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This article explores a trend in some British contemporary art towards 'fictioning', when this names not only the blurring of the reality/fiction boundary, but also, more generally, the material instantiation – or performance – of fictions within the real. It attends to three practices of this fiction as mode of existence: sequencing and nesting (Mike Nelson); the deployment 'fabulous images' and intercessors (Brian Catling); and more occult technologies and an idea of the 'invented life' (Bonnie Camplin). The article also attends to the mythopoetic or 'world-making' aspect of these practices and the way this can involve recourse to other times, past and future. Mythopoesis also involves a sense of collective enunciation and, with that, a concomitant disruption of the more dominant fiction of the self.

Keywords: mythopoesis, fictioning, Mike Nelson, Brian Catling, Bonnie Camplin

Introduction

In the following, I briefly explore a trend in some British contemporary art towards what David Burrows and I call 'fictioning'. This involves the blurring of the reality/fiction boundary, but also, more generally, the material instantiation – or performance – of fictions within the real that then gives them a certain traction on the latter.[1] Another way of saying this is that I am interested in practices that develop fiction as a mode of existence (the term is borrowed from Bruno Latour), especially when this manifests in a sequencing and nesting function (section 2); the deployment of 'fabulous images' and intercessors (section 3); and/or more occult principles (or intentions) and the idea of an 'invented life' (section 4). A further term appears throughout my article: 'mythopoesis'. This refers to the 'world-making' aspect of these practices and, in my usage, to the way this can involve recourse to other times, past and future. Mythopoesis also involves a sense of collective enunciation (as in Gilles Deleuze's understanding of calling forth a 'people-yet-to-come') and, with that, a concomitant disruption of the more dominant fiction of the self.

Despite this somewhat abstract introduction, the idea in what follows is also that the practices themselves enact much of the theoretical work in so far as they involve different inflections on my theme. It is useful to consider examples of practice in some detail in order to grasp their particular logics, and I have space here for three indicative examples.[2] Before I begin, however, I want to say a few words about a wider context. What I write attends to a particular scene (very broadly construed) with which I am most familiar and of which, at least to a certain extent, I am

part (insofar as the artistic collaboration I am involved in, the group 'Plastique Fantastique', is concerned with similar questions and is, indeed, based in London).[3] It is this that determines the choices I have made about what practices to look to. It is one of the contentions of my article that a sense of difference from the what-is – the presentation of a different space-time – tends to be produced through scenes (involving both human and non-human agents) and, in this, my article's own site of production is important.

As I suggested above, my article is also indicative of a renewed interest in fiction evident across contemporary art (when this names a number of different worlds),[4] as well as in the arts and critical humanities more generally.[5] Fiction is also a term that has increasing valence in our wider culture, as indicated in the 'new' terminology used to describe our contemporary political reality: 'post-fact' and 'post-truth'. 'Reality' is itself an increasingly relative term on this terrain, with ideas of 'perception management' replacing any idea of truth. It is here that I would position the urgency of some of what follows, but also of the wider collaboration with Burrows that I mentioned above. Our project is not exactly a critique of this new terrain, but attends to practices that operate on the same level as these more dominant fictions. Ultimately, this kind of work might then be seen as having a political and ethical charge – albeit quite oblique – alongside an aesthetic one. It contributes towards the task of mapping out alternatives to the what-is, giving attention to different perspectives and other modes of existence and, ultimately, helping to foster the production of other worlds from within this one.

Sequencing and nesting: Mike Nelson

Mike Nelson's work abounds in different references – some obscure, others more obvious – to fiction, but also itself operates to fiction the real. In terms of the former, Nelson has provided a list of (and extracts from) the authors he especially looks to in the 'catalogue' (edited by Will Bradley) *Forgotten Kingdom*.[6] The selection includes both William Burroughs and J.G. Ballard alongside a number of other science fiction writers.[7] In relation to the latter, Nelson builds labyrinthine installations or 'sets' (they have been compared to cinematic spaces) that the audience walks in to, literally entering into a narrative scene.[8] The line between fiction and reality is especially blurred because of this performative dimension – our active participation in the work – but also, crucially, because the sets themselves partly consist of 'found' objects. The installations are simply a different arrangement of the what-is. The different 'props' Nelson uses also have their own associations that they bring with them – from their previous worlds – adding a further layer to the fiction (Nelson has suggested that he is 'particularly interested in the resonance of an object that knows why it's there even if you don't').[9]

Figure 1. Mike Nelson, *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent* (installation view), 2001. Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Turin; Matt's Gallery, London; and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

Although he does produce smaller, more sculptural assemblages (out of these found objects), Nelson's installations are generally site specific, large, complex and ephemeral, often involving a significant built component – especially walls and doors – that then sits inside an already existing (often institutional) space. The 'reality effect' (to use a phrase from Roland Barthes)[10] of these installations is produced through an almost obsessive attention to detail. Indeed, it is this that allows a participant's suspension of disbelief. Objects are carefully chosen to 'fit' the very particular narrative and affective scene and it is Nelson himself (rather than any assistants) who meticulously puts all this together so that the fiction is all-encompassing

and seamless. There is a particular 'feel' common to much of Nelson's work that is partly to do with the archive of literary and other references, but that also arises from this attention to detail and the fact, again, that the materials are all second-hand (sourced from charity and thrift shops and the like) and arranged as if the inhabitants had just left a given space, or an event had just happened.

Besides this production of singular site-specific installations, there is a further characteristic of Nelson's work – and especially of some of the pieces from 1999 to 2001 – of what we might call 'sequencing'. Nelson recycles and reuses objects and set-ups, as well as certain motifs, to produce a continuity of practice across installations. One is reminded of Burroughs taping photographs together in the Beat hotel with Bryon Gysin to produce continuity between hitherto separate 'episodes'. Different installations, we might say, are variations on a theme, but also – as a group – cumulatively deploy a different kind of space-time to what is typical. Indeed, there is a certain logic of connection and continuity between apparently disparate shows.

