.

Twice during the show, the entire set is still except for snow falling from the snow machine onto the Prince standing below. This image was taken from *Snow Maiden* (1933). The falling snow is used to represent memories and associations coming to life as they fall around the Prince.

A phonograph horn is a direct visual reference to the collage advertisement Cornell made for the first Surrealist exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery.

The Edison bulbs, which were transformed into stars, come from *Observatory Corona Borrealis Casement* (1950), which portrays constellations.

The bird's perch is taken from *Untitled* (1948-1950), which is assembled from a cockatoo, clock faces, and a music box. The perch and the Bird's role are taken from this box. The Bird is a sort of live music box with her violin and amplified loop and distortion pedals.

The concept of the multiple forms of the same woman appearing and disappearing repetitively is from Cornell's box *Variétés de Minéralogie* (1953), which depicts replications of the same woman that fade away with each repetition until only her outline is visible.

### **The Production**

The theater has been transformed into a large scale Cornell box, and as the audience enters the theatre they enter the world of this assembled memory box. The sides and back of the stage have given way to cardboard boxes suspended by rope and ribbon. The box is falling apart at the seams. Exposed Edison bulbs hanging from the rafters at varying heights are dim, barely on; only the wire is illuminated. The stage is nearly dark, but piles of objects are visible on stage. Three large wooden boxes with boa curtains, a large elevated perch covered with branches, and a set of rolling theatre chairs stand out amongst the piles of junk on the stage. The deep, raspy voice of Tom Waits sings "All the World is Green" as the audience takes their seats. The house lights dim; the show begins.

### **The Chronotopes of Performing *Métaphysique d'Éphémère***

The unexpected is always at play in a live performance; this is part of its chronotope. There was a full house on the opening night of the show. The performers took their places and

began moving about the giant Cornell box. Suddenly the lights started to go haywire. The light board operator had no control over the light settings. The stage lights had a mind of their own, coming on and shutting off randomly. Shutting the grid down did not turn the lights off or fix the problem. This unexpected situation caused the cast and crew to improvise. The cast improvised their movements in order to stay in the light as best they could. The light board operator, the house manager, and I came up with an impromptu plan to get the lights back on track. We discovered that if we shut everything down, cut the breakers, and booted everything back up the lights cooperated for a time. So, we came up with a relay system to communicate between the three of us to troubleshoot this process. Between the cast's and the crew's improvisation, the audience was unaware that something out of the ordinary was occurring.

Cornell's boxes are surprisingly small. "One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small" (Bachelard 150). Although the viewer cannot physically enter the boxes, as she peers into the boxes, the tiny objects became life size within their small worlds. His windows that open up to the night skies and birds perched in windows, or even empty windows looking out to a blank white wall, all ask the viewer to change perspective. We take the perspective of the bird in the window. We peer out the window to gaze up at the infinite universe.

In terms of the spatial axis of the chronotope, *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* contrasted with Cornell's boxes in scale but in other senses aligned with them. A chronotope that spatially condenses yet imaginatively expands is at work in Cornell's boxes. Because this chronotope physically condenses the objects within the box, it amplifies the objects inside. Cornell's boxes created an intimate space for his objects to interact. However, the miniature size of his pieces allowed imaginative expansion for the viewer. A tiny vial holding a ribbon takes the viewer on a journey of a memory far beyond the dimensions of the box itself; "Cornell had to negotiate

issues of scale within a space that he deliberately confined to the small and intimate” (Hartigan, *Shadowplay* 27). The boxes open an infinite imaginative space within the dimension of a frame.

Cornell sometimes uses hidden mirrors in the corners of the boxes to create reflections of objects within the boxes. This effect creates a sense of expansiveness within a confined space. Cornell tricks our perspective and our sense of time and place. Hartigan explains that by positioning ourselves in the experience of the box, we also engage in the illusion of perspective (*Stargazing* 27). And if we go along with this change of perspective, we begin to daydream. Bachelard tells us, “In the presence of an image that dreams, it must be taken as an invitation to continue the daydream that created it” (152).

