OBJECTS OF AMBIQUITY

AN INTRODUCTION INTO
THE ROLE OF THE OBJECT
MEDIATOR

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INSPACE
KONSTFACK
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The project *Objects Of Ambiquity: an introduction into the role of the object mediator*, looks at a possible future situation where the designer has been installed within such a situation; as a creative mediator, working with historical records and artefacts within an institution’s collection. The story of *Objects of Ambiquity* is a vessel used to highlight the role of fiction within historical records. Whilst doing this it simultaneously questions the designer’s possible role within this context and how this will alter our understanding of what a museum is in the future.

The book is split into two parts, the first a fiction which follows the object mediator during the first months of employment, and the second, a non-fiction which explains the choices made by the object mediator and the background of the project.
CONTENTS

INTRO

PART I

VACANCY DETAILS

CUTTING THE RIBBON

CHAPTER 1-
A MIRROR DARKLY

CHAPTER 2-
WOVEN IN TIME

CHAPTER 3-
WHITE LIES

CHAPTER 4-
ANCIENT MODERNISM

CHAPTER 5-
BALTIC GOLD

A ROOM FULL OF DUST

PART II

OBJECTS OF AMBIVALENCE
AND THE OBJECT MEDIATOR

BACKGROUND

OBJECTS
A MIRROR DARKLY
WHITE LIES
BALTIC GOLD
“At first all you’ve got is a few disconnected pieces of raw observation, the sheerest glimpses, but you let your mind go, fantasising the possible connections, projecting the most fanciful life cycles. In a way it’s my favourite part of being a scientist - later on, sure, you have to batten things down, contrive more rigorous hypotheses and the experiments through which to check them out, everything all clean and careful. But that first take - those first fantasies. Those are the best”

- Tom Eisner
PART I
THE INSTITUTION WERE LOOKING FOR AN OBJECT MEDIATOR
Applications are invited for a full-time Object Mediator within the Institution. The successful candidate will be expected to develop a broad approach to historical, contextual and theoretical components in material culture with enough rigour and focus to engage with the challenges of contemporary creative practice in their chosen discipline within the context of the institution.

The Object Mediator will work with the Institution’s collection, creating three dimensional objects which are intended as discursive pieces reflecting possible pasts and possible futures equally within the framework set out by the institution. As an example the Object Mediator might wish to create a collection of objects which highlight a forgotten aspect of the daily lives of our ancestors, discuss possible past scenarios which reflect contemporary archeological understanding or simply create new work based on the Institution’s collection.

Closing Date: 12 March 2014

CORE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Working within the institutions framework, work alongside the collection team on self and institutionally initiated projects.
Help initiate various modes of dissemination of the work carried out within the creative facilitation unit.
Undertake world-leading research in the field of cultural theory (see below)
Support the institution’s developing framework for public outreach and learning.

RESEARCH

The appointee will be required to undertake research. It is essential that the applicant has a developed research profile with a publications record.
This record should consist of academic publications such as books, edited collections, and scholarly articles. A track record in applications for research funding is desirable.
The institution offers strong support for developing and disseminating staff members’ research and for developing new research directions through mentoring schemes, funding for conference attendance, study leave, archival- or field-work, and guidance on the submission of applications for research funding.
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Essential:

MA in Humanities or Arts course with a focus on design research and production
A developed research portfolio in an aspect of visual/material culture
Ability to conceive, lead and deliver a rigorous discipline based body of work is necessary
Ability to contribute to a specialism in visual/material culture
Ability to develop good working relationships with a wide variety of groups – researchers, colleagues within the museum and partner institutions, industry practitioners and representative bodies, etc

Desirable:

Evidence of an ability to work in interdisciplinary groups on studio and research projects
A good understanding of archaeological/historical research methods and thinking.
A yearly subscription to the ‘new modes on old thinking’ journal.
Digital skills

SALARY

Starting from €30,000 per annum

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

We encourage all applicants to apply online at:

http://www.theinstitution.com/jobs/

You will receive e-mail confirmation of safe receipt of your application.
The online system allows you to submit your CV and letter of application as attachments. You will be notified by e-mail whether you have been short listed for interview or not.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants should also provide a full curriculum vitae describing their career to date.
Applicants should also supply a covering letter (approx 500 words) stating your reasons for applying and why you believe you meet the person specification set out in the further particulars.
We cannot guarantee to consider late applications.
CUTTING THE RIBBON
The door at the end of the corridor which had once been used for the storage of old display cases and exhibition units was being cleared out. A member of the museums staff was putting up a sign on the door which read ‘object mediator’, a strange new position within the institution was being put in place.

The room was small and insignificant, but hopefully the work done here would not be. It had been a long road to this point and there was still work to do in getting people to believe in this way of working. The fear was that this would mark the rebirth of the cabinet of curiosity, something which has no place in an institution based on the showcasing of factual knowledge. Such a position could cause friction within the structure of the organisation by having a section of the staff moving in a different direction.