This sequencing also involves what we might call a 'nesting' of fictions. This might involve the positioning of one literary fiction within another (or the use of more hybrid scripts), but it also involves the nesting of these fictions in Nelson's own personal mythos and other narrative constructions (in both these gambits, Nelson's work especially looks to Borges). As I gestured to above, it can also involve the insertion of one kind of space-time within another (a recent example would be *I, Impostor* involving the building of an Arabic souk within the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011). Indeed, these sets of nestings – of fictions within fictions – can produce a formal complexity and density that parallels the 'content'. A further example here is *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004), which involved the nesting of Robert Smithson's original *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970)– itself famously recontextualized by the bullets that lodged in it during police shootings of students at Kent State University, and the subsequent addition of commemorative graffiti – inside a whole collection of further narratives, including the Gulf war (with sand replacing the earth of Smithson's work) and Nelson's own mythologization of his studio.[11]

Indeed, alongside the references 'outside' the work, there is also this self-referentiality that gives Nelson's practice one of its most compelling aspects. This is perhaps best exemplified by his work for the 2001 Turner prize show, *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent* (Figure 1), which, in part, 'stored' his own previous installation *The Coral Reef* from Matts Gallery in 1999 (a work which won him the Turner nomination and which was subsequently acquired by the Tate). *The Coral Reef* was itself already a complex sequence of nested fictions (which also referenced the various spaces and non-places of the London East End context in which it was built).[12] Nelson uses his own art as its own kind of found object in this sense: contained, encircled, within the new installation. As the work is repeated, new layers of meaning are added: the fiction becomes denser; more difficult but also more compelling.

Although offering up a different bloc of space-time, as I have already implied, this nesting of fictions might also be thought of as involving feedback loops from the present to the past and then back to the present. Nelson uses actual elements from his own past, but there is also a sense that each installation is a restaging of those that have gone before. Especially interesting, however, are the loops that are thrown forwards into a future. Indeed, Nelson has described his 'Futurobjectics' show at Camden Gallery in 1998 as being involved in setting up the conditions and possibilities for the future of his own practice, the installation here operating as a technique of divination:

> *Futurobjectics*, a title that refers to that chapter in [Stanislaw] Lem's *Futurological Congress* that we used in *Forgotten Kingdom*, the one that talks about 'future linguistics', which is the idea that you can predict the future by mutilating, modifying and combining words. I changed that to *Futurobjectics*, to take my own references and mesh them together and potentially predict the future of what I'd make – and strangely enough it did, it worked.[13]

Although Nelson talks about the predictive aspect of this show, I want to suggest that it also involved a kind of 'writing' of the future of the practice: laying out a set of propositions or a particular syntax to be used later.[14] There is a kind of working on the future from the present that is enabled because of the 'closed set' of Nelson's practice. Another way of saying this is that time, or a very particular kind of time, is not a background to Nelson's work, but specific to it. Might we suggest that Nelson's practice is 'hyperstitional' in this sense? This term, coined by the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit in the 1990s, names an 'element of effective culture that makes itself real', but also a 'fictional quantity functional as a time-traveling device'.[15] Hyperstition is then a name for those complex fictional works that disrupt typical chronology and linear causality.[16]

Some of the catalogues of this early sequence of works operate in a similar way. *Forgotten Kingdom*, which, as I have already mentioned, contains 'found texts', has also been described by Nelson as a Reader for his work: a gathering of different archives together that gestures to future possibilities. *Magazine*, containing a selection of images from the particular sequence from *The Coral Reef* (2000) to the Tate show, and which doubles the experience of these shows (there is no beginning or end to the book, one is always in the middle, with images from different shows leading on and in to one another), also operates as a sourcebook, and a work that, in its whole 'look' fictions the exhibitions themselves.[17] Finally, Nelson's earliest catalogue *Extinction Beckons* (which tracks his practice from its inception up to *The Coral Reef*) is presented like a travel book – but also contains a long essay by Jaki Irvine (put together from previous reviews and short essays) that further links the different installations through a fictioning of the artist's life.[18]

Extinction Beckons also contains a selection of private view invitations. These were a key aspect of Nelson's practice at this time (pre-Internet as it was) and were often pictures of Nelson himself in different locations (such as in a graffitied bus shelter; 'Master of Reality' [2001]) or in Asia with a Buddhist monk ('Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted' [2001]); or were

of his truck travelling overseas ('Lionheart' [1997] and 'The Amnesiacs' [1997]). Indeed, there is a sense that the absent character of Nelson's sets – drifter, outlaw, and so forth – is himself.[19] The line between the reality of Nelson's life and the theatrical set-up becomes blurred. Although there is a question here of the work's 'post-colonial' perspective (however manufactured or theatrical this might be), it is certainly the case that an elaborate fictioning is produced across the different aspects of the work that destabilizes any straightforward critique and which a certain self-produced mythos of Nelson helps sustain (he did, after all, travel to these places).[20]

As well as this figure of the outsider and loner, there is also the recurring motif of the group or pack, most explicitly in 'The Amnesiacs' (1997) show, which staged the HQ of a fictional biker gang, but also in future works that return to this motif (*AMNESIAC SHRINE or Double Coop Displacement* at Matt's Gallery in 2006 for example).[21] It is this sense of a 'missing people' – summoned in to being by certain objects, clothes, logos, symbols, and so forth – that gives the work a more pronounced mythopoetic aspect. Deleuze develops his own idea of summoning a 'people-yet-to-come' in relation to what he calls (following Henri Bergson) 'fabulation' and also, with Felix Guattari, in his writings on 'minor literature'.[22] Elsewhere, he also suggests that different kinds of cinema – especially that which involves a blurring of fact and fiction – can contribute 'to the invention of a people'.[23] A collective utterance can operate to call forth something different in this sense (it is addressed less to us than to what we might become), whilst dislodging that key fiction of the self-possessed and centred individual subject. The question is whether a so-called real collective is more effective at this reality engineering – this mythopoesis – than an imagined one? Where does the one end and the other begin?