Thus considered, his boxes are tiny memory theatres. In *The Art of Memory*, Francis Yates discusses the historical reliance of memory on images beginning with the Greeks and continuing through the Renaissance. She spends much of the book discussing the contraptions and architectural structures, such as memory theatres, that were built based on the occult idea that memories and knowledge could be projected and held safe in objects and images. Often memories were attached to and structures were built based on astrological images. Giulio Camillo was born in 1480 and spent most of his life working on a mysterious memory theatre to mark divisions of memory. In 1530 he was commissioned by the King of France to build a memory theatre. People were under the impression that Camillo’s project was a model amphitheater. However, when Camillo allowed others to view it, “the object was thus clearly more than a small model; it was a building large enough to be entered by at least two people at once” (Yates 131). Camillo’s theatre was never perfected, and the book he intended to write explaining the theatre’s secrets and designs for future reference was never written. What we do know is that Camillo based his memory theatre on a traditional Roman theatre.

Cornell's practices and aesthetic products were strangely similar in mood and appearance to those created during the Renaissance. Granted, many of Cornell's boxes included astrological images, but the boxes themselves remind me of the occult practice of the art of memory. It is impossible to know for certain if Cornell consciously modeled his boxes in this hermetic tradition, but the similarities are too great to ignore. The poet Charles Simic includes a poem about Gillio Camillo's memory theatre in his volume *Dime Store Alchemy*, inspired by Cornell's boxes.

Similar to the memory theatre Cornell's boxes utilized perspective and scale in ways that simultaneously condense and expand time and space. Camillo borrowed from the traditional Roman theatre, which is constructed of, "seven grades or steps, which are divided by seven gangways representing the seven planets" (Yates 136). Actors make entrances and exits through the seven gateways that have images of gates painted on them. Camillo adapts the theatre archetype for mnemonic purposes. The gates are imaginary for Camillo. Instead of being actual gates, there is painted imagery where the gates would be. Yates explains, "The imaginary gates are his memory places, stocked with images" (137). Surprisingly, there is also no audience for Camillo's theatre. Instead, one person stands where the stage would be and looks out to where the audience would be located. From that vantage point, the individual would look upon the images of the gates in order to recall a memory that the particular image held within. Yates notes, "The solitary spectator of the Theatre stands where the stage would be and looks toward the auditorium, gazing at the images on the seven times seven gates on the seven rising grades" (137). Camillo's theatre is described (and I think this can apply to Cornell's boxes as well) as a, "highly ornamental filing cabinet" (Yates 145). Just as Cornell's tiny boxes mixed small scale with the infinite, Camillo did the same with his memory theatre built for one. By gazing at the

hermetic images, the spectator gains understanding of knowledge and secrets of the universe. *Métaphysique d'éphémère* seems to have been Camillo's goal. In Camillo's case he was attempting to make knowledge eternal, while Cornell sought to make memories, objects, and people eternal.

In the performance I assembled, transferring the feeling of Cornell's boxes to my own memory theatre was my main goal. I wanted the juxtaposition of the intimate and the infinite to be realized in the staged performance. Though the scale was hugely exaggerated, I wanted scale and perspective to remain key characteristics of the performance as they were in Cornell's work. Detail, patience, juxtaposition of scale and perspective all played a role in making this happen. Every aspect had to be intricately assembled. I thought of Bachelard's paradox: "If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing" (172). The scale of the show in contrast to a Cornell box was immense: twelve-foot cardboard walls with lights hung above creating a twenty-five by fifteen performance space. Cornell's intimate space was amplified on stage. I had to figure out ways to keep the juxtaposition of the intimate and magnified.

