In Wood and Word, or, A Gloss on Documents and Documentation in the Humanities
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Attention in the humanities has lately turned to the re-thinking of established modes and means of publishing. Yet contests about publication in the academy, digital or not; monograph or not; collaborative or not, can distract from the more challenging question of the intellectual quality of the scholarship (Liu 2013). If the major hallmarks of the humanities include critical inquiry, careful hermeneutics, and clear argumentation, then all research in humanistic disciplines should be appraised accordingly—whether in handwritten, printed, digital, or yet another form. That is, scholarly publication in the humanities need not be limited to a particular technological platform; rather, it perdures across platforms. But is the academy prepared to assess work that deviates from the recognised forms and formats associated with ‘digging down and standing back’ (Felski 2015, p. 52)? How are meticulous analysis and lucid reasoning to be performed, communicated, and adjudicated, if not with the written word?

Knowledge was understood in the Middle Ages ‘as a realm of sensorial delight’, which consequently positioned books as objects that could be touched, kissed, chewed over, and digested as a way to grapple with ideas (Camille 1998, p. 40). In the modern academic world, however, such embodied and sensory performance is not the dominant model of knowledge-transmission. Quite the opposite, ideas are to be conveyed primarily through the eye, in a written document. The format of these documents is furthermore delimited by conventions around the accepted mode of sharing scholarship. In the same way that Vismann (2008) observes that files can be understood as a mode of creating a legal identity, the research publication is an act that produces and demonstrates allegiance to a scholarly identity. ‘Naturalised through the social relations established by people working together’ (Poovey 1995, p. 9) and codified as part of disciplinary practice, the regimentations of the page have come to determine the look of knowledge in the academy.

There is nothing miraculous about the form of the written document. It is manufactured through a ‘convergence of social, intellectual, economic, and political forces’ (Nusssorfer 2009, p. 230). A particular kind of document has been produced in the academy that enables the management of activity at a distance, the favoured mode of bureaucratic seeing and knowing. In this disciplinary system, the written document is configured to generate documentation that, in turn, propagates more documentation: Titles to aid abstracting; abstracting
to aid indexing; bibliographic references to aid citation analysis; citation analysis to aid performance assessment; and so on. The cascade of ever more documentary inscriptions is mobilised in ‘a giant “optical device”’ (Latour 1986, p. 19), contriving new phenomena to see and legitimising a different way to see. Thus integrated into the management of academic life, the scholarly document defines what ‘counts’ as knowledge and how to count it. But if reconsidered a site for the exercise of administrative power, the document makes visible the politics of the infrastructures in which it is enmeshed.

What will become evident in the following discussion is how the scholarly document has been organised to aid in its own oversight—how the written document is used as documentable evidence of research activity and how it partakes in its own documentation. In many fields, a ‘publication’ can be as narrowly defined as a peer-reviewed book from an academic press or an article in a particular sort of journal (Biagioli & Lippman 2020, p. 4). Because the book and peer-reviewed article have been so naturalised as to be imperceptible, the written publication will be weighed against two alternatives in the present discussion: a cabinet and a box. This chapter introduces the possibility that humanistic research might be expressed in word or wood and investigates the consequences of such a provocation. Whereas journal articles and books profit from long-standing customs in academic milieux, their counterparts in other forms must strive to establish even the most basic scholarly warrant. Documentary forms signal a particular mode of reception for authors, readers, and librarians. They can communicate a scholarly identity; set expectations; express their acknowledgement of and perform a docility to institutional infrastructures of knowledge. Meanwhile, because the cabinet and box are not generally associated with humanistic output, they offer few clues as to their intellectual tradition or proper interpretation. But by wresting the notion of academic publication from the written document, this chapter offers a way to consider how the ‘gradual articulation of a set of practices (publishing, labeling, traveling, referencing, compiling)’ (Daston 2004, p. 157) inaugurated a scholarly identity that has been taken up as universal. Scholarly identity and practice have, of course, never been free of influence. Indeed, disciplinary communities, universities and their libraries, and academic publishers have long shaped how knowledge is to be expressed and disseminated—for example, helping establish numerical representation as a plausible discursive strategy (Porter 1996; Poovey 1998) or the journal article as a legitimate form of scholarly communication (Bazerman 1988; Csiszar 2018; Dawson et al. 2020). But a historically-informed perspective can help show that such developments are contingent and have come to be accepted over time through concerted effort. As universities continue to forge partnerships with private interests to facilitate the management of academic life, it is of the utmost importance to apprehend the dynamics that are establishing the bounds of what will be recognised as knowledge in the future.
This discussion offers a promontory view on an initiative that devised scholarly publications in the three forms of a cabinet, box, and journal article. Such a prospect will bring into relief many of the practices in the academy related to its documents and documentation. The chapter concerns itself with select dimensions of scholarly publication that are especially apparent from a perspective across wood and word—among them, peer review, assessment, dissemination, citation, and ownership. In an analogous context, Smith explicates the value of inspecting translation for evidence of changes in the practices of knowledge: ‘What we read in, what we leave out, may become visible or at least open to study, once what we have grasped of an expression appears and is fixed in quite another vocabulary’. Such work, particularly when rendered in ‘a different language from the original, may function as rich and firm documentation for even quite subtle shifts in conceptual and perceptual habits’ (1984, p. 27). The particular examples of the Cabinet, Box, and Article examined in this study might therefore be read for evidence of ‘subtle shifts in conceptual and perceptual habits’ in academic life. The making of scholarship in the forms of a cabinet, box, and journal article investigated how the physical manifestation of an argument contributes to its persuasive force; descriptions of those efforts may be found elsewhere (Mak & Pollack 2013a; 2013b; 2020). The present chapter uses the specificity of the practice-based project to adumbrate the relationship between forms of publication and the expectations of the academy. In so doing, it reveals how the scholarly document is implicated in institutional and institutionalised ways of knowing.