Following Deleuze and Guattari, there is also, in Nelson's work, a complex relationship between any fictional collective or pack (that the work both evidences and calls forth) and the singular and anomalous. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that a first principle of the pack, multiplicity and contagion, is doubled by a second: an alliance with something more singular; the anomalous, understood as that which borders the pack.[24] Nelson's loner is just such an anomalous figure. Might we also ask, this time following Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, whether the loner is him or herself always already a pack, a collectivity of various 'passive syntheses' which are orphan and nomadic by definition – only later captured by the fiction of an 'I'.[25] In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop this microphysics further with the idea that 'we' as subjects are merely the residuum, or after-effect, of impersonal and inhuman processes – the various 'passive syntheses' of the Unconscious – that we then misrecognize and, again, only subsequently claim as 'ours'.[26] In each case, the individual is simply a sequence – and nesting – of different retroactive fictions.

Figure 2. Brian Catling, *The Vorrh* cover, 2007. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.
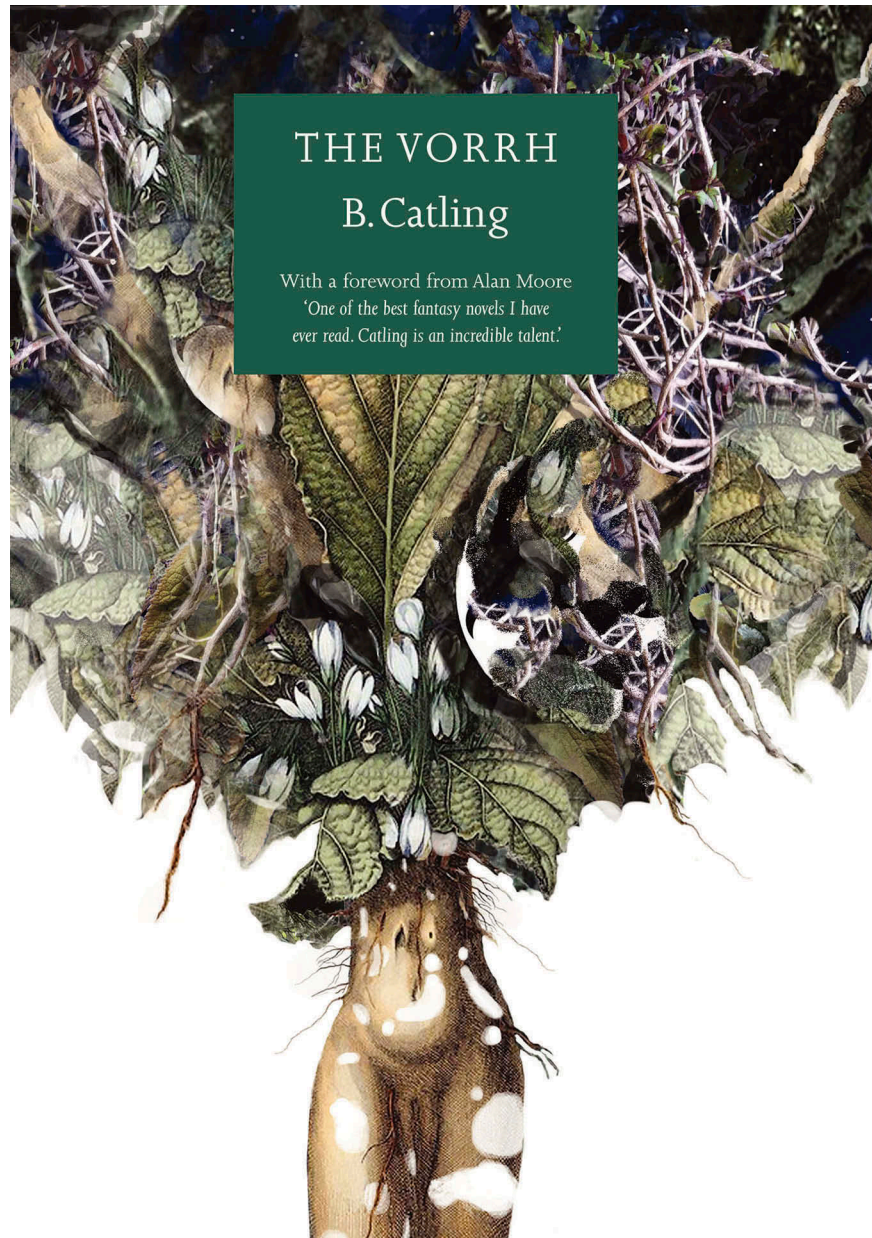
Fabulous images and intercessors: Brian Catling

Brian Catling is a sculptor, performance artist, filmmaker, poet and novelist. More generally, he might be described as simply a 'maker' insofar as even his text works have a certain kind of material 'weight'

to them (as well as being products of a very singular imagination). His recent surrealist/fantasy novel *The Vorrh* is a case in point (Figure 2).[27] This is written in a very distinctive style, and Catling has remarked in interview how the novel more or less wrote itself (as he also remarks in the interview, when asked where he gets his ideas and images: 'It's like someone is talking in my ear').[28] It is this sense of being channelled – of both being by Catling and not by him at the same time – that gives the novel its very particular 'flow' and other-worldly character. In relation to my comments above, there is a sense that Catling is not the sole author of this and others of his works – that they are also, in some sense, a collective endeavour involving other, non-human, entities and forces.

