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Catalogues as Instituting Genres of the Nineteenth-Century Museum: The Two Hunterians

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Abstract: This chapter makes a case for writing the institutional history of museums as the history of process. Rather than focusing on the choices of individuals or structural elements that uphold museums’ claims to permanence and stability, I examine manuscript and published catalogues to excavate the nineteenth-century museum’s ‘procedural rhetoric’, the way processes were used persuasively to support systems of meaning and instill specific values. Through comparative analysis of the Hunterian museums in London and Glasgow, I argue that processes of sequencing, labeling and organizing objects on paper were deployed to forge and consolidate, or, alternatively, disrupt and dispute, each museum’s nascent institutional identity. Catalogues function as ‘instituting genres’—that is, genres of writing that enact and thereby make visible the dynamic processes of institutional formation and evolution.

Like a library, bookshop or art gallery, a museum is a particular kind of institution, one whose identity is fundamentally bound up with things. Museums are defined by their holdings—natural history museum, modern art museum, clock museum—which they conventionally endeavor to preserve, organize, and display. Collections define museums and museums curate collections: how objects are classified and labelled; which items are accessioned and which sold or lent; how specimens and artifacts are displayed or otherwise made public—in aggregate, these acts comprise a museum’s institutional identity. These are commonplace observations, but how does this process actually work? How do the myriad daily actions and decisions—made by a large number of individuals and groups, propelled by any number of internal and external factors from

1 This is not always the case; some museums don’t survive, their collections unceremoniously carted off to the dump. See Steven Lubar et. al., ‘Lost Museums’, Museum History Journal, 10.1 (2016), 1-14 (p. 1).
changes in the law to destruction by weather or war—coalesce over time to embody museums as institutions? This is the question I propose to answer here.

To begin: A specific historical period, the nineteenth century, has conventionally marked the emergence of ‘the modern museum’. This designation implies a distinction between the (supposedly) unruly and eclectic collections of early-modern Wunderkammers and private collections and the (supposedly) orderly and systematized museum born of eighteenth-century classificatory striving and embodying nineteenth-century disciplinary divisions.² This museum is conventionally ‘modern’ in its target audience as much as its methods of organization and display: the ‘Directors’ Foreword’ to a recent exhibition catalogue, William Hunter and the Anatomy of the Modern Museum (2018), describes the volume as an opportunity to ‘assess fully the contribution made by Hunter to the development of the modern museum as a public institution’.

³ This is possible because ‘Hunter sought to find an institutional form through which he could ensure the public utility, in perpetuity’ of his collections.⁴ This assessment of an eighteenth-century collection becoming a ‘modern’ (e.g. institutionalized) museum aligns with current definitions of museums more broadly: As the International Council on Museums codified it in 2007, ‘a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society’ that is ‘open

² This is a persistent claim, made so many times that it has become a given in much recent scholarship on museums. As my parentheticals suggest, I find this assumption suspect but also unhelpful, especially as a beginning point for understanding how institutionalization happens.
⁴ Meyers and Scholten, p. 9.
to the public'.

Permanence and publicness are the defining pillars of the modern museum’s institutional identity.

As scholars have noted, this definition is itself a nineteenth-century invention. As Steven Lubar, Lukas Rieppel, Ann Daly and Kathrine Duffy argue, nineteenth-century museums in Britain were ‘public institution[s] […] designed to both symbolise and instil a particular set of social, moral, and epistemic virtues’, namely to educate the public and elevate its tastes while preserving the material remnants of cultural and natural-historical pasts. These ‘virtues’ were products of nineteenth-century European ideas of progress, with their attendant views on social improvement and the racial and cultural backwardness of working-class publics at home and the subjects of ethnographic and anthropological inquiry across the globe. The idea of a ‘permanent’ collection, and thus a permanent institution, derives from these nineteenth-century elitist and racist colonial ideologies: ascribing value to certain objects that must be preserved and

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6 Lubar et. al., p. 5. See also Sharon Macdonald, ‘Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities’, Museum & Society, 1.1 (2003), 1-16.

7 For discussions of the nineteenth-century museum’s ideological agendas, see Tony Bennett’s Museums, Power, Knowledge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003); for the continuing presence of colonial and racial narratives in natural history museums, see Subandra Das and Miranda Lowe, ‘Nature Read in Black and White: decolonial approaches to interpreting natural history collections’, Journal of Natural Science Collections, 4 (2018), 4-14.
displayed ‘reinforce[d] the precise set of [cultural and social] distinctions these institutions had been designed to exhibit’.  

While the ‘virtues’ museums seek to instill are slowly shifting, many museums continue to rely on this nineteenth-century definition of the museum’s objectives. This reliance limits what stories are told—only recently have scholars begun to write on museums that have been destroyed, sold off or forgotten—and, perhaps more importantly for my concerns here, it limits how we pose questions about museums as institutions. For example, institutional histories of individual museums, which are often written or compiled by curators or other individuals internal to that museum, record change in the guise of progress toward the better fulfillment of the museum’s mission as a permanent, public institution. For this reason, they often describe—in minute detail—stabilizing forces such as buildings, regulations, governance structures, and the decisions of trustees, museum keepers, and curators. This approach aligns with early

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8 Lubar et. al., p. 5.