This was of course not the intended message of the ‘Object Mediator’, but more as opportunity for gaining a different perspective on how we understand our past through creative thinking and designed objects. Rather than acting like a virus within the collection these objects could be seen as an arm reaching out into another sector which speaks of the work being done within the institution and within archaeology and historical practice in general. Can a new object tell us something about old object? This is the question set out by the object mediator; as a temporary solution to the unknown within the historical records.

There had been issues with how to showcase such work. Do they need the museum setting? Can they be sold as works of art? Or are they suitable for mass production? These three rarely mix, and by crossing over these boundaries there are many opportunities for both great success and epic failure. The messages sent out by these objects deal with such deep set roles and understandings in society that the way that they are shown can make or break them. But maybe this is also a part of their story?
CHAPTER 1-

A MIRROR DARKLY
An internal letter arrived at the office, addressed to the new object mediator. A meeting with one of the senior curators had been arranged by the institution to go over some of the basic procedures for the use of the collection and other various aspects of the role the collection team would have with the new object mediator. At first glance it was the usual dry internal letter sent round to, for example; remind employees not to use the public lifts for transporting display units, organise departmental meetings and new recycling rules which were being put in place, although at the bottom a small hand written note read ‘I might have your first bit of proper work!’ This was a strange way of communicating but it seemed as if the new role of the object mediator was one which was not yet fully understood by the rest of the institutions staff.

At the end of the meeting the object mediator was led by the senior curator to one of the storage rooms, the sign on the door read; ‘Middle Eastern pottery’. The room was filled with large drawers and a few glass boxes which contained complete and partly complete vessels and a few small figures.

There the object mediator was shown a small dark bowl. It looked like any other bowl, but the curator began to explain that this bowl had in fact been tested for traces of food to see what kind of diet they had in that area at the time. When the tests came back they showed that the vessel had in fact never been used.

Or that was the initial conclusion anyway as the tests showed no sign of any type of food source or liquid other than possibly water. After initial tests it was tested again to see if any traces of human DNA could be found and since nothing came back the team decided that it was either used to hold water or was never used at all.
Some researchers had been discussing the possibility of bowls like this as being used as crude domestic mirrors. Since its highly possible that people had already seen their own reflections in water it’s not too unlikely that they had taken this phenomenon into their living spaces with the use of these bowls. The Object Mediator looked at the shards of pottery, considering the possible history of them. He looked up to see the curator smiling with enthusiasm. It was clear what the curator was thinking; the object mediator was thinking the same thing. This was too a good, it was crying out to be the first project for the Object Mediator.

A few days past but nothing was really happening. Where was that trigger point? That spark? It seemed like the connection between the bowl and the mirror was too strong, too obvious. Was that really what it was to become?

Sitting in the small room which had become the make shift office the object mediator sat at the large desk, frantically scribbling what looked like small hurricanes in blue pen on sheets of copier paper. There was a frantic nature to the sketches, they seemed to come from sort of frustration.

He stopped and looked down at the images scattered across the various papers which lay across the desk. Looking at the forms he noticed that they were basically made up of layers of ink. It wasn’t the best way of working on the form but one thing did come to mind when looking at the images. The layering of ink reminded him of the way clay is built up on a potter’s wheel. It was a nice connection to the clay bowls in the collection but there was still something missing. How on earth was this going to work? A ceramic bowl mirror would be too direct, even banal. The Object Mediator walked around the room considering the next move. After a few minutes it hit him. What else is turned? Built up in the same way.
On the first day the Object Mediator had been shown the institutions workshop which was used to build the exhibition and make repairs. It was an amazing thing that they even had their own workshop. Most other places had to create displays externally, but this way they could work closer with the curators and the space itself which had so far been of great benefit to the institution. It would also be prefect for the Object Mediator as some of the pieces could even be produced in house. Remembering this he decided to go down to see if they could help out with his new idea.

The head of the workshop was a well-known character within the Institution. He was an Italian who spoke in a very direct manner and who didn’t have much time or respect for many of the staff that worked within the Institution.

Many of the other members of staff found it hard to communicate with the men in the workshop since they had little or no understanding of construction techniques. Maybe this was why the head of workshop had become a man of little patience?

The Object Mediator knocked on the door to the workshop. Another member of the workshop team opened and greeted the object mediator. The Object Mediator explained his idea briefly and was then led to the small office at the back of the workshop. There the Head of Workshop sat smoking what little was left of his cigarette. He looked up at the Object Mediator who was standing just inside the door. He introduced himself and began to explain the idea he had for the new project.

After a few minutes of talking to the Head of Workshop paused and stood up. He took the Object Mediator over to a metal lathe. He began to explain that maybe he could spin a soft metal onto a chosen form and use that for the body of the Object Mediator’s mirror. It was not anything the Object Mediator had considered. Maybe this was the way to go? It was becoming more of a product in his head now, and more importantly further away from the initial object. The Object Mediator looked up, smiling with delight at the Head of Workshop.
This was it, this is what it was going to be. That gut feeling was there. A spun metal body with a glass mirror front. The Head of Workshop looked back at the Object Mediator, trying to hold back from smiling himself. He was just happy to be part of something that wasn’t just building endless boxes and display units. He couldn’t show it though, he had an image uphold. One he didn’t intend on changing. The Object Mediator shook the Head of Workshop’s hand and made his way to the door, stating that he could be in contact soon as he walked out.