The title of *The Vorrh* is borrowed from Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*, in which it names a large primeval forest. This terrain, in Catling's hands, becomes the eponymous hero of his novel.[29] Roussel's forest is brought alive, along with a series of equally fantastic and finely drawn protagonists that journey across (and into) it. Avatars that are, as it were, yet to come, but also recognizable, to a certain extent, from our own past. Like the forest and city of 'Essenwald' that sits on its borders, these are syncretic creations and creatures. Take for example the hunter 'Tsungali', an entirely believable (but fantastic) medieval afrofuturist complete with fetish object Enfield rifle. Indeed, in Catling's writing, a pagan pre-modern is entwined with both the modern (the novel is 'set' after the First World War) and a strange post-modernity that itself loops back to the pre-modern. Or, as Alan Moore puts it in his foreword to *The Vorrh* (Moore's account of the novel is itself a statement of the power and importance of mythopoesis): Catling 'builds a literature of unrestrained futurity out from the fond and sorry debris of a dissipating past'.[30]

The book throws up many startling images and memorable narrative sequences (for example, at the beginning there is a detailed account of the careful construction of a magical bow from 'Este', a dismembered lover). Catling has remarked that fiction allows him to 'make' the installations that would be impossible in real life – and there is something about the above kinds of narrative episode (and there are many similar) that have a certain realism to them, despite their fantastic character. Félix Guattari develops the concept of 'fabulous images' for those descriptions that cross over from fiction to life, ultimately 'producing another real, correlative to another subjectivity'.[31] Guattari has in mind Jean Genet's writings on the Black Panthers and how, overnight as it were, they changed a whole style of life, but he also suggests that:

one can legitimately broaden this expression to all the imaginary formations that, from this same perspective, acquire a particular – transversal – capacity to bridge times of life, existential levels as much as social segments, even – why not – cosmic stratifications.[32]

'Fabulous images' operate as connectors between regimes, bridges between the different levels of life, both real and imaginary. They can offer up a point of inspiration around which a different kind of construction can begin to occur and, ultimately, attain consistency. Here fiction operates as the friction – the cohering mechanism – for the production of difference. *The Vorrh* is

composed of just such images that have this traction outside the novel (despite or because of their fictional character), allowing something else (an alternative mode of existence perhaps?) to coalesce around them.

There is, however, also a strange postcoloniality about the imagery (for example, in a figure such as Tsungali). As Michael Moorcock writes of Catling (in his review of *The Vorrh*): 'His theses are the many forms of psychic and physical colonisation'.[33] Although at times compelling, this is also a problematic aspect of the novel. *The Vorrh*, we might say, is an effort at decolonization, but written from a colonized mind: it offers up a different future premised on a rewriting of the past but from the perspective of a European imaginary. In its turn to a kind of ruined imperialism alongside a 'reconstructed' (and somewhat imaginary) Africa (alongside other landscapes such as an Irish peat bog), the novel belies a very particular attitude to the foreign, doubling the temporal syncretism with a spatial one in which different continents collide and intermingle (this collapsing of landscapes alongside various temporal feedback loops and a certain residual coloniality resonates with the writings of Burroughs).[34]

Moore's foreword also pinpoints something else that is crucial about this work of fiction: the way it does not seem to fit neatly into any existing literary category but arrives, as it were, *sui generis* (to use a term from Moorcock's review). The book has a certain singular and, indeed, untimely character in this sense (not unlike a Ballard novel). It creates its own scene or vibe (a kind of future-past Englishness). Might we even say it constitutes its very own genre (and thus the terms by which it might be approached)?[35] In mythopoetic terms, it is this differ-ence from the existent (not just from the world, but also from typical literary genres) that gives the novel a certain power (of otherness) from within this world.

Nonetheless, once again, it is also the way the book's content is con-nected to our reality that gives it a certain power of fictioning. In particular, the fictional characters intermingle with real historical figures (Edward Muybridge and William Gell for example – alongside the author Roussel, referred to as the 'Frenchman'), who have themselves been fictioned (in *The Vorrh*, history and biography are a kind of material to be played with). We might also turn here once more to Deleuze's own comments on the mythopoetic character of certain fictions (again, Deleuze has cinema in mind) that involve real historical figures as inter-locutors and, with that, 'the possibility of the author providing himself with "intercessors", that is, of taking real and fictional characters, but putting these very characters in the position of "making up fiction", of "making legends", of "story-telling"'.[36]

In Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* – a psychogeographical drift through an increasingly disappearing London – this fictioning moves in another direction, with Catling himself operating as intercessor in Sinclair's narrative.[37] In his book, Sinclair describes Catling as 'the English Beuys' and there is certainly something about the materials (and expanded practice) of both that resonates, alongside a certain amount of self-mythologization that Sinclair himself embellishes. Indeed, Catling is compared to Dr Dee, written about as an 'Elizabethan Jesuit' and a 'wandering scholar and magician', as

well as a practitioner of 'the shamanism of intent', which is the title of the chapter that deals with Catling (amongst other mavericks).[38] In relation to this use of intercessors, we might also note that Catling also plays himself – as 'The Object' – in the contemporary artist Nathaniel Mellors' own mytho-poetic fictioning, *Our House* (2010–2016).

In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair attends in particular to Catling's writing (prior to *The Vorrh*) and, especially, the poetry volume *The Stumbling Block* – 'written sculpture' as he calls it[39] – but he also makes the connection between this and Catling's other work, all of which, as I suggested above, has this distinctive feel for, and manipulation of, materials (the different aspects of Catling's practice, for Sinclair, constituting a 'single energy field' in this sense). Regarding *The Vorrh*, Moore also highlights the materiality of Catling's language, writing of the 'alchemy' and 'earthy shamanism' of the novel, how it tells of 'bark, metal, mud and stone', with 'language worked between the fingers into different and surprising contours'.[40] *The Vorrh* then has a content – a narrative – that moves across different terrains, but also this physicality, this presence *as* reality that comes from its particular manipulation of language.

Sinclair also writes about Catling's performances and, in particular, *At the Lighthouse* (1991), performed at Trinity Buoy Wharf, London, in which Catling plays a kind of 'Hogarthian' oracle. Once again there are pre-elements of *The Vorrh* in the use of language *as* sculpture (and in the throwing up of startling images), but also insofar as Catling performs a character much like his own fictional creations. Indeed, following the performance at the lighthouse (and a chance reflection of his own face in a glass door during another performance), Catling further actualizes the Cyclops in future performances (and tells a tale of the 'original' inspira-tion: a real Cyclops preserved in a glass jar in a medical room in Hungary). Finally, in *The Vorrh*, a version of this figure becomes one of the central (and most compelling) characters.[41] There is, we might say, a nesting of fictions in and across Catling's life and work. This operates, as in Nelson's practice, to foreground the fictional nature of our so-called 'reality' (after all, do we not ourselves live a particular personal fiction inside other larger fictions?). There is also this recurrence of certain motifs and avatars that track across the different fields of life and work by functioning, again, as bridges or connectors.