11 This is particularly pronounced in Miller’s and Keppie’s histories, but it structures many discussions of museums, including exhibition catalogues. For example, the ‘Directors’ Foreword’ and ‘Introduction’ to
sociological approaches to institutions (derived in large part from Max Weber’s work on bureaucracy): mid-twentieth century theorists considered institutions ‘durable structures’ that instill values while also directing, constraining and often controlling behavior through rules and norms. As W. Richard Scott summarizes Philip Selznick’s work, ‘by embodying a particular set of values, the organization acquires a character structure, a distinctive [institutional] identity. Maintaining the organization is no longer simply an instrumental matter of keeping the machinery working, but becomes a struggle to preserve a set of unique values’. Institutional histories of museums script this struggle into a larger narrative of progress and permanence: by focusing on regulative and normative structures—structures that have often molded the author’s behavior, beliefs and values as part of the institution—these histories prove what they have from


13 Scott, p. 24. Selznick describes the process of institutionalization as something that happens to organizations over time; his approach is to depict ‘a natural history of a specific organization, a description of the processes by which, over time, it develops its distinctive structures, capabilities, and liabilities’ (Scott, p. 25). More recent scholarship, discussed below, takes a broader view of the relationship between institutions and organizations.
the beginning assumed, namely the institution’s long-term durability and the value of the objects it contains and the principles it embodies and teaches.

While much can be learned by investigating regulative structures, recent neoinstitutional theory has begun to look moreconcertedly at the malleability of institutions. As Scott points out, ‘although institutions function to provide stability and order, they themselves undergo change, both incremental and revolutionary’. In concert with recent scholarship, I would extend this claim: Institutions do not simply change, they evolve; they are dynamic structures, ‘the unfolding outcome of people’s and collective actors’ continual efforts to maintain, modify, or disturb them’. While institutional theorists have differing views on human agency within institutional frameworks, most would agree that institutionalization is an ongoing process. However, again only recently have theorists taken up processes as constitutive of institutions (rather than simply tracking changes to existing entities). Scholarship on process as an analytic has been hampered, as Francesca Polletta aptly puts it, because ‘it is hard to tell new stories in which processes rather

14 Scott, p. 58.
16 Institutional theory diverges on how rules relate to people in institutions: for example, historical institutionalists see rules as constitutive—to the extent that the very nature of the actors, their capabilities but also preferences, is determined by the institutional framework—while rational choice theorists see regulative structures as constructed by actors to advance their particular interests. See Scott, pp. 40, 84.
17 Reay et. al., pp. 1-2.
than people are what drive action’. In this essay, I want to excavate the processes of institutionalization, which means setting aside the stories museums tell about themselves and instead investigating the mechanisms and procedures by which the museum’s day-to-day work is carried out, its values instilled, its knowledge consolidated.

**Catalogues and Procedural Rhetoric**

How does a historicist analyze process? First, let us return to where I began: museums carry out their work on or through objects. Processes can and do adhere in objects themselves: an accession number etched into wood or stone, a partially detached paper label, a coat of black lacquer—these are signs of particular acts of curation performed at specific historical moments. However, not all (or even most) objects bear easily identifiable traces of their former lives.

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19 While these could refer to any number of objects, I draw these examples from my interactions with the Glasgow Hunterian’s collection of South Seas artefacts. For example, black lacquer was applied to objects in William Hunter’s ethnographic collection and thus provides a mechanism for dating their acquisition.

20 A rich field of scholarship on ‘object biography’ has undertaken such reconstructions; see, for example, the essays collected in Lorraine Daston, ed., *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a discussion of writing the history of museums through objects, see Samuel Alberti, ‘Objects and the Museum’, *Isis*, 96.4 (2005), 559-571.
Rather than reconstructing the lives of objects or trying to pin down specific curatorial decisions, I seek to unearth the ways objects were mobilized procedurally for institutional ends. To do this, I turn to the museum’s documentary archive, a vast sea of paperwork including accession books, museum registers, inventories, shipping manifests, committee minutes, keeper’s and curator’s reports, and catalogues.

The most potent ‘paper tool’ in the process of the nineteenth-century museum’s institutionalization was the catalogue.\(^{21}\) As Geoffrey Swinney argues of museum registers, such documentary records are fundamentally ‘a technology, by and through which the museum is constructed and constituted, its collections disciplined and its objects arrayed.’\(^{22}\) Catalogues bring order and coherence to collections by labeling, organizing, classifying and locating objects. This work depends on the formal elements of the genre. James Delbourgo and Staffan Müller-Wille point out that documents that list—catalogues, registers, inventories, logs—have a spatial logic; instead of linear narrative, lists draw things together by enumerating and abstracting,

\(^{21}\) For a survey of recent thinking on paper tools, see Boris Jardine, ‘State of the field: Paper tools’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 64 (2017), 53-63. I use the term ‘paper tools’ here to describe the practices of inscription in catalogues, with the understanding that these practices are also the record of material processes carried out on objects and that they rely on the material affordances of paper, ink, printing, binding, and so on.