The Object Mediator had spent the last two weeks trying to figure out how to execute this new idea of his. He had been studying ancient manufacturing techniques and had found a link between the use of copper and mirrors in ancient Egypt to the metal spinning techniques which were being developed during the same period. It was now his intention to include this in the project. The back of the mirror would be in copper, that part now felt pretty much set. He had though been considering creating a black object. Something which seemed mysterious. This was the feeling he wanted to create with the object. This played against the use of copper somehow so he was trying to figure out a way of including both. He had written to the Head of Workshop asking for tips on the matter. He had replied by stating that he could burn or oxidize the surface of the copper to make it black. This was something he had never considered but it did seem like something that could work.
The Object Mediator was on his way to a meeting with the Senior Curator. The Senior Curator’s office was on the 4th floor and it was not somewhere the object mediator spent much time. He walked down the long, brightly lit corridor (one of the very few well lit spaces behind the public area), towards the large office. He knocked on the door and the Senior Curator called him in. The Object Meditator opened and walked over to the large desk that stood in the middle of the room. They greeted each other, both sat down, and the Senior Curator began to explain why he had called him there. Two things. The first one was just a general catch up. The Senior Curator wanted to know how he was getting on at his new job and if he had any ideas about the first project? The Object Mediator began to explain the new idea and they both began to chat over ways that they could work with it further and possible ways of disseminating the project.

The object mediator began to explain in detail the idea for the new mirror. A simple product with a connection to the way objects are interpreted. An fictional history which questions its own legitimacy alongside other objects in the collection. The Senior Curator liked the idea and explained that he could see this object as a stand alone within the institutions ceramics room.

This seemed like a good start to the output of the Object Mediator and hopefully as time progressed the work would become more elaborate.
CHAPTER 2-

WOVEN IN TIME
It had been a month since the Object Mediator position had been filled at The Institution and things were starting to tick along nicely. The Object Mediator had become more and more accustomed to The Institution with its many storage rooms and long corridors. During this time the Senior Curator and the staff which worked with the collection and archive had gotten more and more acquainted with the Object Mediator and communication had been good. The collection team were always willing to help with projects and in some cases external experts had been invited to join in discussions with the various members working there and the Object Mediator as a way of gaining even more insight into the objects and their context.

In one such discussion a professor of archaeology with an expertise on Late Neolithic ceramic styles had been invited to discuss with the collection team some of the objects in the collection. The Object Mediator had been invited to join the meeting. These cross discipline meetings were part of the new system being put in place by the institution to help gain new insight into the field. Fresh eyes and in this case the naïve and curious mind of the Object Mediator.

Today’s discussion was on the institutions collection of Late Neolithic pottery from Britain as well as a collection of pottery fragments from central Europe, which they wanted to discuss with the Professor.

There had been plans to loan out some of these items to other institution’s but they had been poorly documented and had really only been stored in the archives until now. It was the institutions goal to work with these objects further to allow them to be loaned out to specific external exhibitions, as well as displayed upstairs in the newly finished ceramics room on the second floor.
During the meeting there were a lot of details which seemed very confusing and alien to the object mediator. Although they were talking about objects and their relationships with the humans who made and used them – a subject which of course the Object Mediator was very familiar with - there seemed to be a certain language which was altogether removed from the way the design world discussed similar topics. Even though this was the case the object mediator was able to effectively partake in the discussion. After 45 minutes they came onto the topic of the marking and surface decorations on the many objects in the collection. Many of the ceramic vessels in the collection contained some kind of abstract markings which had been either pressed or dragged into the surface. Since these patterns did not contain any kind of figurative or symbolic icons there must have been another kind of visual language that was being communicated.

The Object Mediator was sketching and scribbling a few short pieces of text on his note pad. Both as part of understanding the topic more and to some degree because his mind was wandering slightly throughout the meeting. This was not uncommon and had been a problem in some of the other meetings with the other staff members. This was the object mediator distilling the discussions in his head. Trying to come up with a way of approaching the subject from his own angle.

The Professor stopped and looked at the Object Mediator. He asked him if he had anything to add to the discussions, but the Object Mediator just sat there in silence. After a few long seconds he began to explain that he was having trouble coming up with anything in regards to the days discussions. He began to explain a few things which he found interesting. He looked down at the notebook to find the thoughts he had scribbled down. He explained that he found it interesting that there was no symbolism or iconography within the patterns and that maybe they just found the minimalist forms beautiful. As most reasoning for the decoration within ancient artefacts had been put down to symbolism it was strange to see this kind of decoration. The technique was also something that fascinated him. How did they develop them and were they connected to some kind of older form of production?
The Professor began to explain some theories for the production of ‘groove ware’ or any of the other abstract patterned ceramics of the same age. Some had noticed a correlation between the construction techniques in woven baskets and that of the early pressed patterns in ceramic goods which later became more abstract as time went on. Was there a forgotten link? Or was this just an evolution in the aesthetic tastes of these people? It was of course like most of the questions about this time very hard to answer. Of course any attempt to come up with possible theories would be hard, involving a deep investigation into ancient production techniques.