I achieved the effect with boxes inside of the cardboard box. Smaller spaces within the box created a differentiation between sizes. Small, yet key props were scattered about the stage. Also, I created a sense of a universe outside of the stage universe by creating projection screens in the walls that functioned much like the windows in Cornell's aviaries by suggesting an outside world. For example, in the final scene (see Figure 13), the Bird begins to play on her violin the song "I'm Not Here," by Radiohead. She loops the song as the Prince walks towards the bird's perch. The Prince helps the bird from her perch and takes her place. He moves toward a microphone as the Bird, for the first and only time throughout the show, leaves her perch and

circles the stage. She settles center stage and slowly moves her arms up and down as if she is flapping.



Figure 13: Final Sequence

All the clutter is pulled into the Bird's body and now there is a stark contrast of former clutter and present starkness and emptiness. As the Prince sings into her microphone, the Bird, now free, dances upon an empty stage.

The scale was amplified; however, the performance maintained an intimacy, as if the audience was pulling off the door of a dollhouse and peering inside. It was as if we got to see what happens at night when we go to bed and the dolls come to life inside their house. Susan Stewart argues, "The miniature, linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and projected from contamination" (69). However, this dollhouse is not a pristine environment that protects objects from the passing of time. Instead, the objects within are worn, obsolete, forgotten, and broken. Cornell's boxes and my production display the objects within as decayed by time.

Another key component of the performance was the incorporation of digital media. Three video screens were built into the cardboard walls. The size and placement of the video screens created individual compartments within the box, a common characteristic of Cornell's boxes. Each displayed different versions of a digital collage film that I assembled from multiple found videos including Coney Island circa 1920s and 1940s with carnival rides, sideshows, freak shows, and carnival games. I also assembled videos of ballet dancers, which included the famous "Dying Swan" dance by Anna Pavlova, water ballet dancers, stars, snow, a 1970s animation of *The Little Prince*, and Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963). I downloaded each of these videos from YouTube and collaged them together with digital video editing software. I added my original video work of the performers in rehearsal performing actions that did not occur in the performance itself. Each of the three videos was made from the same found footage; however, I rearranged the order in each sequence. The videos were rear projected using an old theatre trick of projecting into an angled mirror to manipulate the size of the projection. This trick became a necessity because the cardboard walls were built very close to the actual walls of the theatre, leaving only a narrow walkway between faux and actual walls. Because of the narrow space and the small size of the square projection screens built into the walls, the projector was unable to project small enough to fit the screen. In this way, much like a Cornell box, the performance included hidden mirrors that created mysterious visual effects for the onlookers.

The footage repeated multiple times throughout the show and chance created moments where the videos synched up and projected the same images. The multiple projections functioned as small memory boxes within the theatre memory box, as the Prince's memory, dreams, and longings. However, as the audience learns, the Prince's memory plays tricks on him and is continuously decaying as the show progresses. The repetition of the memories throughout the



performance communicates the obsessive replay of that which is lost in the Prince's mind. The projections become replay of his memories (archives) as he tries to figure out what went wrong and how he can get back what is disappearing before him or is already gone. These videos work within the collage chronotope within the assemblage chronotope, creating ruptures where continuity once existed, offering meaning through juxtaposition, and manipulating time and space.

The collage chronotope of the video offers a different experience of time and space than the live performance that contains it. They constantly jump, switch, and contradict time and space. What the audience sees in the projections is not happening in the present (though they are seeing it in the present) but in reference to the past. The videos are the Prince's memories and imaginative longings. The lively content and mood of the videos contradicts the melancholic mood of the live performance.

In *Digital Performance* Steve Dixon tells us when the live and mediated co-exist “the one we watch more (our attention will flirt between them), the one with the most presence, is the one engaged in what we find personally the more interesting or emotive activity. In this sense, presence in relation to audience engagement and attention is dependent on the compulsion of the audiovisual activity, not on liveness or corporeal three-dimensionality” (132). The audience could choose to privilege the live or the mediated or let their attention go back and forth, allowing for moments of harmony and dissonance between the live and mediated.