linking objects in non-syntactic formations that perform social, political, and cultural functions.\textsuperscript{23} Further, despite their utilitarian appearance, these genres are fundamentally rhetorical. As the Multigraph Collective argues, a catalogue’s sequences and groupings can tell coherent, progressive stories and this non-syntactic narrative mode ‘stands behind many of the preeminent cultural institutions of the age’.\textsuperscript{24} As such, catalogues are an example of what I call \textit{instituting genres}: that is, genres of writing that, through ‘the construction and interpretation of a symbolic system’, transform a heap of material objects into a paper tool that supports and encodes the museum’s institutional character and values.\textsuperscript{25} Understood in this way, catalogues instantiate what Ian Bogost, writing about video games, has called ‘procedural rhetoric’, ‘a practice of using process persuasively’.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} The Multigraph Collective, \textit{Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Era of Print Saturation} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 70.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Bogost, p. 3. Bogost admits that procedurality can be seen in noncomputational structures; see also Ian Bogost, \textit{Unit Operations} (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006).
\end{itemize}
However—and this is true of both manuscript and printed catalogues—the genre does not always work as intended. Catalogues and inventories are purposefully designed and utilized by actors within organizations to integrate objects into systems of meaning, but they also inevitably record the innumerable things lost, out of place, detached from their provenance, unknown and unknowable. The catalogue’s generic imperative to order, fix, stabilize and name exists in tension with the equal pressure of disorder, of objects turning into ‘things’ unloosed from the system created to make them knowable as ‘objects’. Because of this tension, catalogues capture the dynamism of institutionalization as a process; rather than a narrative march toward order, stability and permanence, catalogues make visible both the procedural consolidation of institutional identity and the continual dislocations and disorders that erupt to derail that process or alter its course.

A word on methodology and terminology: in what follows I employ a familiar historicist approach, the case study. There are many reasons for this, including my disciplinary training. That said, I am not writing a ‘natural history’ of how an organization becomes institutionalized and takes on a specific character. Following recent institutional theory, I understand institutions as comprised of symbolic systems (regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive) that intersect with people’s behavior (their social activity, their compliance with or resistance to these systems of rules, norms and beliefs) and material resources (in the case of museums, their collections, 27

display cabinets, buildings, storage facilities, and so on). Institutionalization will vary according to the specific elements (people, collections) comprising a particular museum at any point in time and across time. However, by analyzing the procedural form of the catalogue—the format and methods of which were standard across many nineteenth-century museums—I aim to describe processes of institutionalization that are also constitutive of museums beyond those treated in this essay.

Other methods might support and extend the conclusions reached here. For example, digitization has driven new methodologies in institutional studies, including what Scott calls a ‘new archival research’ approach that employs ‘formal analytical methodologies such as content, semiotic, sequence, and network analysis’ to investigate various kinds of materials, including media accounts, reports, professional journals, and organizational documents. Applying such methods to a (currently unavailable but in progress) corpus of digitized manuscript and print catalogues would, I believe, generate complementary insights to those I develop here. Further, materials related to the museum’s public facing activities—guidebooks, advertising leaflets, postcards, posters, webpages and Twitter feeds—are fodder for what Ryan Skinnell identifies as ‘institutional rhetoric’, the investigation of ‘how institutions shape public discourse in distinct

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28 See Scott, pp. 56-58. Regulative systems can work by incentives or sanctions but are generally defined by their high level of enforcement while normative systems are often understood in conjunction with the roles people occupy within organizations; norms reflect ‘the routine way in which people do what they are supposed to do’ (Scott, p. 65). Scott’s own neoinstitutional approach focuses on the cultural-cognitive aspects of institutions over the regulative and normative.
and powerful ways’. Analysis of these outward-facing materials might reveal either an alignment or a radical disjuncture between the procedural and the proclamatory, between what is done and what is said. However, for such comparisons to be possible, it is crucial to begin by recovering how procedural forms work as the paper tools of institutionalization and what they reveal about that process.

**The Two Hunterians**

I could have focused on any number of museums that took shape in the nineteenth century, but I have chosen the two Hunterian Museums, in Glasgow and London, for the correspondence of their core collections, the close proximity of their dates of formation, and the biographical connection between them. Each museum was formed from the private collections of an eighteenth-century surgeon-anatomist, William Hunter and his younger brother John Hunter respectively, in the early decades of the nineteenth century (the Glasgow Hunterian opened in 1807, with the London Hunterian following in 1813). The conditions under which this transformation from private collection to public museum occurred were substantively different: William willed his collections more or less entire to the University of Glasgow and provided a lump sum to construct a purpose-built museum; John’s collections were partially auctioned off before the residue (primarily anatomical preparations and drawings) was bought by the British

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Parliament and placed with the Royal College of Surgeons. Over the succeeding decades, each museum was shaped by its umbrella organization (a university and a professional society), and each was transformed by a host of other factors, including decisions made by trustees, keepers, committees, and boards; changes in location, buildings, and storage; damage to and purposeful destruction of collections; and continual influxes of new objects through various forms of accession including creation, donation and purchase.