This consideration draws upon histories of textual transmission that explore the communication of ideas through time (Wilson & Reynolds 2014). Although emerging from the humanistic traditions of philology and palaeography, the study also shares points of contact with efforts in visual poetics that examine the material expression of letterforms (Drucker 1998); media archaeology that explore the agencies and temporalities of the digital through a framework of new and ‘obsolete’ technologies of recent centuries (Parikka 2012); platform studies that investigate the computer systems that undergird digital games (Bogost & Montfort 2009; Montfort & Bogost 2009); and trans-text and -media studies that are concerned with narrative, writing, performance, and participation across contemporary media (Richards 2017). In an early investigation of new media, Bolter and Grusin (1998) identify a ‘remediation’ that occurs in photography, film, television, and virtual reality, in which technologies seek to erase their own presence according to an aesthetic of transparency. It is in the disappearing act of mediation that this project situates itself. The apparent efficiency of the word as a mode of expression conceals the fact that written documents benefit from customised networks of circulation. Such documents are able to be assessed, described, classified, and moved expeditiously because the system in which they function was developed with and around them. As the ‘same’ argument unfolds
across the forms of a cabinet, box, and peer-reviewed article, we will discover to what extent the scholarly document has been cultivated for academic service.

The first publication—a making public—of the research was staged in a community gallery. A *cabinet of curiosity: the library’s dead time* was an exhibition of sculptures and performance pieces, introduced by a wooden cabinet of two metres in height (Fig. 1). All elements, including the cabinet, were built custom for the event to highlight different aspects of the complex relations between material form and meaning. By conveying scholarship in a register other than that of the typical peer-reviewed article or book, the *Cabinet* exhibition gave cause to examine how certain forms of academic publication are related to disciplinary identity. However, the *Cabinet* first had to establish that it was indeed scholarship, and, furthermore, in the humanities. There is no tradition of academic publishing in the form of joinery that helps locate the *Cabinet* in the landscape of humanistic scholarship. Moreover, the use of sculptures and performance worked outside the disciplinary expectations related to the word. Indeed, the *Cabinet* lacked an important feature of academic publications, that is, a scholarly apparatus. Composed of bibliographical references or citations, this apparatus helps to signal the intellectual orientation of the work (Barney 1991; Rouse & Rouse 1991; Grafton 1999). It identifies the particular disciplinary discussions that are being engaged and indicates the context in which readers should understand the contribution. In journal articles and books, the device manifests as footnotes, endnotes, or a list of bibliographical references documenting a relevant field of research. A wooden cabinet, by contrast, does not have an analogous infrastructure. In eschewing the customs and shorthand of academic communication that would make the work identifiable, the material form of the *Cabinet* had to be deployed in a different way to establish its scholarly *bona fides* and its humanistic orientation.

A cabinet had been selected as the material form for the publication because it not only indexed a particular kind of space and approach to meaning-making, but also embodied it. Rather than citing with word, the *Cabinet* cited with its material form. The cabinet and, indeed, the other pieces of the exhibition in *A cabinet of curiosity: the library’s dead time*, were coordinated to make reference to the cabinets of curiosity of the early modern period. Such cabinets were spaces in which collectors experimented with different ways of ordering and understanding the world, especially as travellers began to return from foreign lands with extraordinary stories and objects that had to be reconciled with conventional knowledge. Not yet set into formalised systems of classification, disparate objects such as botanical oddities, books, religious relics, and works of art were arranged in multiple ways; descriptions might emphasise their curiousness, rarity, and beauty, offering a link between aesthetics and the production of knowledge (Findlen 1996; Stafford 2001). By recalling this tradition as a legitimate way of
knowing, the form of the cabinet signalled a particular approach for the entire exhibition. Namely, the audience was given licence to incorporate sensation in the act of interpretation and transgress the disciplinary boundaries of knowledge-production that now divide the arts, sciences, and humanities (Haskins 1957; Leclerq 1961; Kelley 1997; Forman 2012). The implied references of the Cabinet encouraged a re-appraisal of ways of seeing and knowing that have only recently been separated for codification in different disciplines.