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan claims that the disappearance of live performance is its defining quality. She insists that mediated performance and live performance are polar opposites explaining, “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation or representations: once

it does so it becomes something other than performance” (147). Philip Auslander disputes Phelan’s claim by explaining that mediated performances can be just as ephemeral as live performance. To Phelan, live performance is identified with disappearing, while mediated performance is identified with repetition. Auslander counters:

Each time I watch a videotape is the only time I can watch that tape in that state of being because the very process of playing it alters it. The tape that I initially placed in my VCR or audio player started disappearing the moment I began watching or listening to it. Disappearance, existence only in the present moment, is not, then, an ontological quality of live performance that distinguishes it from modes of technical reproduction. (45)

Theorists such as Phelan claim that there is in fact a binary between the live and the mediated. Auslander challenges this constricted view by stating that live is only live because of the invention of mediatization. He describes liveness as an effect of mediatization. He describes this relationship through Baudrillard’s example of simulacrum:

Live performance has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to our nostalgia for what we assumed was the im-mediated: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been “real” to begin with. The schema resolves into an impossible oscillation between the two poles of what once seemed a clear opposition: whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc. (39)

I suggest that digital *and* analogue media are evanescent, albeit in different ways. While there is no film to dematerialize each time the film is viewed, digital video can disappear. As I addressed in Chapter Five, Wendy Chun argues that ephemerality is a defining characteristic of digital media. Digital memory constantly refreshes and updates, erasing that which came before to make way for the new. Mediatization, whether analog or digital, does not guarantee permanence. We might like to believe that documentation and archivization create stable and fixed materials protected from the deterioration of time. But, like performance, mediated documentation is subject to change and even disappearance over time. Mediatized works

embody the tension of preservation and ephemerality. Cornell's use of media to explore this tension and keeping the tension in play is, I argue, more generative than attempting to separate live and mediated performance.

The use of simultaneous live and mediatized performance becomes a way to challenge these binaries as well as a way to suggest that not only are they not binaries, they are always already wrapped up together, influencing and contributing to one another. I used video in *Métaphysique* to represent memory and imagination, two themes of the performance. The media thus operated within multiple chronotopes. The videos were heterochronotopic because they were produced using the collage chronotope, which combines footage from pre-existing chronotopes to create a disjointed, non-linear film. Because the content of the films functions as memory, the audience shifts between chronotopes throughout the show. They shift between present deteriorating interior of the Prince's kingdom (the live performance) and the past pristine kingdom (the video) that is decaying before them on stage. The past and the present cannot be separated within the show.

### **Post Show**

The performance elicited the same mood that I feel when I gaze, transfixed, into Cornell's boxes. Creating a performance inspired by a great visual artist is an intimidating task. It was a labor of love; however, I felt very vulnerable because I not only directed the show, but I also co-wrote the script. So, my daydreams, memories, fears, and longings were put on display, and by the end of the show I felt that the performance was more about me and my struggles of letting go than it was about Cornell. A significant result of this undertaking is that I found a generative process by embodying or "trying on" Cornell's practices, and this experience transformed how I now approach my own creative projects.

When the show was over, the set disassembled, the cardboard recycled, and the Edison bulbs taken down, I took all of the found objects home. I have re-used the phonograph horn, rabbit mask, and a ballerina's costume in other performances since the show. In many ways I feel like the show was my first experiment with Cornell's chronotopes. The show in a sense was a springboard for my research for the present dissertation. As I write about my process of making *Métaphysique d'Éphémère*, I realize that the process illuminated themes that have shaped my research and artistic production since then, and the overall theme of the show has had a major influence on the theme of my dissertation. *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* staked out Cornell's philosophical and emotional tension that manifested through his artwork. Each scene became an example or vignette about this chronotopic tension. After the performance, I extended the concept as a way to understand Cornell's practices, process, and artwork.