In both cases, the name of the museum suggests an institutional identity closely aligned with the eponymous collector and his collections. This may well be the case for the Glasgow Hunterian in 2021, having celebrated the bicentenary of the museum’s founding in 2007 with the publication of Laurence Keppie’s institutional history, followed closely in 2013 by an exhibition focused on the Hunterian’s first catalogue; the publication of an essay collection William Hunter’s World: The Art and Science of Eighteenth-Century Collecting in 2015; and finally, in 2018, by a much larger, transatlantic exhibition and lavish, large format publication marking the tercentenary of William Hunter’s death.\(^{30}\) While William may be front and center now, this has not always been the case, as a wealth of recent scholarship attests in its quest to recover—by reconstructing from material evidence—the provenance of South Seas artifacts, antiquities, and

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\(^{30}\) My first experience of the Hunterian was through This Unrivalled Collection: The Hunterian’s First Catalogue, the 2013 exhibition marking the 200th anniversary of the publication of John Laskey’s catalogue. See also E. Geoffrey Hancock, Nick Pearce and Mungo Campbell, eds., William Hunter’s World: The Art and Science of Eighteenth-Century Collecting (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), and the aforementioned William Hunter and the Anatomy of the Modern Museum.
anatomical preparations and casts in the Glasgow Hunterian collections. The losses have been greater in the London Hunterian: not only was a large portion of the collection destroyed when the museum was bombed in the Blitz during World War II, but a large part of the documentary archive containing John Hunter’s papers was burned in 1823 by Sir Everard Home, Hunter’s brother-in-law and one of the executors of his will. Despite these losses, a considerable number of manuscript catalogues have survived from both museums. In addition, catalogues of each museum, and specifically of the anatomical preparations, were prepared and published during the nineteenth century.

Manuscript and printed catalogues may look similar in format and in what information is presented, but they serve distinct functions vis-à-vis the process of institutionalization. Printed catalogues are public-facing; they might consolidate, articulate and advertise an institution’s identity, or they might display fissures in it by foregrounding internal conflicts between the symbolic systems that comprise it (e.g. rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive beliefs). Manuscript catalogues (and some printed catalogues that have been annotated), by contrast, are the working records of the museum; they show, in gritty detail, how the collections are mobilized procedurally. With their interlineations, notes, strikethroughs, paste-ins, shorthand and technical language, manuscript catalogues comprise a system of organization; they materialize processes.

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‘the methods, techniques and logics that drive the operation of systems’ integral to the museum’s labeling, categorizing, storing and displaying of objects.\textsuperscript{32}

Like many of their contemporaries, both William and John Hunter put considerable time and effort (their own and that of various assistants and collaborators) into cataloging their collections.\textsuperscript{33} Early surviving anatomical lists and catalogues in John Hunter’s hand were copied during his lifetime and rearranged posthumously by his assistants William Bell and William Clift; catalogues of books in William Hunter’s hand and a catalogue of anatomical preparations with his annotations survive, as do catalogues for various other parts of his collections (insects, shells, minerals, coins and medals) produced under the supervision of his trustees in advance of moving his collections from London to Glasgow. These early catalogues help us understand what the nineteenth-century museums inherited: not simply what objects but, equally importantly, the logics in place for keeping track of them and how those methods had developed and evolved. In what follows, I uncover the procedural rhetoric of manuscript catalogues by way of examples that cover the transition between private collection and public museum.

\textsuperscript{32} Bogost, \textit{Persuasive Games}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{33} Both William and John employed assistants—including William Hewson, and William Bell and William Clift, respectively—to aid them in organizing and cataloging their collections; William also took advantage of the help of scientific visitors like Johann Christian Fabricius and Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, both of whom organized and used William’s insect collections in their taxonomic research and publications. See Dominik Hünniger, “‘Extolled by Foreigners’: William Hunter’s Collection and the Development of Science and Medicine in Eighteenth-Century Europe’, in \textit{William Hunter and the Anatomy of the Modern Museum}, pp. 127-41.
Elements of procedural rhetoric can be identified in the successive iterations of catalogues of anatomical preparations in John Hunter’s museum, compiled by Hunter and his assistants between the 1777 and 1816, the date Clift began to rearrange the museum gallery twenty-four years after Hunter’s death. The earliest extant ‘catalogue’ in the London Hunterian archives is titled ‘Catalogue of the Preparations before entered into the Catalogue’. This somewhat enigmatic title indicates the notebook’s purpose as a chronological record of dissections: the entries in John Hunter’s hand are organized by date and type of specimen, listing parts extracted and preserved. For example, one entry lists ‘parts of a Lyon’ dissected on 2 January 1779, including villi of the intestine, the perforated stomach, and a tumor from the abdomen, the cause of death. This dissection book uses a simple system of headings and numbering, but it also records the conceptual reorganization of objects as scribal practice. A series of strikethroughs signals redistribution and dispersal of the preparations: the sequence of 36, 37, 38 39, 40 becomes 373, 509-514, 277, 516 and 276, unnumbered, 1248, unnumbered, 1591 and 1625, revealing how objects once united in a single body were reallocated into multiple other groupings.