Although the words of a footnote serve to negotiate scholarly credibility by parading intellectual kinships before the eye of the reader, the wood of the Cabinet worked differently. The Cabinet constituted a physical site in which other ways of observing and knowing could be sensed and experienced with the body. As Bowersock observes regarding the practice of citation, there are ‘many other ways of telling the reader why he should believe what he reads’ (1984, p. 54). For academic readers, the wooden cabinet indexed scholarship on early modern ways of knowing by historians Findlen (1996), Daston and Park (1998), and Smith (2004), among others. But the Cabinet’s life-sized reference to the history of cabinets of curiosity also situated and provided the grounds to practise sensation as a legitimate way of knowing. The Cabinet encouraged the audience to reflect on how bodily engagement influenced their interpretation of the publication. That is, did touching and smelling the argument add to its persuasiveness? The negotiation of credibility, then, was located not in the textual documentation of scholarly references but in the ability of the Cabinet to engender an experience that convincingly substantiated its argument—the Cabinet used instantiation to substantiate.

Now imbricated in the management of scholarly activity, the stakes of citing have been raised. Many universities assess academic performance based on a calculation of how often a publication has been mentioned—or cited—by others in recent scholarship, an approach known as citation analysis. Presently conceived, citation analysis compels a standardising of form, style, and convention to facilitate the extraction of bibliographic references. Yet there are sources of inspiration that evade documentation or need no reference. The gifts of the Muses are eternal and their impact is timeless. Influence may manifest as an allusion or imitation of form; it may be expressed in a veiled acknowledgement of debt that is not ratified with a citation in words. Although traditional bibliometric methods have been augmented by tallies of page views, bookmarks, downloads, tags, and shares on social networks in an effort to secure a more comprehensive view of academic performance, these measures nevertheless require research to be arranged and accessed in particular ways (Cronin & Sugimoto 2014). Such metrics shift attention away from the internal characteristics of a publication, such as the quality of its argument or the originality of the contribution. They instead ‘focus on those features of the publication that are external to its claims’, harvesting
elements that ‘are literally at its physical margins: publication title and date, journal titles, citations, references, authors’ names—everything but the content’ (Biagioli 2018, p. 255). The measures suppose, moreover, that the effect of scholarship—its influence on and use by others—results in traces that are also documented and documentable. And it is these visible traces that are now constituted as interchangeable units of evidence in the final reckoning of scholarly performance.

Although bibliographic citations have been collected since at least the third century as research aids for scholars, it is in the last fifty years that such data have been deployed to assess the performance of scholars. Throughout the nineteenth century, judicial decisions in the United States were traced through time so that lawyers could quickly ascertain whether a particular case was authoritative in terms of establishing precedent (Shapiro 1992; Ogden 1993; Wouters 1999). In Frank Shepard’s Adhesive annotations of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and his later Citations, cases were annotated with codes to signal whether a judgment had subsequently been affirmed, questioned, modified, or overturned. Because the references were to case law, they could not be mistaken as an indicator of the performance of legal professionals—except, of course, when it emerged that someone had failed to conduct a comprehensive check of the authority of a ruling (Ogden 1993, p. 42). This tradition formed the basis of Eugene Garfield’s initiative, the Science citation index, which amassed bibliographical information that tracked when a scientific journal article appeared in the notes or reference lists of other publications. Although developed as an ‘association-of-ideas index’ (Garfield 1955, p. 108) to aid a thorough search of related literature and thus discourage redundant publications, the Science citation index was quickly taken up to study the behaviour of scholarly communities—for example, examining the nature of scientific consensus or the emergence of new ideas (Wouters 2014; Csiszar 2020). That turn having been made, the path was cleared for deploying citation analysis to measure the performance of those same scholarly communities.