Catling has described film as a fusion between his installation/sculp-ture and the poetry/readings, but, for Catling, it is the novel that is able to take this a step further, allowing, again, the depiction of possibilities that are on one level unrealizable.[42] As well as working across genres and media, Catling also speaks about the importance of working at the limits of any given genre and, indeed, of taking chances with his work.[43] This, after all, is where everything happens. In this respect it is performance, especially, that, for Catling, still maintains a certain experimental character and 'edginess'. In interview Catling has also remarked how his own performances operate through shifting a fiction from one context to another – in order, we might say, to highlight the difference.[44] Could we say that *The Vorrh* also involves this kind of shift

Figure 3. Installation view of Bonnie Camplin at Camden Arts Centre, 2016–17. Courtesy of Camden Arts Centre, Photo: Mark Blower.

in perspective? Indeed, Catling brings performance and fiction together in a practice that moves between genres and perspectives and that, in so doing, he produces images and uses intercessors that shuttle backwards and forwards across what were hitherto seen as the separate regimes of art and life.

Magickal intention and the invented life: Bonnie Camplin

My third and final case study of fiction as mode of existence is Bonnie Camplin, an artist whose expanded practice moves us from mythopoesis per se to what she herself calls a 'myth-science of energy and consciousness research'.[45] Indeed, Camplin uses different media and genres – incorporating drawing and painting, filmmaking, installation and performance – in her exploration of a different way of being in the world or what she also calls the 'invented life' (like Catling, Camplin does not see a separation between her life and art, or, at least, she understands them as being in a reciprocal relation). In this her practice has a certain 'magickal' character, or, at least, refuses more typical knowledge paradigms, economies and protocols (following practitioners such as Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare, the 'k' in magick marks a difference from illusionistic/stage magic, and can be defined as involving both a will to self-determination and as offering a different account of causality).

An example here is Camplin's drawings, which can be understood as themselves an occult technology, often involving quickly executed sketches in which the artist enters an altered state and then, as it were, 'reports back'. These kinds of work (as well as more recent diagrammatic paintings)[46] are, precisely, channelled in this sense of a sidestepping of conscious intention so as to allow 'something else' to come through

(Figure 3). Once again there is the sense that Camplin herself is not the only 'author' at play here (she has described this particular aspect of her practice as being less about cultural production per se than operating as a 'gnostic modality').[47] Other drawings are more laboured and pictorial, involving an investment of time and energy in the picturing of different and detailed dream-like realities. The titles of these works also operate as incantations or spells. Camplin has herself suggested they might be understood as declarations of intent.[48] Camplin's use of language also follows the rubric of the sigil to a certain extent in its focusing and directing of the mind in a very particular manner.[49]

Camplin is interested, then, in the constructed nature of our consensual reality, and, indeed, in how language in general helps produce this particular fiction insofar as it allows certain possibilities but not others. Writing itself is a kind of technology in this sense – and, as such, a practice such as neurolinguistic programming (an interest of Camplin's, as it was of Burroughs') is a form of reality production. But Camplin's drawings and paintings might also be described as themselves having a certain syntax. Indeed, there is a sense that Camplin's *oeuvre* operates through its own particular grammar and logic. It has its own internal semantics. She has also talked about how all her work is connected in this sense – part of a system – and thus what we see in any given presentation is part of a larger whole (the world of the practice, we might say).[50] There is often an implication that there is a 'back story' to the work in this sense: a narrative that needs to be reconstructed – or itself fictioned – by the spectator (and that might well involve recourse to other intentions and forces).

It is also in this sense that the work has its own particular temporality, putting out lines to both the past and the future. In relation to the latter, the work operates as a kind of divination (and Camplin has herself used technologies such as tarot in her practice). As with Nelson, might we even say that her practice writes its own future in this sense (certainly there is this interest, again, in cybernetics and ideas of system-specific temporalities)? It is partly this that gives the work its mythopoetic quality: it constitutes its own very particular space-time – or simply a world – as well as the terms by which that world might be approached (and, as such, it also has much in common with the practices of 'worlding' recently discussed by Donna Harraway).[51]

A further key component of Camplin's practice is her more 'public' (or, at least, publicly funded) installations. These involve para-theatrical set-ups where the distinction between fiction and fact becomes blurred. This can involve the construction of a platform for experiments involving public participation (and in which Camplin might also be a 'performer'), as, for example, with the *DSV Technology* (2014) project at the Liverpool biennale that involved the presentation of 'a magnification technology for the enhanced observation of small objects'. Camplin has spoken about 'entering in to the mythology of the technology' in relation to this work,[52] but we might note, more generally, that Camplin also uses technology to disrupt a certain dominant reality effect, as, for example, with time stretching. Indeed, technology (especially when used contra its intended

purposes) can itself enable a certain kind of magickal practice pitched against more dominant reality principles (this was certainly Burroughs and Gysin's take on the possibilities of audio and visual tape recording).

This more public-facing work can also involve the presentation of an archive, as for example in the *Military Industrial Complex* (2014) installation at the South London Gallery, which itself involved a sustained enquiry into consensual reality and other contemporary belief systems. Part of this exhibition involved filmed interviews with those believing in conspiracy theories – and who might, or might not, have been fabulists. Indeed, this was a fictional set-up about a fictional set-up (although, of course, for some the fiction was, precisely, fact). This foregrounding of a certain perspectivism, but also a nesting of fictions (or of fictions within facts and facts within fictions), produces a certain complexity that the audience/participant enters in to, but also operates, again, to question our accepted definitions of these terms.