The purpose of this reorganization emerges in the earliest museum catalogue (late 1770s/early 1780s): hearts join with hearts, stomachs with stomachs, regardless of what or who supplied them. In addition to grouping preparations by organ, each entry has been expanded to detail what each preparation is intended to ‘show’, underscoring how the objects are being

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34 Anatomical Catalogue: October 17, 1777, MS 0189/2/1, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.
mobilized as exempla. In a third incarnation of the museum catalogue (in Clift’s hand), preparations begin to illustrate conceptual categories like ‘Muscular Arrangement’ and ‘The Absorbent System’. These new categories correspond to the display of preparations in the museum: the west wall displayed organs of generation, the east wall was devoted to the senses, the south-east corner populated by ‘Absorbents’, ‘Intestines’ and ‘Stomachs’. A fourth set of catalogues prepared in Hunter’s lifetime (also in Clift’s hand and titled Catalogue of the Museum 1800: Gallery, suggesting it continued to be used after Hunter’s death in 1793) reiterate and expand the organization by function: the ‘Absorbent System’ is described in a long prefatory note supported by bare bones lists, stomachs and intestines lining pages and display cases. In this catalogue, description has by and large been stripped away from individual preparations and relocated into headnotes. For example, the ‘Lion’ dissected in 1779 has contributed a series of parts (still #509-517) that exemplify the Absorbent System, including a ‘beautiful villous intestine’ (see Figure 1). The insertion of ‘Lion’ in Hunter’s hand reminds us where this beautiful part came from, but his annotation also foregrounds logic of the catalogue as a genre. The catalogue detaches the anatomical preparations from once-living animal and human bodies,

35 Brain, Hearts, Monsters Catalogue, MS 0189/2/10, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.

36 Catalogue of Anatomy and Physiology forming the original catalogue of the Hunterian Museum, MS 0189/2/8, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.


38 Intestines, from Catalogue of the Museum 1800: Gallery, MS 0007/1/1/1/7, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.
rendering them free-standing objects that exist within (and materially support) conceptual systems. In other words, the process scripted by the catalogue renders the objects mobile and flexibly interpretable, available to be deployed strategically to support claims implicit in the museum’s organizational schema (in this case, as I will discuss further in a moment, the ‘principles of life’ as Hunter conceived of them).

This process of erasing original context and scripting objects into the museum’s episteme is certainly not exclusive to anatomical preparations; as scholarship has long underscored, ‘the

Fig. 1. Intestines, from Catalogue of the Museum 1800: Gallery, MS 0007/1/1/1/7, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.
museum setting has become emblematic of the artifact’s loss of original context’, whether the artifact in question is a bottled intestine, a Polynesian tool, or a work of Medieval European art.³⁹ The Hunterian catalogues simply underscore that the decontextualization and recontextualization of objects happens procedurally: the processes of inscription, re-inscription, numbering and renumbering deploy objects within a system of knowledge—a system that the objects in aggregate comprise and support. Other aspects of the catalogue’s procedural rhetoric bolster this work of recontextualization. For example, note the pervasive use of ‘D⁰’, a shorthand for ditto [Figure 1]. In the catalogue, ‘ditto’ linguistically means ‘the same again’ but it also functions to represent the process of sequencing: 514 is the same as 513, which is the same as 512, which is the same as 511 and so on. The ‘beautiful villous intestine’ interrupts this specific sequence by introducing an asophagus and a ‘particular glandular appearance’ before the list of intestines restarts with dog, ditto, bear, ditto, ditto, turtle, ditto. Setting the interruption aside for a moment, we can see how D⁰ functions symbolically to represent the process of sequential ordering in which objects in a chain are coded as either the same or different. This instills a way of knowing the objects—the reiteration of sameness and difference foregrounds the comparative aspect of Hunter’s anatomical investigations—while also directing what one does with the objects, e.g.

how the preparations should be arranged in the museum. In this way, the catalogue can be understood as what Bogost calls ‘procedural expression’: through manipulation of symbols like D°, the catalogue enacts ‘the construction and interpretation of a symbolic system that governs human thought and action’. 40

Fig. 2. Intestines from the *Original fascicules of Hunterian Museum Catalogues, bound in one quarto volume*, MS 0189/2/16, Hunterian Museum and Library, Royal College of Surgeons, London.

40 Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, p. 5.
Let me now return to the Lion’s beautiful villous intestine, which clearly derails the sequence with its call for aesthetic appreciation and the baggage it carries with it. Yet another early nineteenth-century catalogue in William Bell’s hand, which Clift labeled “Nov. 11th 1816. Began to re-arrange the Contents of the Gallery,” attempts to correct this transgression by crossing out one interloper (the asophagus), but the “particular glandular appearance” remains to interrupt the litany of intestinal villi [Figure 2]. Something, Clift recognizes, is out of order here, intruding where it doesn’t belong—except, of course, for Hunter it did belong, a consequence of the history of the leonine subject that supplied the preparation in 1779. While this simple strikethrough may seem innocuous, the individuation of this preparation opens a gap in the catalogue’s procedural rhetoric: when one actor (Hunter) refuses to strip an object of its context and allow it to be scripted into the catalogue, the object disrupts and thereby makes visible the processes that construct and uphold the museum’s episteme, leaving other human actors (in this case Clift) unsure of how to proceed.