The involvement of the private sector has further intensified the use of citation metrics in the academy. Information traffickers have monetised the collection and analysis of bibliographic data and consequently saturated the field with market-driven rhetoric about the utility of their metrological products. One such company, is Clarivate, a self-anointed ‘global leader’ that provides ‘trusted insights and analytics to accelerate the pace of innovation’ (Clarivate n.d.a). Seeking to maximise return on its ownership of Garfield’s Science citation index (now part of a collection called Web of science), Clarivate uses its bibliometric data to compile an annual list of Highly cited researchers that recognises the ‘world’s most influential researchers of the past decades, demonstrated by the production of multiple highly-cited papers that rank in the top 1% by citations for field and year
in *Web of science*’ (Clarivate n.d.b). The characterisation makes explicit that a research paper that has been mentioned frequently by other publications should be assumed to be influential or even, it is insinuated, of some quality. Enamoured with the convenience of this proxy, many universities permit quality to be perceived as a function of quantity. The same citation metric from this perspective can therefore be extended to be interpreted as an indicator of the quality of not only the particular article, but also the researcher who produced it (Biagioli 2018; Wouters 2020).

One of Clarivate’s major competitors in academic bibliometrics is Elsevier, a publisher of 2,500 scientific journals, which reported revenues of £2,637m in 2019 (RELX n.d., p. 12; p. 15). Also among its assets are Scopus—described as ‘the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature’—and CiteScore, a citation metric that draws data from the Scopus database (Elsevier n.d.b; 2020b). Jockeying for market share, Elsevier takes pains to explicate the methodological differences between its citation tool and its more established rival, the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), owned by Clarivate (Elsevier 2020a). Although Elsevier had introduced other analytical indicators before the launch of CiteScore in 2016, such tools were never ‘as popular as the JIF’ (Van Noorden 2016, p. 325). Both CiteScore and the JIF track how many times a serial or journal has been mentioned by other publications within a specific timeframe. In other words, the ‘impact factor’ is derived from the number of times the title of a journal—not an article—is listed in the bibliographical references of another publication. Despite widespread cautions against using CiteScore or the JIF to perform granular assessments, ‘researchers are judged by the impact factor of the journal in which their work appears, rather than by what they actually write’ (Van Noorden 2016, p. 325). The impact of a forthcoming article is probably close to none, having been read and discussed by very few. But the article-to-be is nevertheless is considered more valuable if it is to appear in a journal with a high impact factor because it is perceived to have a better chance of receiving a greater number of citations in that venue than if published elsewhere (Biagioli & Lippman 2020, p. 7).

Another of Elsevier’s products is Pure, which offers modules customised for various national assessment schemes. These schemes include the Research Excellence Framework in the United Kingdom, as well as the Higher Education Research Data Collection and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). Pure consolidates bibliometric data from Elsevier’s portfolio to help institutions ‘improve their performance’ by delivering reports on ‘researchers’ activities, areas of expertise and accomplishments’ (Elsevier n.d.a). When questioned about the company’s relationship with academia, the chairman of Elsevier, Y.S. Chi—a former trustee of Princeton University and current trustee of Princeton University Press—bluntly stated, ‘Our business is absolutely contingent on the competition among researchers and the assessment of their research’ (Schonfeld 2018). As
evidence of the traction gained in academic circles for performance evaluation, Elsevier was selected by the Australian Research Council as the sole provider for citation data for the ERA assessments of 2010, 2012, and 2015 (Elsevier 2014), and Clarivate was named for the assessment of 2018 (Australian Research Council 2018). In this configuration of the academic reward system, the leading desideratum is the potential to be highly cited, and, indeed, in ways and venues that make such references visible to the instruments that dominate the market. The savvy scholar may then puzzle over whether to excoriate their adversaries in print (the explicit citations nevertheless improving the bibliometric scores of the opposing side) or to condemn with silence. Thus interlocked with commercial and institutional interests—and the performance assessments of colleagues, friends, and rivals—citation has become an important political act.

The Cabinet engaged the ongoing debates around the measurement of scholarly performance by invoking the notion of ‘dead time’ in the title of the publication and in the sculptural argument of the Cabinet itself. In the context of cinema studies, Doane (2002) explains that dead time refers to events that are edited out of a film because they are considered unproductive to the final narrative. Biddick (2009) goes further, noting that dead time is not only about selective seeing, but also and more consequentially about selective archiving. Dead time, then, can refer to activities that are devalued and made imperceptible when systems favour other sorts of work. As instantiated in the Cabinet, a collection of the unseen and unregistered ‘dead time’ of scholarly work challenged the metrics that are currently used to assess performance in the academy (Fig. 2). On display were paper forms from the University Library, dating from the early part of the twentieth century. These documents transmitted various measurements of work related to research that included counts of librarian-patron interactions, the duration of the exchanges, and numerical representations of the effort expended. Next to these devices were other models of adjudicating the work of research, including laboratory glassware containing a ‘good sum’ of bitter tears that had been collected from a frustrated researcher and ‘a noble accumulation’ of sweat from the brow of a librarian (Fig. 3).