The Object Mediator had never worked with ceramics, weaving or glass in this way before. It would be an interesting and challenging task if he were to take it on. Rewarding for sure but risky at the same time. Both glass and ceramic techniques can produce unexpected results. Maybe that was the key? Where these old developments a product of past mistakes in the production of each style of goods?

It sounded like a big project. One which would take a fair amount of time. The object mediator frantically wrote down all the information the professor was communicating.
CHAPTER 3-

WHITE LIES
The collection team were opening up boxes in the archive of marble and limestone statues from the ancient Mediterranean. New work was to be carried out on them as part of exhibition which was planned for next year. Other institutions had been studying their own sculptures, after UV scans had started to show more detailed views of the intricate patterns, and vibrant colours used in the paint work of these ancient sculptures.

An exhibition explaining and showcasing what we consider to be a monochrome world in which the ancient Romans and Greeks lived in was in fact extremely colourful.

The Object Mediator had been asked to join the team in unpacking the objects to see if there was a possibility that he could add something to the exhibition as a way of communicating these new findings. A modern interpretation of the ancient objects. He overheard some of the members of staff discussing the reproductions other institutions had made of the new coloured statues. They laughed as they made fun of the garish use of colour. The value of the material had been lowered due to the kitsch and childlike over elaboration of the decoration and colour palette. This seemed like a strange way for the team to act but some other institutions and researchers had been struggling to come to terms with these new discoveries and their impact on our understanding of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Of course this information was nothing new but it had never really been shown in this manner before. Many sculptures were found with reddish paint still visible and there had even been accounts of the paint being washed off by some researchers as the colourings were seen as garish and distasteful. There was definitely something there to be worked on. The political nature of these new reconstructions and their connection to our own aesthetic tastes and values was something that would make for a really interesting project.
After unpacking all the boxes the Object Mediator went up to the Team Leader and told him that he definitely wanted to be part of this new exhibition, and that he already had a few ideas in his head on how to advance with them. The Team Leader explained that there was a small team going to the Cararra district in Italy to speak with some marble experts there, and do some surveys of some old temples which were to be included in the exhibition. The Team Leader stated that it might be of benefit to the whole exhibition if the Object Mediator came along, and took on a larger role within the whole setup of the show. This sounded perfect and the Object Mediator spared no time in agreeing to the offer. The Team Leader then shouted over to another member of staff to come over. The three men talked and decided to organise a casual meeting to go over the finer details later on in the week.

The group met in one of the old social rooms, a disused space which had become a storage space for objects which had yet to be catalogued; the curators bad conscience.

They had already decided that the trip would partly be used as a way of cataloging finds in situ as a way of juxtaposing them alongside the ‘out of situ’ objects within the collection. They would also speak with a few chosen experts and historians in the area on the material properties as well as the cultural importance of the new finds. The object mediator suggested that he be the one to take the photos due to his artistic eye and sense of composition allowing the others to focus on the dig itself. The other members would work the dig as usual and the object mediator would document the whole trip.

The team arrived in port of Genoa and began packing the cars in preparation of the 114 km journey to Cararra. The team had packed lightly for the trip as they were only planning on a one week stay. The kit was light and the rest they could borrow from the Italian team which had already taken up post on the site.
When they arrived they set up at the site and began by meeting with the Italian team which was posted there. They explained that the dig had gone well so far and that there were many objects for the team to examine. They had not been much in the way of finds with visible paint remnants but they were positive that they had enough to take back with them to examine further with the UV lights.

The Object Mediator went around taking photos of the various sites and of some of the objects which they had successfully excavated. He was struck by what looked like a few marble altars which lay half excavated in one of the sites. Where they altars or where they truncated columns from an architectural structure? Next to them lay one of the few finds which had visible traces of paint still on the surface. This seemed like a good place to start.

The differing heights of the ‘altars’ made them look like a collection of side tables, adding a sense of the common to something which at the same time seemed full of mystique. There was something in the friction between these two polar opposite expressions which the object mediator found truly magical. He took a photo and moved on to the neighboring dig.

Two weeks had passed since the trip to Italy and the Object Mediator was working in his office, sketches for the piece which he had drawn during the trip lay scattered across the desk. With each sketch the image changed, forever in flux. Its fluid form becoming more and more static and refined. The form was a direct link to the alters found in Italy, the alterations made to the form were gut feelings on the Object Mediator’s part. He was becoming more settled in his role and such choices had become second nature. The rest would come.
After speaking with the other members of the trip he had decided that he would apply a gradient colouring on the marble object which would be created. There had been many discussions about pattern and the techniques used by the Romans and how they could be applied to the project. They decided that they would display pigments and samples of their attempts to recreate the way of applying the colour to the marble as part of the exhibition but that the object the Object Mediator would focus on should be more connected to our current tastes and visual language. That was the reason a gradient had been chosen since it to some degree contained no pattern but at the same time displaying some sort of visual trait other than solid colour. It was also contemporary in its expression and that was stated as being very important as these objects were to be seen as lenses used to help us see and understand the past through the re imagination of these topics through contemporary objects which we can connect with.