The above exhibitions are not ironic, but concerned with a kind of general testing of reality claims.[53] Camplin, we might say, operates with a local idea of truth, one that is mutable and malleable (as she has remarked, we have nothing, really, but our own perspective to go on). The work is then situated on the porous border between fiction and fact: it deals with consensual reality and other possible realities or fictions, but is also, itself, often difficult to place (a recurring question I have about her practice is whether she is making it all up?). Indeed, perhaps the truth/fiction division is, ultimately, the wrong one to focus on – a false dichotomy – when it comes to Camplin's work. Rather, we might say, she offers up other models of truth to place beside (and inside) our more usual ones.

Of particular interest in relation to fiction as mode of existence is also Camplin's intuitive working methodology, which, again, involves a more subjective take on reality as opposed to something ostensibly objective. Reality, for Camplin, does not necessarily obey scientific principles at all but is simply 'produced' through habit (and thus requires other methods of enquiry and interrogation besides [or, at least, alongside] the rational and scientific).[54] Her work is pitched against typical ways of 'making sense' of the world and, especially, against any over-emphasis on a techno-scientific approach (although it is clear that Camplin also has a faith in a certain kind of reason as a possible counter-balance to other all-pervasive and dominant fictions). Again, the practice is not just sometimes 'about' magick but itself operates on magickal principles (another question I return to with Camplin is that of whether she is a witch).

Camplin's practice then offers up to its audience and participants a particular technology (it is marked by a certain obscure generosity in this respect). This is a technology that suggests, if nothing else, that there is something else going on besides that which we typically think or presume we know. There are other, different, agencies and actants at work in our world (and 'in' ourselves) that we might come in to relation with. Camplin has talked about recent work as a letting go of preconceived ideas and models, and, again, of entering a kind of trance state to make the work, but also that she only really sees what she is doing once she is

finished.[55] This play between intention and non-intention – and the trusting in this process – might well be a further characteristic of a mythopoesis that is situated in this world (where else could it be?) but needs to be able suggest something different from both the world as it is and the subject who inhabits it: a practice that allows something else to 'get through' or that 'speaks back' from another space-time.

Finally, Camplin also collaborates with other artists. We might say her work in general develops from certain scenes – themselves composed of groups but also different spaces and places, and other non-human elements – that are also connected to her own involvement in the club culture of London in the 1990s.[56] An example of these collaborations is the group DonAteller, formed with Mark Leckey and Enrico David in the 1990s.[57] A film such as DonAteller's *LondonAteller* (2002) (in which Camplin performs), is itself a performance fiction, a fable about a re-imagined London – post-rave – that is enabled partly through being a collective enunciation.[58] It is also somehow both of its time and yet out of time. There is also a sense in which Camplin's wider practice is 'untimely' and also invents a people who are adequate and appropriate to it (the 'invented life' refers both to Camplin and her audience/participants). Once again, this is an occult practice where typical meaning is stymied and a kind of future state called forth. Her work has this explicitly mythopoetic aspect, setting out markers or coordination points for another world that it also helps summon into being.

Conclusion

In the bringing together of my three mythopoetic case studies of Nelson, Catling and Camplin – around the thematics of sequencing and nesting, images and intercessors, and magic and the invented life – I have alluded to both the performance of fiction and an idea of 'performance fictions'.[59] Indeed, it is this performance – a staging or presentation of difference – that works to open up another world from within this one (it is a technology of immanence in this sense), whilst also demonstrating, through a reflexion, the fictional nature of any given reality, including the one we habitually exist within (and, indeed, the fiction of our typical sense of self). It is this, as I mentioned in my Introduction, that gives the kind of practices above a relevance and, I would argue, an urgency beyond their aesthetic value.

In this way, fictioning might be understood as a kind of device, something akin to an anamorphosis. On the one hand – at an extreme – it can appear as a rupture in consensual reality. It does not quite fit our usual world or dominant regimes of representation. And yet, on the other hand – when the correct stance or posture towards it is assumed – it 'reveals' another world that, we might say, is occluded by this one (there are resonances here with Deleuze's comments on the diagram that can reveal another world of hitherto invisible forces).[60] This is not the promise of another world – not exactly a utopia – but its presence, however minimally, within this one.

As I have suggested, fictioning also involves a further enactment or embodiment of these fictions, a living out of them as real. We might turn once again to Austin Osman Spare here and to his ideas of a practice of

living 'as if' as a way of counter-acting dominant reality and regimes of subject production.[61] Another example would be those Sufi rituals that re-enact historical events – such as martyrdoms – in order to give them a reality (or, at least, to provoke a 'real' emotional response in the ritual's participants).[62] The connections and resonances between these kinds of non-artistic practice and contemporary art would need more detailed attention; certainly each of them – as with my case studies above – involves a kind of performance fictioning of the real. Although each of the above has its own very particular operating protocols and procedures, each is also part of a larger field – as yet to be fully mapped – of fiction as mode of existence.[63]

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Notes

1. Burrows and O'Sullivan, *Mythopoesis/Myth-Science/Mythotechnesis*; O'Sullivan, 'Deleuze Against Control'; O'Sullivan, 'Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality'.
2. See also the companion article to this one, O'Sullivan, *From Science Fiction to Science Fictioning*, where I look to a number of other artists involved in more specifically future-orientated fictions, such as John Russell, who has himself developed his own concept of fictioning in relation to art practice (Russell, 'Autonomy is Not Worth the Paper it is Written On').
3. See www.plastiquefantastique.org for an archive of this practice. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the other members of Plastique Fantastique for continuing explorations and experiments in fiction as mode of existence, and especially David Burrows for conversations that have directly fed in to this article.
4. Carrie Lambert-Beatty also attends to this trend in her article 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility', albeit her take on these fictions (or what she names 'parafictions') is that they tend to be concerned with practices of deception and dissimulation (and with the possibilities of an art activism that arises from this, as with *The Yes Men* or *The Atlas Group*). To quote Lambert-Beatty, from the beginning of her article:

   'Fiction or fictiveness has emerged as an important category in recent art. But, like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor, a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside. It does not perform its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature, but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact' (54).