When a limited set of activities have been defined and validated as ‘research work’, other practices—specifically those that have been rendered difficult or impossible to measure according to those same gauges—are never entered into the archive of academia. Yet, as the Cabinet sought to remind the audience with its material form, this system of observation was not always the default mode of perceiving the world; it is instead the manifestation of a ‘visual epistemology’ that rationalises a particular way of seeing and representing the world (Daston & Lunbeck 2011; Bleichmar 2012, pp. 45–45). The argument is not that scholarship cannot be quantified for measurement, but rather that anything can, if so nominated by administrative imperative (Joseph 2014, p. 140). To raise this point
for discussion, modern scientific equipment was marshalled in the Cabinet to make visible the practices that are routinely passed over in contemporary valuations of research activity. For example, specimen jars borrowed from a laboratory bestowed a kind of authority upon samples of bodily effluvia in a resurrection of the dead time of scholarship. Fixed under glass, a scholar’s tears of frustration were offered for scientific analysis. The Cabinet thus instantiated a new ‘centre of calculation’ (Latour 1986, p. 32) in which lachrymae could be presented as quantifiable, interchangeable, and transportable. The juxtaposition of various approaches to evaluating scholarly performance suggested that the work of research could equally be adjudicated by the smell of perspiration as by the data analytics that are currently in favour. It furthermore suggested that things which appear commensurable have been made so by design and furthermore transmit their own logic of assessment. All measures ‘construct a commensurability that did not exist before their own calibration. Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else’ (Latour 1993, p. 113). The Cabinet made evident that other approaches of marking and classifying scholarly activity are no more or less credible than the prevailing method that has been institutionalised. Taking advantage of its material form, the Cabinet enacted this dynamic in its presentation of observing, understanding, and acknowledging different aspects of scholarly activity.

Because the Cabinet could not be easily shared with people around the world, the second phase of the project engaged the issue of dissemination. A new publication was proposed in the form of a portable, suitcase-sized box (Figs. 4 and 5). The Box was also composed with wood but operated on a different scale. Travel restrictions concerning carry-on luggage, liquids, and hazardous materials, as well as the limitations of budget and feasibility, were taken into account in the construction of the Box. Despite its purposeful design, the material form of the Box remained a challenge to circulating the research, a stark reminder of the extent to which the written document has been domesticated. The Box had to be hauled through one of Greece’s record-breaking heat waves; trundled over cobbled streets in Copenhagen; and navigated through traffic in Washington, D.C. and London in support of dissemination. Its contents needed to be packed for transport, laid out on arrival at its publication venue, explicated, and then packed up again. As the attempt to disseminate research in the form of the Box illustrates, what ‘shareable’ has come to mean and for what end has been strategically cultivated by the infrastructures that moderate the practice of scholarship.

The Cabinet and Box disseminate research beyond the walls of the academy in ways that the journal article or scholarly monograph do not. They circulate scholarship through site-specific performance, calling upon and responding to local expertise in their engagement of knowledge practices that extend beyond the written document. Aiming to exhilarate and invigorate, the Cabinet and the Box
exert influence by inspiring reflective practices; they are not designed to prompt citation. The Cabinet and the Box are intended to stimulate thinking that might be shared with friends and family, and they encourage the rehearsal of other ways of knowing on whatever timeline might be appropriate. For instance, marking its departure from scholarly convention, the Cabinet dislocated academic readers from their usual spaces of knowledge-exchange. Installed in a community gallery, the Cabinet provided an opportunity for a heterogeneous audience of those who do not regularly participate in citation to experience scholarship with their academic counterparts who do. Multiple groups came together in time and space to ‘read’ the publication and practise diverse ways of knowing. Meanwhile, the Box was shared in different geographical regions with an international audience of students and scholars from various disciplines. The Box developed an ever-changing list of influences as its constituent parts were revised each time to index more apprehensible bodies of scholarship and knowledge practices. In addition, the Box was received by inquisitive taxi drivers and audio-visual technicians around the world who were ‘readers’ and partners in its publication, but not occupied with generating visible traces of their interest in documented form. Indeed, the reaction sought from the audience was not one of citation. The Cabinet and Box therefore test the bureaucratic eye: They do not cite with word and they are themselves difficult to cite. They share research and produce effects, but not in ways that make the impact perceptible by current techniques of surveillance. Such contributions are therefore classified as ‘bibliometrically unsuitable research achievements’ (Ball 2017, p. 65). Whereas the scholarly paper has been refined to generate a fixed list of bibliographic references to other publications and solicit references to itself in other publications, the forms of a cabinet and box have not. ‘Writing’ with wood thus exposed assumptions about how documents of scholarship are expected to perform and, specifically, in relation to the documentation of scholarly activity.