Through the research undertaken he had discovered that blue was a colour which was held in high regard during ancient times and that it was at that time worth more than the marble itself. This seemed like a good choice as it would highlight the fact that to the Romans, the marble was merely a canvas for their elaborate colourings.

Now the Object Mediator was waiting for the marble to arrive, hopefully it would come in one piece.
CHAPTER 4-

ANCIENT MODERNISM
The Collection Supervisor took the Object Mediator down a long corridor into one of the rooms at the end. The sign on the door read ‘Dry Room’. The name on the door didn’t really give any clues into what kinds of things were housed there or the type of work done there. The collection supervisor open the heavy metal door and lead the way over to a few cabinets and pulled one of the drawers open to show a collection of what looked like nothing more than rotten wooden branches of some sort.

At closer inspection there were definite signs of human interference with the material. Some sections still showed tool marks. A knife or some other sort of shape tool had been used to shape the wood.

The Object Mediator asked why he was being shown these pieces, whilst at the same time trying to figure out how the could be worked with in some way. The collection supervisor went on to explain that these pieces had just been tested in the lab for dating, and to find out the types of wood. The tests showed that they dated from 2200 BC - 2000 BC and all had origins in north Africa and the middle east; places which traded with ancient Egypt extensively throughout that period. All apart from one that is which was, according to the data which came back from the lab, a small piece of ash with origins from northern or central Europe.

This was very strange. The Supervisor mentioned that the historian that works in the department of Egyptian technology mentioned that there was evidence of trade between central Europe and Egypt around this period and that there had been findings in Germany and Denmark of Egyptian folding stools dating from that period.

The Object Mediator stood for a moment considering the possibility of using this in a new project. It seemed like another obvious project. Was it too obvious. The issues that had come up in other projects due the closeness to the link had caused problems before and for some reason it didn’t seem like there was much deeper this project could go.
He took a few photos of the pieces, thanked the Supervisor and went on his way back to his office to be greeted by the mess of paper scattered around the room. He stood there, knowing that these photos and the info the supervisor had given him would only be more wood for the fire. He placed the camera down on the edge of the oak desk and threw the papers down next to it, pushing the other papers further to the edge of the long desk.

It seemed like this was one for the archive. Out of one archive and into another.
CHAPTER 5-

BALTIC GOLD
A letter arrived at the office of the Object Mediator. It was from the dig team which had recently come back from Cyprus. A big project was being organised by the institution for a team to go out and take part in one of the digs outside Cairo. They were wondering if the Object Mediator would be interested in joining them and taking on larger role in the project. They wanted to see the object mediator work in a more hands on manner and to allow him to work on material that was ‘fresh’ in a sense that he could jump into the discussions sooner since he would be there on site as the team excavated the objects.

He ran to the phone and dialled the internal number to the office for Egyptian treasure to confirm his interest in the trip. It would be his second trip since starting and by looking at the letter it looked like this one would be longer, and without a doubt more demanding.

The sun was trying its best to break through the thick canvas of the tent the Object Mediator was sitting in. It was lunchtime and he was trying to avoid the hot midday sun. He opened his bag and pulled out a one of his notebooks. He had taken some of his notes and sketches with him to Cairo as he thought there might be a chance that some of things he had been working with back at the institution might come up whilst he was here. There were some loose ends he was looking to tie up.

The team met at one of the digs since they had been called there by the Cairo team which had been stationed there for the past month. They wanted them to look at some small finds they had found in what seemed to be a passageway to a tomb of some sorts. This site was quite new so it was unclear what the site actually was and if there was anything further in as they had not yet had the time to continue deeper into the dusty rock face.

One of the Egyptian archeologists told them that the find looked like it could have been part of an unsuccessful tomb raid or robbery. They had found a small collection of jewelry, fragile golden thread with emerald and amber stones.
The team watched as they packed the artifacts into cardboard storage boxes. The Object Mediator asked if the find looked rare or if it was in fact a common thing in these parts? One of his companions from the institution softly explained that stones such as amber and emerald had been found in a few sites in Egypt which date from the same time and the they were seen as mystical objects which were imported from the north. Amber was regarded as a material which had healing powers and was associated with Ra the god of the sun due to its appearance. The object mediator looked at his colleague with intrigue. Mystical, power, these are always words that are going to grab he attention of the viewer. He went to ask more but was interrupted.

It seemed the team needed to stop work in the nearby site and move to this dig. It seemed the Egyptians wanted to get as much out of this as possible before the day ended. He would have to wait.