### **Restaging *Métaphysique*: A Re-Reassemblage**

Like Phelan, we may think about performance as something that disappears. However, people remount or make new versions of performances all the time. When shows are restaged, language, props, characters, video clips and other elements are recycled to become a re-assemblage of a prior assemblage or a re-re-assemblage. In 2013, characters, dialogue, props, and video from my production were reassembled, creating a new, yet re-used performance.

In September 2013, director Craig Gingrich-Philbrook staged *Métaphysique d'Éphémère* in the Klineau Theatre at Southern Illinois University. Gingrich-Philbrook, my undergraduate mentor, had always wanted to direct a show about Cornell. When he heard that I had created an assemblage performance, he agreed to adapt the show as an experiment in re-assembled performance. Shipman and I provided multiple versions of the script to Gingrich-Philbrook and told him to mix, combine, alter, re-arrange, add to, and delete from the script in any way he

wanted. I wanted see how a new production re-used, remixed, and re-assembled the script and staging. Additionally, I did not want to influence Gingrich-Philbrook's staging so together we decided that he would not look at any documentation of my production. He would not attempt to recreate my re-assemblage but instead would use the script as raw source material. Rather than describing and discussing the entire project here, I confine myself to talking about the more radical re-assemblages that happened in Gingrich-Philbrook's version of the show.

Similar to the original staging, the stage was an assemblage of found materials containing references to Cornell's boxes (see Figure 14). However, the materials were not the same as the found materials in the 2011 production. Also included were objects from previous shows Gingrich-Philbrook directed. Compared to my 2011 staging, the stage was stripped down.



Figure 14: Bird and Ballerina

There were no cardboard walls, elevated bird perches, or wooden ballerina boxes. The Klineau Theatre is a traditional theatre with a proscenium stage, whereas The HopKins Black Box theatre is a large room that can transform into anything. These spatial differences provided different opportunities and limitations for staging the two productions.

As the audience entered the theatre, the stage included a prince's chair and telescope, a

ballerina's box, a bird's swinging cage, and a space for a new character, "The Means of Production," to run her equipment. Scattered about were tiny figurines, a tribe of weasel ballerinas (the ballerina's babies), and objects from previous performances (see Figure 15).

There were no longer three ballerinas. There was now only one. However, a new character emerged. The theatre itself became an active character personified through "Means of Production." Means brought the theatre alive through projecting and manipulating live- live feed, pre-recorded digital and analog videos (see Figure 16), and found footage with a VJ mixer; she also narrated actions of the characters and addressed the audience directly. The audience was constantly reminded that the action on stage (within the box) was unfolding in a theatre, of which they were an essential part.



Figure 15: Full Cast

Even more than in the original staging, this production exposed the means of production. The edges were not hidden, but instead the production operated from the acknowledgement that it was a performance occurring in front of a live audience in a theatre. The creation of the projections happened live on stage. Even though there was no mystery as to how the projections happened, they were still magical. In this version of the script, there is a scene in which the

theatre curtain is the main character and does an opening and closing dance across stage. Means of Production sits on the edge of the stage and narrates the curtains' movements as the curtain inches closed then sweeps across the stage then inches back and forth behind her.



Figure 16: Means of Production Set-Up

The characters in Gingrich-Philbrook's production had different attitudes about their situation (being trapped inside the Cat-Prince's memory) and also had different relationships with one another. For example, The Bird seemed already to know the outcome; consequently she allowed herself the freedom to do what she wanted with the knowledge that none of it mattered. The Rabbit is almost disappointed that she cannot be convinced of the Cat-Prince's imagination, but eventually becomes angry with the Cat-Prince's inability or refusal to accept his reality. The Ballerina is happy with the Cat-Prince and attempts to be what she once was in his memory.

The Cat-Prince remains oblivious to his reality and spends the show trying to protect the Ballerina from the reality of the present (the Rabbit). He attempts to save the Ballerina from the passage of time.