Under the intensifying exigencies of documentation, components of the written document that were once provisional become obligatory and codified through practice. Indeed, certain features of documentary records from the sixth century onwards began to be enshrined as formal requirements—‘formalities with legal force’—as authority shifted to the document itself and away from agents who could attest to its trustworthiness (Vismann 2008, p. 72). Once simply a sealant, the seal was granted the faculty and responsibility of being its own authenticating mechanism. The document consequently emerges as a ‘training ground for administrative routine’ (p. 101) and its regimentation an important exercise of bureaucratic power. The prioritising of managerial efficiency in academia has similarly consecrated a particular form of the document. It is around a standardised conception of scholarship and its documents that the academy has configured grant competitions; categories that identify and assess contributions; and library practices that help organise, circulate, and preserve the research. From
this perspective, the application of creativity risks producing non-conforming documents that do not ‘do’ what they need to do to support their own administration. In a framework that orients scholarly practice towards market-driven calculations of efficiency, several core priorities of the humanities will be rendered dead time or, worse, acknowledged but ascribed little or no value. For example, although it has been said that writing ‘is the cheapest way to reach a big audience’ (McCloskey 1985, p. 188), writing well emerges as a liability. Economist Jack C. High had already observed some thirty years ago that ‘good writing has a lower economic value and a higher opportunity cost’. He explains, ‘good writing requires long study, hard thought, and repeated edits…. If the goal is to publish, writing well misdirects time and labour’ (1986, pp. 543, 544). Imbricated in the operations of management, the scholarly document—and thus practice—is policed closely by administrative procedure.

To permit a closer inspection of how writing may be a liability even within the confines of a document, the third publication of the project adopted the form of the journal article. The Article, having been composed with word, was more ostensibly a written document (Fig. 6). It could be integrated into the existing infrastructures of academic publishing, and therefore offered the opportunity to scrutinise the system of peer review. In contrast to citation metrics that allow any observer to perform an audit by checking features that are external to the claims of a scholarly paper, peer review relies on specialist knowledge and focuses on the evidence, argument, and quality of the contribution (Biagioli 2018, p. 255). Although peer review is sometimes preferred for its individualised and discipline-specific approach, Wouters observes that relying on the assessment of expert colleagues can nevertheless hinder radical advances in scholarship. Peer review may ‘delay interdisciplinary innovation because this often entails not only a reconfiguration of substantive or methodological research areas, but may also mean a redefinition of the very criteria of what counts as high quality research’ (2020, p. 72). Set within the current reward infrastructure, he notes that peer review can actively work against innovation because such contributions do not conform to standard expectations. Indeed, innovative scholarship is often deemed innovative precisely because it eludes the usual measures of time, space, and influence.

In the same way that the Cabinet and the Box employed wood to stimulate an aesthetic response in support of their argument, the Article mobilised the printed word. The visual arrangement of the Article intimates its deviation from the typical journal submission. With a glance, readers might already surmise that they are to embark on another way of grappling with ideas. The words of the Article draw attention to themselves in an acutely visible way; they suggest that the activities of reception and interpretation are to be performed by the audience in the reading of the journal article (Auslander 2016, p. 6). The layout of the page was
configured to suggest to readers that they are exploring a cabinet of curiosity. To that end, the text was divided into subsections that described each item in detail and offered an analysis. Also serving the performance of the argument was the prose itself. As the words on the page verbally explicate the role of material form in the shaping and mediation of knowledge, so too do they physically embody it. The shapely letterforms and layout invite the reader to experience—and then consider—how the materiality of the Article strengthens its own argument by participating in it. Working within the infrastructures of academic publishing, the Article performs research with word but nevertheless tests the limits of the scholarly document.

Scholarship in wood might have predictably been difficult to integrate into the infrastructures of academic publishing, but the Article—despite having been written with word—likewise proved a challenge. The process of peer review made evident that the Article did not match the expectations regarding genres of academic publication, which may be understood as ‘social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact’ (Jameson 1982, p. 106). The divergent peer reports indicated that some readers had struggled to understand the research or its project. Without explicit instruction to do otherwise, these reviewers had assumed that the Article was participating in the tradition of performance-documentation in the arts (Auslander 2016, p. 1). They expected a comprehensive description of the show: A reprise with word, accompanied by an extensive account of audience reaction, a floor plan, and a full set of images that would provide witness to the event. The Article, they reasoned, should act archivally, functioning as a recording—as documentation—of a historical moment. One reader indicated that the article should furthermore provide enough information so that others might arrange a similar event. The overtly designed layout of the page, the organisational structure of the article, and the analytical discussion were seen to be interfering with the depiction of the past spectacle as it had unfolded; these authorial choices were considered inappropriate interventions.