The early manuscript catalogues of the London Hunterian form an instructive instance of a nineteenth-century museum’s procedural rhetoric at work. These manuscript catalogues register processes by which objects are mobilized on paper to form a symbolic system, which in turn is represented in the space of the museum. This system is governed by various rules (prohibiting the removal of objects, for example), norms (the sanctioned role of the museum keeper to preserve and organize the objects), and cultural-cognitive beliefs (including the value ascribed to objects through their organization and display). But the processes of inscription are what constitutes the system and thereby the unique identity of the institution. In the case of the London Hunterian, this identity was codified and publicized through a series of catalogues.
published between 1830 and 1840 by William Clift and his then assistant Richard Owen.\textsuperscript{41} Clift and Owen’s six volume \textit{Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Physiological Series of Comparative Anatomy} (1833-40) differs significantly from the manuscript catalogues produced by Clift and Bell. While the manuscript catalogues move seamlessly from pelican to human to lion to dog to bear, in the published version Owen divides the preparations according to class (i.e. mollusks, fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals) and sequences them in order of increasing complexity, often further subdividing them by genus and family: the pelican and turtle were moved out of the above sequence so it could represent \textit{Mammalia}. Further, the stripped-down lists of the late manuscript catalogues are replaced by detailed descriptive annotations that pinpoint exactly what each preparation shows. The preparations are not returned to their origin but rather made uniquely exemplary: for example, four preparations in the series (693-96, note the new numbering) are ‘from the same Lion’ but they are not ‘the same again’; each now represents a slightly different (if ‘similar’) aspect of the intestine, and in aggregate they ‘show the simple disposition and limited extent of the intestinal mucous membrane in this carnivorous animal’\textsuperscript{42}. Clift and Owen’s catalogue, in other words, draws finer, more copious divisions by multiplying both categories and narrative explanation (it also adds a good number of

\textsuperscript{41} Clift and Owen began with pathological preparations, which were described in \textit{Catalogue of the Hunterian Collection of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of London}, 6 vols (London: Richard Taylor, 1830-1); this was followed by a separate set of catalogues devoted to comparative anatomy, \textit{Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Physiological Series of Comparative Anatomy contained in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London}, 6 vols (London: Richard Taylor, 1833-40).

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue}, I, 209.
preparations ‘prepared by Mr. Owen’ to fill out the new categories). With these changes, the published catalogue stabilizes the relations between the objects themselves and between objects and the groups that contain them, minimizing disturbances in the (new) ordering schema. This six-volume catalogue codifies the Hunterian Museum London as an institution devoted to comparative anatomy, one that upholds an implicit evolutionary narrative in its selection, categorization and organization of exemplary objects.43

Despite a holistic recasting and reorganization of the manuscript sources, Clift and Owen’s published catalogues supplied evidence for arguments about the eponymous origin of the Hunterian Museum. In the Preface to his edition of The Works of John Hunter (1835), James Palmer argues that Hunter’s writings are ‘the text to his museum,—his museum the appropriate illustration of his writings’.44 Palmer concludes his extensive life of Hunter (which opens the first volume of Works) with a chapter describing the Hunterian museum as his crowning achievement. Palmer quotes extensively from Clift and Owen’s catalogues to argue that the ‘original design of Hunter, in the formation of his museum, was to furnish an ample illustration of the phenomena of life exhibited throughout the vast chain of organized beings, by a display of the various structures in which the functions of life are carried on’.45 This conclusion is speculative, Palmer admits, because Hunter did not finish a written account of the museum, and a

43 Owen would later write critically of Charles Darwin’s theories despite his own work proving evolutionary sequences, primarily because Owen saw transmutation as displacing humans from atop the order of nature.


45 John Hunter, I, 148
large body of his preparatory material was lost when Home burned the ‘ten folio volumes of MSS’ in which Hunter had recorded his ‘labours in the field of comparative anatomy’. Nevertheless, Palmer confidently asserts that Hunter fully intended to organize his observations into ‘one comprehensive work’ in which he ‘would have stated at large his views on the nature of animal life, on the particular uses of the several organs, and on their relations to one another’. Palmer’s confidence derives from his source: drawing on Owen’s editorial work in the catalogues, Palmer lists the contents of the museum as a series of conceptual elucidations scripted by the spatial organization of the preparations. Both Clift and Owen’s catalogue and Palmer’s *Works* emphasize connections between sequences: in the category of locomotion, a series illustrating ‘component parts’ is succeeded by examples ‘arranged according to their degree of vitality’ and ascending through different types. This rhetorical pattern of ascending sequence is repeated throughout Palmer’s description. Palmer thus sutures Owen’s elaborate descriptions into a coherent narrative that encourages viewers to see the museum’s component parts as an expression of a unified theory. In doing so, he secures Hunter’s reputation and extracts a unified theory of life out of a fragmentary archive.

Palmer’s editorial project in *The Works of John Hunter* is an act of scientific canonization; the prefatory life and its culminating discussion of the museum demonstrates Hunter’s original contribution to emergent biological science, despite the hodgepodge of fragmentary writings collected in the volume. Drawing on Clift and Owen’s published catalogues, Palmer also presents this reconstitutive narrative of Hunter’s theory of life as the

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46 John Hunter, I, 151.

47 John Hunter, I, 150.

48 John Hunter, I, 158.
public face of the London Hunterian, aligning the institution’s name, the knowledge it conveys, and the (implicitly permanent) value it holds. The catalogue thus works as an instituting genre: the processes of ordering objects enacted by the manuscript catalogues form the material support for public-facing expressions of the institution’s epistemic ends, values and unique identity. While the Lion introduces a slight wrinkle in the catalogue’s procedural rhetoric, it is but a momentary lapse. Deploying the catalogue’s generic features, Clift and Bell (and later Clift and Owen) mobilize the objects (on paper and in space) to forge a symbolic system that institutionalizes the London Hunterian as a museum of comparative anatomy. In this case study, the catalogue’s procedural rhetoric enables a relatively stable institutional identity to emerge in the first twenty years of the museum’s public life, despite (or more likely enabled by) the loss of an immense part of the documentary archive.