As in the 2011 production, scale was a key component of the show. Scale was manipulated in the show primarily through the video work, which created a sense of miniaturization and amplification that is characteristic of Cornell's work. Large projections were used to create a sense of amplification. Means of Production would use her live feed camera to amplify miniature rabbits and cats, which created a disorienting sense of scale. The projectors on stage were focused toward both sides of the theatre's seating, creating a sense of immersion for the audience. Projections were always visible in the periphery of the audience's vision. Scale was also manipulated through a puppet theatre within the theatre box. Miniature toys appeared as puppet versions of the live performers. When the puppet theatre's curtains opened (see Figure 17), the backstage was exposed, which created a sense of scale, depth, and an opening to a world beyond.



Figure 17: Theatre within the Theatre

As I reconsider this version of the performance, I realize that it was directed and performed as I understand Cornell now. As I began writing about Cornell, I thought of his work as nostalgic and melancholy; consequently, I staged my version of the show in that tone. Now, I



understand that Cornell was working with a tension throughout his career and sought multiple generative ways of exploring, understanding, and presenting the tension of *métaphysique d'éphémère*, which for Gingrich-Philbrook was connected with the nature of performance itself. This process created a mood and tone for his work, but it also imposed a creative and technical challenge around which to work.

### **The *Métaphysiques* of Performance**

A performance is just one moment of a subject's trajectory. The performance does not end with the closing of the show. Performance, created within the assemblage chronotopes, necessitates that materials including staging elements, costumes, characters, props, and texts are tied to and extensions of a particular past and are constantly on a forward trajectory. Though a specific performance ends, themes, motifs, and moods extend into future creative projects such as another staged production or another form of art made in response to the production.

Performance provides a unique opportunity for assemblage work because it affords the opportunity to exploit maximally the heterochronotopicity of assemblage. Multiple temporalities exist and are highlighted within assembled performance allowing the audience to experience temporal and spatial polyphony as they watch a performance. A practitioner of assembled performance finds value in the reuse and remixing of sources. Performers engage with the past or even embody the archive to breathe new life into it, extend and re-mix it. The past and present are equally generative and productive for the assemblage practitioner. Finally, an assemblage artist embraces the idea that once an assemblage has been created it is no longer hers. It belongs to no one and everyone. Just as the materials in the production came from pre-existing contexts, they can now be picked up, re-used, and re-mixed by someone else. In this way, assemblage becomes an offering to fellow artists and scholars of one's work.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

At the end of this project I am left with a question: is the embodiment of Cornell's practices inextricably tied to his chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphemera*? It certainly was for Cornell. What initially drew me to Cornell's work was his expression of *métaphysique d'éphemera*. However, as I progressed through each chapter I became more interested in the chronotopes of his processes rather than the aesthetics of his art-works. That being said, in each of my projects I sought to create works that operated within the *metaphysique d'ephemera* chronotope. So, at the beginning I was compelled by the aesthetics and worked textually from his products to produce works with a Cornelian aesthetic. But over time I focused more on the chronotopes of his assemblage practices. The two are entangled in my work. But, if a practitioner chooses to work with these practices as methods of production do the chronotopes of practice produce works that inherently embody *métaphysique d'éphemera*? Could the performance of Cornell's assemblage chronotopes lead in a different direction to produce a type of aesthetic completely different from Cornell's play of preservation and decay? Does this project produce a method that artists can use to create any type of assemblage work or does it lead only to a particular Cornelian aesthetic? Cornell never took his art in a different direction that was independent of *métaphysique d'éphemera*. For Cornell, *métaphysique d'éphemera* or "everyday magic" was inextricably tied to his chronotopic processes because of his dedication to or fascination with mixing the past and present, the decaying and the preserved, the old and the new, and the obsolete and the innovative in both form and content.