Caught between disciplinary genres and imperatives, the Article could be mistaken as an attempt to reproduce a work that had been performed and completed elsewhere, for and to a different audience. But the Article was not designed to provide a faithful recording of a past event—it does not reproduce; it produces. The notion of reproducibility has recently emerged as a fundamental concern in some areas of scientific research, often said to account for investment by validating results. Tendered as an important procedure of stabilisation for scientific knowledge, the successful repetition of the same experiment is by no means a metric of universal application if considered historically and across the disciplines. Reproducibility in the humanities is tantamount to plagiarism. As early as antiquity, imitation was recognised as a valuable educational technique. But
Quintilian argues in his *Institutio oratoria* that although of some merit, the copying of models should give way to mature judgement towards the goal of progress, that is, improving upon past achievements: ‘Nothing grows by imitation alone’ (Inst. 10.2.9). Indeed, humanistic research is not usually formulated as a reproduction of an earlier achievement (Mak & Pollack 2016). The ambition, then, is not to replicate or repeat. Instead, each contribution proposes and is valued for its unique iteration of an idea.

But how is the quality of uniqueness to be assessed by standardised measures? The current metrics of the academy rely on a credible abstraction from scholarly practice from which an apparatus of normalisation can be developed. This abstraction must be based on particular examples in order to be defensible; the abstraction is also distanced far enough from the characteristics of any specific instance that it can acquire a moral neutrality. The grounds for measurement and its calibration have been cultivated by and for a particular perspective, but—under the cover of abstraction—the metric assumes an air of authoritativeness that permits it to be imposed as an objective and universal standard. Poovey explains:

> Modern abstraction…derives from the imposition of a conceptual grid that enables every phenomenon to be compared, differentiated, and measured by the same yardstick. Such comparisons and measurements, of course, produce some phenomena as normative—ostensibly because they are more numerous, because they represent an average, or because they constitute an ideal towards which all other phenomena move. (1995, p. 9)

With the assessment of academic performance yoked to this abstracted way of seeing, some scholarly practices are fixed as an ideal towards which all others should now tend. The normalising effect in the academy will be profound, likely to ‘change the criteria for future scientific and scholarly performance’ (Wouters 2014, p. 49). Cronin characterises the dynamic simply: ‘The easier data capture is, the richer the picture of use and performance that can be produced’ (2014, p. 6). A vivid example of the unresolved tensions between humanistic research and the needs related to its ‘data capture’ is described by Tibbo:

> Humanists frequently use vague or metaphorical titles for their writing, both fictional and nonfictional, which lend little evidence as to what the body of the text is about…. Humanities scholars may also strive to make their writing “dense” rather than “readable.” While this may win them scholarly accolades, it can make comprehension of the text difficult for anyone, including indexers and abstractors, except a small cadre of subject experts. This may result in poorly written document surrogates. (1994 p. 609)

Scientific papers are amenable to the extraction of descriptive information by non-specialists because they are frequently organised into distinct sections that identify the purpose, methodology, results, and conclusion of the contribution. Moreover, terminology may be tightly monitored by controlled vocabularies, which further
aids the management of the documents. These customs that regulate the scholarly document in the sciences are rarely observed in the humanities. Similarly, legal scholarship follows different conventions and is therefore difficult for traditional bibliometrics to capture. Didactic articles, commentaries, and hearings are considered important achievements in law, but ‘completely fall through the bibliometric cracks’ (Ball 2017, p. 64).

As Poovey (1995; 1998) and Porter (1996) have shown, some disciplines were configured for external assessment from the outset as part of negotiating their claims to authority and are therefore equipped to respond swiftly to the bureaucratised audits that are presently in favour. Meanwhile, disciplines that were not constituted with these mechanisms as an integral dimension of their practice struggle to rationalise their contributions according to the market-driven conceits of accounting and accountability (Newfield 2009, p. 279; Joseph 2014, pp. 140–148; Biagioli 2018, pp. 271–272). Having discovered that their documents are not optimally configured for the bureaucratic eye and its reward structure, many established fields are modifying their routines. For example, some scholars have embraced select English-language or international venues of publication to increase the visibility of their work in citation metrics. But studies in law, literature, history, and archaeology frequently have regional or national foci; such work might have greater impact if published in a venue devoted to a specific time period or geographical context. In these areas, then, publishing in international journals may not be as desirable as it might be in the natural sciences—yet the metrics are still oriented towards this ideal (Ball 2017, p. 59). The gaming of the reward system may therefore result in a significant reduction of high-quality research of local, regional, or national interest and furthermore raises the question of what ‘sharing’ means and with whom (Hicks et al. 2015, p. 430). Already made into dead time by bibliometric judgment, scholarship that does not receive the support of institutional recognition may languish. In that case, ‘the notion of knowledge itself as an important aspect of human culture would no longer be an important leitmotiv of universities’ (Wouters 2020, pp. 67–68).