The trouble with Cairo is that its sometimes hard to think in the heat. The Object Mediator had been walking the narrow shaded streets trying to avoid to sun. He walked past a barbers shop where the owner stood outside greeting passers by. He smiled at the barber as he passed, hearing him shout/sing to passers by what seemed like attempts at persuading in customers. The Object Mediator slowed down, a moment of spontaneity came over him. His hair had been bothering him of late; soaked wet by the baking sun. He turned around and walked up to the barber, pointed at his hair and imitated a pair of scissors with his hands. The crude attempt at communication worked and the man showed him to a chair.

Whilst he was getting his hair cut the object mediator looked through some of the images on his camera to see if he could find anything he had missed. He had taken images from some of the various digs around the site they were working and of some of the finds they had excavated. There were many images of jewelry and finer belongings from what they believed to be a royal tomb. He zoomed in on one of the images, a fine necklace with small pellet shaped amber beads connected to it. He highlighted the image number and put the camera back in his bag.
Back at his tent the Object Mediator sat in his fold out chair looking at the images he had taken at the dig. He was taken in by an image of the amber necklace which had been excavated. He had been talking with one of the Egyptian archaeologists who had been posted at the site, he had explained that the amber necklace shows that there must have been some sort of trade with Scandinavia and the Baltic states during this time. Other scholars had discussed a possible trade route called the *Amber Road*, something similar to the Silk Road in the east, but further development of this theory had not been taken out yet.

What was he to make of this? If there was truth in this it might be the case that this was the moment that Scandinavia moved into the Bronze Age. With all the information and goods which must have come flooding back from the south, the trade of amber would have brought a huge boost to the region. He thought for a moment, trying to connect the story to the present day in some way like he had with the other objects. It seemed the most interesting part about this was the notion of trade and information so there might possibly be something there which he could use. He sat there, questioning this theory of the Amber Road in his head, desperate to get back to the Institution and discuss this more with the other experts there.

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Back at the Institution the Object Mediator was on his way down into the archive to pick up a few pieces of information the Institution had on this possible Amber Road. When he got down there he noticed the large pullout bookshelves which housed the paper based section of the archive. Row after row of these large storage units. He walked down one of the ‘aisles’, looking for the books he needed. About half way down it hit him. Make a bookshelf! It seemed pretty obvious after he thought of it. Storage, information, transport maybe not so much but there was time to iron that out later. He turned the wheel on the side of the archive shelf, it slowly opened up to reveal a large collection of books dating from the 1600’s to the present day, as well as some binders which contains notes and various other piece’s of written information.
He searched the shelf which contained the book he was after and once he found it, closed the shelving unit and walked towards the door. Maybe he didn’t need any other input in this project? It might be interesting to play with the notion of unknown more in this one or at least take ownership of it. That was something he hadn’t really done in the other projects. Maybe it was time to try it out now?

The object mediator was down in the workshop speaking to the Head of Workshop. He wanted to know what material to use in his bookshelf. He had considered glass or plastic but needed a second opinion as he couldn’t decide. Whatever it was going to be made of it needed to have some kind of property similar to that of amber.

The Head of Workshop explained that he could use a type of plastic called polyurethane. It had a very similar look to amber and it also came in different colour and transparency variations. The Head of Workshop explained a few ideas he had on how to construct the bookshelf. He mentioned something about constructing it using dowels to connect the different shelf levels to the sides. This stuck in the mind of the Object Mediator as it reminded him of the flat pack furniture which was typically associated with Sweden. He could use that to link back to the ancient trade of amber from Scandinavia as this could be seen as the new trade coming from that region. It seemed like an interesting thing to add into the narrative.

A few days later the samples of the polyurethane sheets arrived. Some of them were really soft and some of them were as hard a glass. Each one had a different tone of yellow and a few of them were slightly opaque. He cross examined them with the collection small amber pieces he had, trying to decide on the right colour to choose. After a few hours of deciding and later changing his mind he decided on the pale yellow colouring as it created a subtlety to the piece. He called to supplier and ordered to sheets he needed.
A ROOM FULL OF DUST
The Object Mediator was cleaning his office before the opening of the exhibition based on the work carried out in Egypt. He moved some of the papers which lay scattered around his desk into a box. He was planning on taking some of the info down to the scanner. Digital copies of all physical work created had been requested to be digitalised by the Institution. Even the final objects had been scanned before the show for storage in the digital archives.

This fact had troubled the Object Mediator. Even though fully created by himself, within his contract it stated that the work was required to be added to the archive. What would happen to them then had not really occurred to the Object Mediator until now. What good is an object in storage? Was it a precaution for the future? Were these to be used as the museum objects of the future?

The scanning room was empty. Did he have the wrong time? An appointment had been scheduled with the Digital Archiver earlier in the month, so it was strange to see the room empty. He opened the door and walked in. It was not in his nature to just walk in but he only wanted to leave the documents and write a note for the Archiver. He placed the box of papers down on the desk and turned to walk out. As he did so he noticed something on the computer screen which had been left on. ‘object mediation algorithm’. The Object Mediator heard the sound of footsteps walking down the corridor. He started frantically writing the note and turned to leave as the door swung open.
“The visitor to the Museum of Jurassic Technology continually finds himself shimmering between wondering at (the marvels of nature) and wondering whether (any of this could possibly be true). And it’s that very shimmer, the capacity for such delicious confusion, Wilson sometimes seems to suggest, that may constitute the most blessedly wonderful thing about being human.”