I now turn to the Glasgow Hunterian as a counterexample, one that underscores the dynamism of the process of institutionalization rather than its culmination in order and stability. As will become clear, the greater scope and variety of the Glasgow Hunterian’s collections—William Hunter’s anatomical preparations arrived with a host of other objects, supplemented from 1808 by donations of every imaginable type of object, from meteoritic stones to an African cap to stuffed birds to self-published poems—made the process of forging a stable institutional identity fraught and uneven.49 What has become known as the first catalogue of Glasgow Hunterian makes this patently obvious. Captain John Laskey’s *A General Account of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow: including Historical and Scientific Notices of the various objects*

of Art, Literature, Natural History, Anatomical Preparations, Antiquities, &c. in that Celebrated Collection is more a museum guidebook than a catalogue proper: it is organized by room, allowing the reader to move through the museum virtually. Some ‘departments’ (such as the ‘Conchological Division’) are numbered, grouped by Linnaean classification, and described in detail, while others (the paintings and books, for example) are simply listed by name of artist/author. These gestures to the catalogue’s procedural form, however, are embedded in a mass of dense descriptive prose, and Laskey’s descriptions everywhere attest to various kinds of loss, both physical and contextual: beetles are wanting their heads; the identity of a prominently displayed terra cotta bust is ‘unknown at present’; and ethnographic artifacts have become detached from geography, use, and name (here a spur ‘probably from Mexico,’ there a fish hook whose operation is ‘difficult to comprehend’). While these lapses might reflect the decontextualization of artifacts and their subsequent recontextualization in the museum order, it is also possible to read them as processes gone awry. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, in its haphazard organization, eclecticism and emphasis on singular, unusual, and astonishing, Laskey’s General Account has more in common formally with early accession books and inventories of goods packed for the move to Glasgow than with the procedural form of the London Hunterian catalogues.

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51 Laskey, General Account, pp. 29, 5, 19, 22.

We might understand this as a case of ‘messy beginnings’, a period of disorder preceding the consolidation of institutional identity. However, examining manuscript and published catalogues of the Glasgow Hunterian collections indicate a more prolonged period of instability, one that signals a highly contested, dynamic process of institutionalization. Specifically, the documentary archive reveals what Scott calls ‘endogenous processes, involving conflicts and contradictions between institutional elements’ of rules, norms and cultural-cognitive beliefs.53 These conflicts are nascent in the Trustee Catalogues produced in the 1780s, and which accompanied William Hunter’s collections to Glasgow in 1807.

The Trustee Catalogues are often surprisingly sparse, comprised of long lists with minimal information. The 1785 Trustee catalogue of printed books, for example, is organized alphabetically by author, with each letter subdivided by format (folios, quartos, octavos, pamphlets); individual books are recorded with one-line entries listing author’s last name, abbreviated title, and so on. The Trustee catalogue of anatomical preparations has considerably more detail: most entries provide a description of the preparation and what it is intended to ‘show’ while also (with preparations from human subjects) giving details of the medical case it

53 Scott, p. 58. Scott claims that endogenous processes are the most common drivers of institutional change while acknowledging that institutions are rocked by ‘exogenous shocks, such as wars and financial crises’. The processes of institutionalization in both Hunterian museums were radically impacted by many exogenous factors, most obviously decay of the Glasgow Hunterian building and its move to a new building in 1870 and the destruction of large portions of the London Hunterian during WWII.
derived from. This manuscript catalogue incorporates aspects of the medical case history by explicitly naming the doctors whose cases are recorded and giving information about patients, such as Hunter’s note to the preparation numbered 55.S, a stricture of the rectum: ‘Lord T — Above a year’s standing — dreadful case’. Thus, while this catalogue makes extensive use of ‘Ditto’ (particularly in lists of the animal preparations) in combination with classificatory headings and numerical accounting, it also maintains a degree of individuation by linking many of the human-derived preparations to specific medical cases.

This aspect of the Glasgow Hunterian anatomical catalogue does not prevent it from functioning procedurally; however, it does mean that a large quantity of identifying contextual information is embedded, narratively, in the procedural rhetoric of a catalogue that is, ostensibly, devoted to an exploration of vitality by way of comparative anatomy. When a catalogue of anatomical preparations in the Glasgow Hunterian was published in 1840, it retained most of this information, effectively presenting the anatomical department of the museum as a mash-up of comparative anatomy and medical case histories. This tension does not exist in the London Hunterian catalogues, in which pathological preparations are cordoned off in a separate publication. However, the difference between the published anatomical catalogues of the two museums is in fact starker: while the London Hunterian manuscript catalogues scripted objects into a specific, identifiable episteme that was then refined and codified in the published catalogue, the Glasgow anatomical catalogue was ‘published for the use of the Medical Students

54 ‘Catalogue of Anatomical Preparations’, MR 20, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Glasgow. MR 20 is a copy of MR 19, which is in an unknown hand with insertions and notes by William Hunter.