Despite the challenges posed by the Cabinet, Box, and Article to the surveillance and management of scholarship, all three publications were readily handled by the institutional grip on intellectual property. The comprehensive documentation by the university on the topic of ownership reveals another way in which scholarly output has been constituted a site for the exercise of administrative control. Books, journal articles, educational software, and ‘works of artistic imagination’ are considered by the university as ‘traditional academic copyrightable works’ (University of Illinois 2019, Art. III, Sec. 2.b). In general, the intellectual property rights over such materials remain with the creators. However, any work produced with ‘funds under the control of or administered by the University’ (Sec. 5) is owned by the institution. Accordingly, the rights over the Cabinet and the Article
are both retained by the creators. The *Box*, in contrast, having been funded in part by a university grant, is classified as the property of the public institution—and, consequently, the state of Illinois. There were nevertheless benefits to having the *Box* placed in the same category as office furniture: Expenses related to its dissemination were permitted to be reimbursed; these costs included local transportation involving the conveyance of the *Box* by taxi to a conference venue and postage to send its contents overseas. But human travel was not considered essential to the act of publication. As a result, other sources of funding had to be secured in order for the creators to accompany the *Box* and explicate its argument in support of dissemination. Although the publications of *Cabinet*, *Box*, and *Article* offer alternative ways to think about classification and knowledge-production, the respective pieces themselves were entangled in institutional infrastructures that dictated what they were and how they should be managed. As the documentation regarding intellectual property shows, significant attention has been paid to formulating a conception of scholarly work that expedites normalisation and control. It seems that where considered an institutional priority, it is indeed possible to devise an expansive definition of scholarship that accommodates a range of practices and products.

One of the aims of the tripartite project was to create a momentary interruption during which some of the infrastructures that discipline academic practice were made visible for investigation. The infrastructures supporting scholarship have been carefully refined over centuries and the tenets of classification continue to play a role in articulating the boundaries of knowledge, both within the university and without (Bowker & Star 1999; Clark 2000 & 2006; Garberson 2006; Grafton 2006; Adler 2017). Such schemes can be read both as historical relics of the society that produced them and as disciplinary systems that configure how knowledge is—for the moment—understood. The forms of a cabinet and box were deliberately selected for the initiative because they do not ‘conform to the abstract character of market value’ (Kula 1986, p. 123) and are thus more able to expose the metrological fictions in question. The *Cabinet* and *Box* sought to frustrate the bureaucratic sleight that so easily converts research activities into discrete units in an accounting of academic performance—they do not cite in a conventional manner and were not designed to stimulate documentable effects; they lack the portability and interchangeability assigned to the written document. Meanwhile, composed with word, the *Article* that cites and is citable may still challenge the bounds of the scholarly document in the academy. The trajectories of the *Cabinet*, *Box*, and *Article* reveal in what ways the research publication has already been shaped by administrative routine and to what extent administrative routine has already been written into scholarly practice. As an arena for the exercise of surveillance, measurement, and management, the scholarly document now underwrites and authenticates a bureaucratic mode of seeing knowledge.
The foregoing discussion of a historically-informed experiment in academic publishing raises for consideration how specific practices of knowledge have been legitimised over time. Making visible and grappling with the infrastructures that shape knowledge-production is key to understanding fundamental assumptions related to what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is counted. The moments of friction encountered by the Cabinet, Box, and Article provide clues about how certain forms of knowledge gain traction over time. Conceiving publications as unique performances of meaning may stimulate alternative strategies of assessment, interpretation, and dissemination that are cognisant of—and work in concert with—the diverse forms at issue. The project furthermore sheds light on new modes and technologies of publication which emerge from this study as less revolutionary when compared with cabinets or boxes that can present distinct and acute challenges to the long-standing activities of collection, curation, circulation, and citation that have been organised around a particular form of the written document.
Figures

Fig. 1. The cabinet in *A cabinet of curiosity: the library's dead time*.

Fig. 2. Seeing ‘dead time’ in the *Cabinet*. 
Fig. 3. Sweat from the brow of a librarian in the *Cabinet*.

Fig. 4. The *Box* in its closed position.
Fig. 5. The Box, prepared for dissemination.

Fig. 6. The Article.
Reference List


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