_Lawrence Weschler_
PART II
OBJECTS OF AMBIQUIETY AND THE OBJECT MEDIATOR
Whist working on this project it became evident that it needed a story, something that tied the objects together; a collective narrative. This manifested itself in the story about a designer who is placed within a museum setting, and looks at how they might work alongside the other staff members which work there. I was interested in how someone with a creative background could add new value to old objects and use them to bring up questions about our relation to the past and its artefacts.

The project *Objects Of Ambiquity: an introduction into the role of the object mediator*, looks at a possible future situation where the designer has been installed within such a situation; as a creative mediator, working with historical records and artefacts within an institutions collection. The story of *Objects of Ambiquity* is a vessel used to highlight the role of fiction within historical records. Whilst doing this it simultaneously question’s the designers possible role within this context and how this will alter our understanding of what a museum is in the future.

This new role for the designer, which I called the ‘Object Mediator’, was something that became a way of looking at both the role they might play and how this might alter the output of the museum, what i call the ‘Institution’ in the text.

It became a method for testing out some of the finer details in the narrative within each project. Writing in this way created total freedom to twist and pull the ‘truth’ in a way that created new stories for the objects.
When doing this we are instantly confronted by both time, and memory. Both of these constantly play against each other and so our attempt at understanding the past must include some degree of interpretation as a means of creatively gaining knowledge from what is left behind by the past, the artefacts of previous cultures.

Whilst looking into the notion of truth within history I was confronted with Aristotle’s ‘Poetics’. This led me to work more with what you might call poetic truths as a way of questioning our relationship with historical truths.

This friction is what in turn creates the final objects and manifests itself within the narratives connected to them.

This is also furthered through the use of old imagery in a contemporary or future context. The images used within the text come from Stockholm’s Mediterranean Museum and range from 1910 to 1950 but placing them within this context it creates a sense of timelessness, an effect usually applied in science fiction. Of course the use of these images also brings up questions how the people in the images, most of whom are finely dressed white males viewed their roles, and the role of the museum within a world context. During this time period they would have travelled countries with rich historical culture such as Egypt and Greece and in many cases exploit the locals. Taking their cultural heritage out of the soil, cataloging it and shipping it to counties in the west.

This of course is not the way of working for the Object Mediator.
BACKGROUND
To be human is to be curious. We know that our ancient ancestors looked at the world around them with great wonder. They tried to gain understanding of the natural world and its phenomena and through this contemplated over their place within it. When they witnessed the cycles of life and death they sought explanation and meaning in them. This inquisitive nature and want to understand the larger system which they were part of is what contributed to the development of culture, a type of user’s manual which could be passed down through the generations and built upon, creating a more and more complex body of knowledge and understanding as time went on.

Although we understand much more than our ancestors did about world that surrounds us, some old questions still remain unanswered while new discoveries have generated new questions. As long as humans exist we will contemplate the mysteries around us and seek to acquire the knowledge and understanding necessary to satisfy our needs and solve our problems. This thirst for knowledge reaches into the past, even when one is focused on solving contemporary problems. The search for solutions often requires an understanding of how difficulties developed or how our ancestors might have approached parallel situations in the past. We study both our collective pasts and our individual pasts to gain a better understanding of who we are today and where we are going in the future. To understand the present and begin to consider the future we must learn and understand our own past, in simple terms it is like any other method of learning where lessons are made through the experience of mistakes and success of past cultures and people.
We can never go back; we can never fully know. In some ways we miss it, we want to experience it, live it. We can never go back; but we can look back. Although, when we do this, we are always looking at it through our own eyes, mirroring it through our world. But maybe this is what we are truly interested in, as it’s the closest we can get to truly experiencing the past is through an embodied experience, something which stays with us. Even though we may forget exacts we are still left with the feeling of the past.

When the past can speak to us in this way we can gain perspective and values from it. It helps us understand our current situation; it’s a way of taking a step back and seeing the wider picture.

I believe that if we can create truly engaging experiences through the physicality of objects and spaces we can create a more embodied experience of the past, something which I feel will be easier for people to digest and connect to. Although this experience will party become a subjective one, I still believe that it can be more fruitful in helping us to understand the past and how it relates to us today.

Some of these notions already exist in the curating of contemporary museums as they stage and present to us a view of history. This is because these new findings are of political and national interest in the form of culture building through material history. They attempt to create a sense of delight around objects and their meanings.
OBJECTS
A MIRROR DARKLY
As our first technology for contemplation of the self, the mirror is arguably as important an invention as the wheel yet within design I feel that the focus has become more about the shape of the glass and the frame which contains the mirror rather than its emotional effect on the user.