In this vein, some contemporary artists use Cornell's chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphemera* as their inspiration and goal for their own creative work. For example, contemporary poet Charles Simic wrote *Dime-Store Alchemy* (1992), in which eight of Cornell's boxes become

metaphors for Simic's poetry. Robert Coover's book *The Grand Hotels* (2002) springs from Cornell's hotel box series into imaginary rooms and worlds that Coover writes into existence. Recently, Kristina Marie Darling wrote *The Moon & Other Inventions: Poems After Joseph Cornell* (2012). Darling's entire book is composed of footnotes at the bottom of otherwise blank pages. Ann Bogart directed *Hotel Cassiopeia* (2007), a performance that explores the mind of Cornell. There have also been contemporary art exhibitions that are inspired by or situate Cornell's work as a kind of creative preface. For example, *Pandora's Box: Joseph Cornell Unlocks the MCA Collection* (2011), an exhibition at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, put Cornell's work in conversation with contemporary work to demonstrate the timelessness of his pursuits as well as to offer historical grounding to new art. The Walker Gallery in Minneapolis exhibited a show called *Midnight Party* (2011), dedicated to the explorations of dreams, fantasies, and meditations with Cornell's *Midnight Party* (1940s) collage film at the center of the exhibition. Installation artist Jee Young Lee constructs life-sized rooms that are her interpretations of children's fables, memories, and imagination in her Seoul studio. She spends months creating each environment. Once the room is complete she places herself within the room, becoming the focal point of the scene, and creates otherworldly photographs. Her work is classified as sculpture, photography, installation art, and performance art. It has the intimacy, detail, and mystery of Cornell's miniature boxes, yet the human scale and her presence in the small worlds she creates depart from Cornell's aesthetics.

On the other hand, contemporary digital and media artists draw on his chronotopes of assemblage to produce radically different assemblage aesthetics. Additionally, they may use the chronotopes of assemblage to create works that challenge, critique consumer culture and consumption. These artists are more interested in the processes of assemblage. For example,

artist Perry Bard initiated a global, participatory remake of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by inviting people to interpret shots from the original film and remake them in their own contemporary settings and with contemporary technology in response. Participants upload their videos to a website that has software specifically designed to sequence uploads in a film sequence; thus the project changes daily. This collaborative project creates the possibility for multiple people to upload submissions simultaneously creating infinite versions of the film. Natalie Bookchin creates video installations that are assemblages of personal video archives found on YouTube. She searches and collects videos from the digital database of YouTube and creates her own pieces that often center on specific themes. Both of these artists exploit chronotopes of assemblage, expanding them to the digital art world with global collaboration and unfinalizability.

Some of these artists, such as Simic and Bogart, are inspired directly by Cornell's assemblage work and extend his themes and motifs to create their original work. Others such as Lee, Bard, and Bookchin, are engaged in Cornelian chronotopes of wandering, archiving, collaging, and assembling. I situate the creative work I have produced throughout this project with both types of artists. My work functions both as creative productions created through the embodiment of Cornell's chronotopic practices as well as Cornell's textual chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphémère*.

Artists and scholars can choose to work within both the chronotope of *métaphysique d'éphémère* and the chronotopes of assemblage. I believe that artists can choose to embody Cornell's practices of assemblage to produce assemblage works that are radically different in tone and purpose from Cornell's. However, I also believe that "everyday magic" is inherently tied to the chronotopes of assemblage because assemblages embrace the old, obsolete, found, and

forgotten. Though overall aesthetics and purpose of the artwork might look nothing like Cornell's, there is still a value of reusing materials and giving the everyday special meaning in assemblage art.

This project began with an immediate sense of intimacy I felt when in the presence of Cornell's work. Upon first viewing his odd boxes I had the delightfully unsettling feeling that I was almost home from some long voyage. Urged on to discover how Cornell had placed me inside the strange box in which I found myself, the only real course of action was to travel the path of learning everything I could about him--his greatest influences, his interests, his background, and his processes and techniques of production--and along the journey of my research Cornell continued to prompt me to produce projects of my own.