55 Ibid., p. 98.
at the University’. Again, this innocuous statement belies specific tensions within the museum. After decades of disagreements between university faculty and the museum keeper over access to preparations for pedagogical purposes, in 1840 the Museum Committee resolved that ‘the anatomical preparations in the Museum, should not on any account be removed from the room in which they are placed in the Museum’. At a committee meeting the next year, keeper William Couper reported that 1,000 copies of the new catalogue were available for medical students to purchase; access to the museum was included in the three shilling purchase price. At the same time, Couper proposed ‘that it would contribute to the security & usefulness of the anatomical preparations of Dr. Hunter as exhibited in the new room if they were protected by an Iron Trellice [sic]’. As this evidence suggests, the catalogue’s publication was directly attributable to a conflict between 1. the rules and regulations imposed by the museum keeper as part of his obligation (dictated by William Hunter’s will) to preserve the objects under his care in perpetuity, and 2. the faculty’s culturally-sanctioned belief that students should have access to the preparations as part of their medical studies (an assumption also supported by Hunter’s will). Rather than codifying a stable institutional identity, both manuscript and published

56 ‘Advertisement’, *Catalogue of Anatomical Preparations in the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: George Richardson, 1840).


58 Ibid.

59 Hunter’s London will and testament explicitly states that his collections should be ‘kept and preserved’ by the University ‘for ever’; it also states that the collections were bequeathed to the university for the ‘improvement of knowledge’ and specifically for ‘the Improvement of the Students’. See ‘MS copy of
catalogues register an ongoing disruption in the process of institutionalization: e.g. are the preparations meant to elucidate medical conditions and facilitate diagnosis, or do they support a broader theory built on comparative anatomy?

This is, of course, a false dichotomy: a collection of objects can be deployed to do two, or four or ten, things at once. My point here is that a dual agenda does not lend itself to the consolidation of a particularly stable institutional identity. In this case, the procedural rhetoric of the catalogue could not surmount and stabilize the conflict of interests registered in the descriptions, and thus the published catalogue displays a tension in the ongoing process of institutionalization. This conclusion is supported by the Advertisement to the 1840 publication, which explicitly undermines the catalogue’s work as an instituting genre. While stating that the catalogue was printed from one of the two manuscript catalogues of anatomical preparations, the Advertisement also claims that these catalogues ‘abound with errors of every kind, rendering the descriptions often obscure and sometimes quite unintelligible’. Further, the Advertisement admits that the work of correcting these errors by consulting the physical preparations was not done carefully in several sections, such that ‘some Preparations have been wrong described, and some not described at all; while some descriptions have been printed, to which no Preparation corresponds’. These errors, the editor admits, will ‘prove embarrassing to the student’ who tries to use the catalogue to study the preparations, but the printing was too far advanced to allow for corrections. As this indicates, the printed catalogue was a rather slipshod affair, a plaster on an open conflict of interests rather than a strategic deployment of the genre’s procedural rhetoric.

William Hunter’s will and codicil. 19th century’, MS Gen 1000, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. Quoted in Keppie, p. 32.

60 Advertisement’, Catalogue of Anatomical Preparations...Glasgow.
The fate of the Glasgow Hunterian’s anatomical collections usefully qualifies the case of the London Hunterian. The anatomical preparations, so long contested, were eventually ceded to the Anatomy Department in 1912—ironically (or predictably) once they were no longer at the core of medical research or teaching.\textsuperscript{61} This decision was spurred by the acquisition of a large group of more publicly engaging ethnographic objects, which arrived around the turn of the century—a moment which also witnessed a stream of published catalogues of the Glasgow Hunterian’s varied collections, including the pictures, sculptures and other works of art (1880), coins and medals (1899-1905), manuscripts (1908), and the anatomical preparations (1900-01). While the other catalogues mention William Hunter’s foundational collections, John Teacher’s anatomical catalogue specifically set out to identify which preparations originated with William Hunter; as such, it treated a subset of the museum’s objects as a unique, historically singular collection rather than a working collection of medical knowledge.\textsuperscript{62} Read alongside John Young’s scientific biography of Hunter, \textit{William Hunter: physician, anatomist, founder of the Hunterian Museum} (1901), Teacher’s catalogue constitutes an attempt to deploy the genre’s procedural rhetoric to frame the Glasgow Hunterian as a historically-significant medical museum—an identity that, a little more than ten years later, would be soundly rejected by the transfer of the anatomical preparations out of the museum entirely.

While much more can be said about how nineteenth-century manuscript catalogues function within the two Hunterian museums, the above analysis demonstrates both the drive to order and fix and the dynamism of institutionalization as a process. By analyzing the procedural

\textsuperscript{61} For an extended discussion of this decision, see Porter, pp. 215-216 and 240-243.

\textsuperscript{62} For a discussion of this distinction, see Boris Jardine, et. al., ‘How collections end: objects, meaning and loss in laboratories and museums’, \textit{BJHS Themes}, 4 (2019), 1-27.
rhetoric of the catalogue, I have identified both stabilizing and destabilizing forces which contributed to actors’ attempts to consolidate particular institutional identities for each museum, or to reroute or thwart that process. Despite the contrast developed here, the institutional identity Clift and Owen established through the published catalogues was neither unequivocal nor permanent. Likewise, the Glasgow Hunterian has had swings of greater and lesser institutional stability. Celebrations of each museum’s permanence and the enduring value of the objects it contains paper over a much more dynamic process of invention and reinvention—a process that depends on the mundane, everyday work of listing, organizing, numbering, of inscription and re-inscription, undertaken with and through the museum’s paper tools.