The fact that human beings, unlike animals, recognize themselves in the reflected images of their bodies forms speculations on the role of the image in the development of the human psyche. One’s awareness of one’s own position within the physical world and the ability to imagine that position in relation to other physical objects is one which makes the mirror such an alluring object to study.

To start off I wanted to go back to a point where humans had just started to place importance on the ability to see themselves in some sort of reflection which they could control and contain in some form. There is actually no concrete evidence but some historians believe that small ceramic bowls may have been used to contain water which could be used as table top mirrors during the late Stone Age.

The fact that it cannot be proven also adds to the objects mystery. Is this a new object, or an old one reinvented? I wanted to take this notion and create a modern object which questioned its possible past and its relation to ‘the self’. Within ‘Objects of Ambiguity’ I wanted to showcase this ability to decide or propose the past. Once the words leave the mouth of the person who is proposing these scenarios they ultimately become true, no matter how false they are. Until proven otherwise of course, but its that ability to believe in something so beautiful that it must of course be true that is the most beautiful thing about the human condition. These creations show how we wish to see our world, and in turn how we wish to see ourselves. They mirror our dreams.

The objects title comes from the phrase to see “through a glass darkly”, (to have an obscure or imperfect vision of reality). The expression comes from the writings of the Apostle Paul in Corinthians 13 where he explains that we do not now see clearly, but at the end of time, we will do so.
WHITE LIES
White Lies looks at how the choices made by those who write and disseminate history can become so deep set that once our understanding changes we are still unable to accept them. Our understanding of the events of the past reflect the decisions we make in the present, so when confronted with a new truth it can undermine the current structure of cultural meaning. We choose to curate or direct the past in the way we want it to be seen as it affirms the decisions we make in the present. If we later find this to be untrue it can question the reasoning behind those past decisions which are in turn based on the then present understanding of past decisions.

In this case I chose to look at our connection with the marble sculptures of the ancient Romans and Greeks. These to us are symbols of artistic and cultural good taste. The opposite of this could be seen as what the Romans might call barbaric. We have known years that Roman and Greek sculptures were painted and in recent years thanks to new technology we have been able to re-create some of those vibrant works of art as they originally might have looked. Although this is what we would now consider to be true representations of greek and roman sculptures we still cannot accept them. To us they are garish, crude and kitsch.

The outcome of this part of the project is the console table, ‘White Lies’. The tables form echoes that of the ancient columns which held up the carved sculptures of buildings such as the Parthenon. A blue gradient design is spayed onto the table (a colour highly valued in ancient times) creating a sense of further mystique as it hides and shows at the same time. Does this paint add value or take away? It seems shocking and almost madness to paint over marble yet this was the true representation of the materials original use.

In Euripides play Helen, Helen of Troy is noted as saying,
"If only I could shed my beauty and assume an uglier aspect
The way you would wipe color off a statue.". This shows how the ancients viewed white unpainted marble, to them it was the opposite of what we now see it as.
Baltic Gold started when I wanted to take the next step in working with historical fiction. Since the previous objects dealt with the interpretations of others I thought it would be interesting to create my own interpretive truth.

Is it possible to create new meaning from fictional accounts of the past? And if so are they relevant today?

Routes of trade in goods and knowledge in the ancient world seem so full of magic due to the limited modes of transport available and the great distances covered. They also serve as the carriers of information yet due to the large distances travelled and the many exchanges of hand which take place during trips information can get twisted. Like a game of Chinese whispers taking place over a whole continent. In this part of the project I wanted to further bend these notions of trade and the transfer of information.

The hypothetical Amber Road is a trade route of amber from Scandinavia and the Baltic states down to the Mediterranean which may have existed as early as the late Paleolithic era. It is said that the amber road may have caused bringing of the bronze age to Scandinavia due to the flood of new information coming in from the south when trading with cultures such as the Mycenaean’s and the ancient Egyptian’s. If this is true it would mean that in Scandinavia amber could be seen as a symbol of progress, a token which is exchanged in return for information.

I wanted to take this notion and transform it into an object, using the story of the Object Mediator as a method for creating the narrative around it. The outcome is a archetypical bookshelf in raw polyurethane, you could call it a re-imagined IKEA Billy bookcase. The bookcase is the only piece of furniture which holds knowledge yet it is not seen as an item of high status. With this in mind the goal was to create an object which expressed the entering of Sweden into the bronze age.
If this is true it would mean that in Scandinavia amber could be seen as a symbol of progress, a token which is exchanged in return for information. If true, this is the moment that Sweden became visible to the rest of Europe. Amber could be more important to the country than currently acknowledges. Could this be a new icon for Sweden? I wanted to take this notion and transform it into an object, using the story of the Object Mediator as a method for creating the narrative around it. The outcome is a archetypical bookshelf in raw polyurethane, The bookcase is the only piece of furniture which holds knowledge yet it is not seen as an item of high status. The polyurethane darkens in UV light which means after years of usage it will contain the ghost shadows of the books and objects which filled it shelves.
Tell the truth, but tell it slant.

*Emily Dickenson*