As my research into Cornell progressed the project came into sharper focus. I ultimately realized that as a performance scholar, performer, and media artist what I was most interested in was his processes. This obsession with process that stemmed from an obsession with a feeling has produced, in the end, a project that brings performance into a dissertation that analyzes the work of an artist. I have re-performed Cornell's processes to create the projects within this dissertation. In a way, this dissertation is a heterochronotopic assemblage born from the expansion of my research to creative work. Such a process of researching and creating has provided diverse experiences with, and understandings of, the kinds of things that can happen within diverse times and spaces, with each creative project inhabiting its own particular chronotopicity. Bringing research and heterochronotopic projects together with writing has created a multi-temporal experience for the reader. Overall, the dissertation becomes an assemblage of my research, Cornell's practices, and embodiments of multiple chronotopes to produce artworks.

In simplest terms, this study combines scholarship and the creative. I am not suggesting that the two are the same, nor are they completely different. However, chronotopic similarities resonate within each. The process and experience of writing my dissertation was like creating an assemblage of theorists, artists, films, boxes, and critics that I encountered and collected on my scholarly wandering. I collected, re-used, and re-mixed ideas, theories, concepts, and examples that already existed to help me shape my arguments and frame my creative projects. Along the way, some research became pivotal to my study, while other research was not included in the final draft at all. The work was constantly cut, edited, and rearranged. In many ways I de-romanticized art by tying the creative process to the everyday through activities such as wandering, collecting, archiving, collage, and assemblage, but these same everyday activities are parts of the research and writing process, thus de-romanticizing scholarship.

It was my goal to demonstrate the advantages of theoretic and creative learning performed together. Though I drew from multiple fields of study I was committed to the performance studies belief that embodiment of research offers new and richer understanding of a subject. This type of scholarly and creative research values the unending via collaboration, reuse of materials, borrower's rights, and creative extensions from multiple researchers and artists across time and space. This project also crossed disciplinary boundaries, contributing to the significance of interdisciplinary research with a performance studies emphasis. Throughout my project I drew on research from various fields such as memory studies, media studies, art history, cultural studies, and film studies to inform and guide my performances as both scholar and artist. Although not anticipated from the outset, my work also engages media archaeology, an emerging field that studies new uses of obsolete technologies. The medium Cornell used to create his work became just as important to my explorations of *métaphysique d'éphémère* as the content of his

work. Cornell's methods of re-use and repurpose of technologies in his works informed how I used, re-used, and re-purposed both old and new technologies in my extensions of his work.

If I were to extend this project I would work to re-create it in a multi-media format. An exciting challenge would be adapting the dissertation into a digital format incorporating my writing, images of Cornell's work, and each of my projects. Similar to how I argue for the merit of content Cornell's process accomplishes, the form and content of my dissertation would inform one another by allowing the form and process of the project to be as much a vehicle for argument as the content. The present study does, however, produce multi-mediated, multi-chronotopic research that values learning, discovery, and creation through embodiment.

This dissertation has also allowed me to explore the tension of holding onto that which is ephemeral, the quality to which I was originally drawn in Cornell's work, and the same quality that I have come to understand how to embody through multiple iterations over the course of this process. Early on I recognized part of myself in Cornell's work. The attraction to the past, the combination of the whimsical and the unsettling, and negotiating the pain of progress were all qualities of his work that appealed to me. My desire to collect objects is indeed so great that the uninformed visitor to my apartment may find it to be part modern living space and part makeshift museum.

Much of my work on the dissertation was active; I wandered toward it like I would wander through a collection of Cornell boxes or the streets of a magical city like New Orleans. Such a project has created many memorable experiences that have been consumed by my work and my life which will resurface whenever I think of Joseph Cornell, when I think of my work as a performer and performance scholar, and when I am prompted to ponder how I view the world around me by the world itself. In sum, my dissertation has become my personal archive. As I

continue to interact with it memories come flying back and new memories are forged--some of them grounded in grappling with and assembling research, some with processing that research and transforming it into my own creative projects, both dancing between preservation and decay in the creative works that assemble this dissertation.



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