5. It is especially evident within what is known as the 'speculative turn' of the humanities where a genre of 'theory-fiction' has developed (following, in part, Reza Negarestani's magnificent *Cyclonopedia*. See also, as indicative, The Confraternity of Neoflagellants' (Norman Hogg and Neil Mulholland) neo-medieval fictioning, *thN Lng folk 2go*).
6. Nelson, *Forgotten Kingdom*.
7. Both Burroughs and Ballard, although literary writers, were involved in their own fictioning of the real, as, for example, with Burroughs' ethnopoetic travel journal (written with Allen Ginsberg) *The Yage Letters* and Ballard's fictioning of the landscape in the experimental *The Atrocity Exhibition*. See the chapter on 'The Fiction of the Self' in Burrows and O'Sullivan, *Mythopoesis/Myth-Science/Mythotechnesis* for a more detailed argument about this literary fictioning.
8. For a compelling account of one such installation – along with its literary resources – see Richard Grayson's account of Nelson's work at the Venice Biennale in 2001 in his essay 'The Deliverance and the Patience'.
9. Nelson and Bradley, *Mike Nelson Interviewed by Will Bradley*. Nelson's work is usually displayed in galleries, or, at least, buildings that are clearly demarcated as art spaces. The blurring of fiction/reality becomes especially pronounced, however, when this is less the case, when, we might say, the frame is missing: as, for example, in the work for the 2002 Sydney Biennale *24 Orwell Street*, in which, as Will Bradley suggests in his interview with Nelson, 'the whole building has been incorporated into the work – the interior is altered so that the façade, though unchanged, becomes an intrinsic part of the piece'. Nelson's response is telling:

'There was a curious reaction to the piece in Australia, because it was so completely within the fabric of the city that people had problems dealing with it, with the replication. If it had taken place within the white space of the gallery I think they would have accepted it with more ease'.

10. Barthes, 'The Reality Effect'.

11. Smithson was adept at fictioning. See for example the diaristic *Hotel Palenque* which was originally a slide presentation (and perhaps one of the earliest forms of the 'docu-fiction') (1969); and *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey (1967)*, which records a trip Smithson made to the industrial landscape just outside NYC. Both of these involve a journey 'beyond' Smithson's habitual environment and a re-imagining – or fictioning – of the landscape that operates through Smithson's 'projecting' of his view on to things, whilst also producing an account that is both believable and somehow accurate. Indeed, as with Ballard, after reading Smithson one cannot but see a certain kind of industrial landscape through Smithson's eyes.

12. *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent* also emulated the structure of a previous installation – *TRADING STATION ALPHA CMa* – at Matt's gallery in 1996. See Burrows, review of 'TRADING STATION ALPHA CMa' for an account of the way this work also nested different fictions within it.

13. Nelson and Bradley, '*Mike Nelson Interviewed by Will Bradley*', n.p.

14. I attend further to this idea of an art practice 'writing the future' – in relation to financial instruments such as derivatives (and the practices of US artists Ryan Trecartin and Jacolby Satterwhite) – in O'Sullivan, 'From Financial Fictions to Mythotechnesis'.

15. Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, 'Hyperstition'. For a discussion of hyperstition in relation to accelerationism and art practice see O'Sullivan, 'Accelerationism, Hyperstition and Myth-Science'.

16. The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit text 'Lemurian Time War' identifies Burroughs as a key exponent of this 'hyperstitional practice':

Diagrams, maps, sets of abstract relations, tactical gambits, are as real in a fiction about a fiction about a fiction as they are encountered raw, but subjecting such semiotic contraband to multiple embeddings allows a traffic in materials for decoding dominant reality that would otherwise be proscribed. Rather than acting as transcendental screens, blocking out contact between itself and the world, the fiction acts as a Chinese box – a container for sorcerous interventions in the world. The frame is both used (for concealment) and broken (the fictions potentiate changes in reality).

17. Nelson, *Magazine*.

18. Nelson, *Extinction Beckons*.

19. Jaki Irvine sums up this absent figure, how they are summoned in to presence through certain objects and residues (in this case in the 'Lionheart' installation), but also the post-coloniality of this particular take:

Other bundles of magazines, an American football, a toolbox, fuel cans clutter the floor, testifying to their far-flung origins and to the nomadic eclecticism of their owner. The skins, cages, traps, darts, beer cans, books – all make insinuations about an English drifter whose livelihood is based on gleaning discarded objects from the streets and markets of London, moving from one section of the city to another through Asian, Turkish, Afro-Caribbean, Irish communities … sifting through things whose origins and functions were once known and cared about … things that were made specifically to perform precise functions in certain circumstances … that now, dislocated from their beginnings have turned into so much junk … to be peddled by the growing numbers of poor White British trash (Irvine, *Extinction Beckons*, 46).

20. Nelson's work might also be described as what Raymond Williams once called (in an essay on science fiction) a 'putropia': 'fiction of this type tends to portray a world in which the isolated individual, often the intellectual, is opposed or in confrontation with "the masses"' (see Williams, 'Science Fiction').

21. The third absent 'figure' – alongside the loner and the gang – is the unnamed beast of John Carpenter/H.P. Lovecraft which, in *To the Memory of H.P. Lovecraft* (1999), has literally torn the exhibition space apart.

22. Deleuze discusses Bergson's concept of fabulation (or 'story telling') in the last few pages of *Bergsonism*, where it is portrayed as a mechanism that produces an interval within society through which 'creative emotion' might arise (106–12). Elsewhere, Deleuze deploys the concept of fabulation more specifically in relation to a political project (as bridge between the critical [work] and clinical [author]); see, as indicative, the essay 'Literature and Life', where Deleuze suggests that 'It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people' (4). In terms of minor literature see Chapter 3, 'What is a Minor Literature?' in Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16–27; for a discussion of the minor in relation to contemporary art, Chapter 3, 'Art and the Political: Minor Literature, the War Machine and the Production of Subjectivity', in O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, 69–97. Guattari also attends to literature and is more attuned to fiction's actual connections to lived life: with his concept of transversal 'fabulous images' (or, as he puts it in interview: 'For me, a literary machine starts itself, or can start itself, when writing connects with other machines of desire'; Guattari, 'A Liberation of Desire', 208).

23. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 217.

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244–5. Literary examples are crucial in helping define this principle: Captain Ahab's complex relation with Moby Dick (the 'white wall') and Josephine, the privileged mouse singer of Kafka's mouse society.

25. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 73–9.

26. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 16–22.

27. Catling, *The Vorrh*.

28. Catling and Spragg, 'Brian Catling Speaks to Andy Spragg'.

29. Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*.

30. Moore, 'Foreword', vii.

31. Guattari, 'Genet Regained', 225.

32. Ibid., 220.

33. Moorcock, '*The Vorrh* by B. Catling, Review'.

34. See, for example, the letters/passages by Burroughs in Burroughs and Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*.

35. For further reflections on this question of genre and of art producing its own worlds see O'Sullivan, 'Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality'.

36. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 222.

37. Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*. Sinclair's *oeuvre* might also be described as a kind of mythopoesis and, in particular, a fictioning (and psychogeography) of London.

38. Ibid., 261.

39. Ibid., 256.

40. Moore, 'Foreword', vi.

41. Catling also remarks in interview that during the writing of *The Vorrh* he embarked on a series of small egg tempura paintings of a Cyclops (Catling and Spragg, 'Brian Catling speaks to Andy Spragg').

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. There is more to say here about the relationship between what I have been calling mythopoesis and myth-science. The latter term was coined by Sun Ra as a name for his own practice of fictioning the real, involving a re-engineering of the past (away from that which is typically written in and by White history) and a projection into an alternative future. In Sun Ra's account, ancient Egypt combines with space travel in the production of a specifically different narrative for an immiserated Black subjectivity. For a more sustained discussion of myth-science in relation to contemporary art see Burrows and O'Sullivan, *Mythopoesis/Myth-Science/Mythotechnesis*.

46. See Figure 3. Camplin's show at Camden Arts Centre was with the artist Matt Mullican who himself might be thought of as using fiction as mode of existence and enquiry, in his sketches and diagrams, but also his performances.

47. Camplin, 'Bonnie Camplin'.

48. Ibid.

49. For more on the sigil (especially as discussed by Austin Osman Spare) in relation to art practice see Burrows, 'Self Obliteration through Self Love'.

50. Camplin, 'Introductory Talk'.

51. Harraway, 'Playing String Figures with Companion Species'. See also our discussion in the chapter 'Myth-Science and Feminist World-Building' in *Mythopoesis/Myth-Science/Mythotechnesis* (that also looks to the practices of Kathy Acker and Carolee Schneeman, alongside British artist Oreet Ashery as particular kinds of performance fictions).

52. Camplin, 'Liverpool Biennial 2014 Artist Talk'.

53. It is appropriate, therefore, that one of the invited speakers at the exhibition was John Cussans, whose own practice involves a kind of 'paranoid method' (see Cussans, 'The Para-Psychic Properties of Marmalade').

54. There are resonances here with what Quentin Meillassoux calls 'extro-Science Fiction' and, especially, with the depiction of those worlds in which there is only a certain amount of stability and thus science operates through a kind of 'chronics' (see Meillassoux, 'Metaphysics and Extro-Science Fiction'). See also my discussion of this text in O'Sullivan, 'From Science Fiction to Science Fictioning' that also considers a further example of fictioning: o[rphan]d[rift>]'s *Cyberpositive*.

55. Camplin, 'Introductory Talk'.

56. David Burrows writes well on different contemporary art scenes and the logic of scenes more generally in his 'An Art Scene as Big as the Ritz'. For a discussion of scenes in relation to more counter-cultural/music formations see O'Sullivan, 'Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions', where I discuss CRASS, The Temple ov Psychick Youth and rave culture in relation to fiction as mode of existence.

57. Lecky might also be described, more generally, as working with fiction as a mode of existence. His seminal film, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), involves a fictioning of a very particular scene, with the construction of a narrative (from spliced-together found footage) that links Northern Soul and the Casuals to rave, but also incorporates Leckey's own personal 'mythos' (his experience of being a

Casual in Liverpool in the 1980s, for example). *Fiorrucci Made Me Hardcore* might also be understood as an early example of the 'docu-fiction' (see Note 58). This interest and working method are continued in a recent work, *Dream English Kid 1964–1999AD* (2015) where animation (of his daughter's drawings) and found footage is brought together to produce a mythopoetic visual essay that is both about Leckey (who is a figure in the film) and a fast-disappearing London. Indeed, it is the knotting together of the intensely personal and the more public that produces a very particular perspective or, again, a certain fictioning of the real.

58. There are resonances here with that other filmic fictioning of London, Patrick Keiller's *London* (1994). This is an example of 'docu-fiction', a term coined by Stewart Home for A/V presentations that sit between documentary and film, operating on a porous border between fiction and fact (Home, 'Foreword', 3). See also Agathocleous, 'Postcards from the Apocalypse', 251–69.

59. The term 'performance fictions' was coined by David Burrows to describe a particular contemporary scene of practices in London involving artistic collaborations and collectives such as Pil and Galia Kollectiv, Reaktor, AAS and Plastique Fantastique – as well artists John Cussans and John Russell (see Burrows, 'Performance Fictions').

60. See 'The Diagram' in Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 99–110 and 'From the Archive to the Diagram' in Deleuze, *Foucault*, 1–23.

61. See Burrows, 'Self Obliteration through Self Love'. Acting 'as if' is also a technique deployed in more therapeutic contexts (see the theory and practice of Alfred Adler).

62. For a further visceral example see Oppenheimer's *The Art of Killing* which demonstrates the power of enactment.

63. See O'Sullivan, 'Myth-Science as Residual Culture and Magical Thinking' for a more detailed discussion of magick as both pre-modern technology and mode of existence – and in relation to contemporary art practices (Derek Jarmen and Bruce Lacey for example) that involve a deployment of these other pasts against the impasses of the present.

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