HELEN HUGHES
An editorial approach: Mike Nelson's corridors and *The Deliverance and The Patience*

ABSTRACT

This essay contrasts the contemporary British artist Mike Nelson's approach to constructing his large, multi-room installations with his approach to editing the numerous artist books that he has produced since 2000. This comparison reveals several compositional symmetries between the two, namely pertaining to narrative non-linearity and meta-fictionality. The logic of montage is shown to similarly underscore both the books and the installations. This essay argues that the corridors connecting the different rooms of Nelson's installations function in a similar way to the logic of montage: they play an integral role as the support that binds the structure of the installation (its multiple rooms) together as a whole. This essay argues that the corridor is the primary viewing framework of the installation for the viewer, and that this vantage point is significant because the necessarily partial vision of the installation from the space of the corridor demonstrates the logic of installation art more broadly. I conclude by mapping the key compositional elements of Nelson's artist books onto his installations, taking the 2001 work *The Deliverance and The Patience* as a case study, to show that the books do not exemplify the artwork as with traditional exhibition catalogues, but rather parallel it. That is, a structural continuity is established between these two facets of his work.

When asked to articulate the ideas underpinning his work, Mike Nelson — a notorious bibliophile — firmly states that fiction comes first and theory comes second.[1] When Nelson began studying sculpture in the late 1980s at the University of Reading, where he was required to theoretically frame his practice, he found that fiction provided an equally apposite — if not better — armature for his work than the academic texts prescribed by the department's curricula. Nelson's sculptural and installation-based works are often predicated on a tightly woven web of references to myths, conspiracy theories, alternative histories, films and novels. While he never "illustrates" a particular literary point of reference with an artwork, Nelson does deliberately draw on several compositional qualities (like non-linearity, meta-fictionality, and montage) derived from the specific literary and filmic sources that he cites when constructing his installations. For instance, Nelson has a stated interest in 'stories [that] negate a traditional Western linear narrative; [where] an atmosphere is created from something not definable by categories such as geography, culture or time'.[2] The sprawling, multi-directional nature of his large-scale installations — which viewers must navigate individually, creating unique jump-cuts through series of rooms via interconnecting corridors — clearly echo this preference for non-linear narrative composition.

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Artist books

Nelson's preference for supporting his work with fictional rather than exegetical or typically academic texts is reflected in the artist books that he has produced to accompany a number of his exhibitions, as well as two catalogue raisonée-style publications published independently. His gravitational pull towards non-linearity is implicit in the formats of these artist books. The first of these publications was *Extinction Beckons*, published in 2000 by Matt's Gallery in London (Fig. 1). It comprises photographic documentation of Nelson's work from the early 1990s up to 2000 alongside a series of short parallel-fictional texts by Jacki Irvine, an Irish video artist and writer whose work, like Nelson's, interweaves different histories and fictional events.[3] For instance, Irvine's entry on Nelson's 1993 sculpture *Barker Ranch*, which is a glib reconstruction of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* lit internally so as to appear like a funeral pyre, is a short text amalgamating the murderous history of the Manson family (whose last hideout was at Barker Ranch) with the failed utopian vision of the Russian Constructivists.[4] In 2004, the English science fiction author Brian Aldiss would do something similar in the catalogue for Nelson's exhibition *Triple Bluff Canyon* at Modern Art Oxford (MAO). Here, Aldiss wrote a futuristic short story about the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) set against a landscape of interminably cascading sand dunes; the dunes in Adliss's story were borrowed directly from Nelson's work for MAO itself.
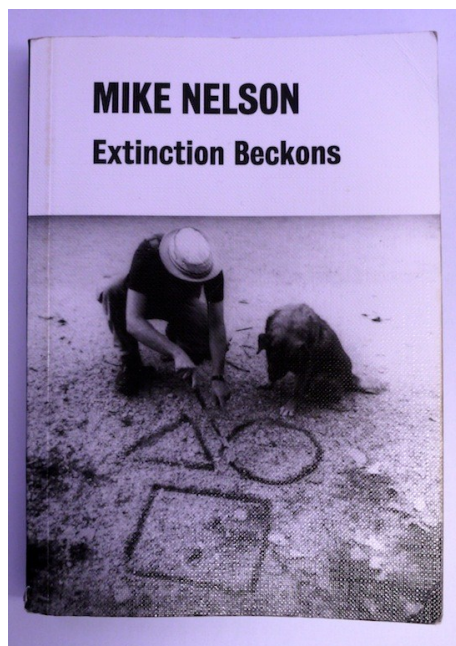

Fig. 1. Jacki Irvine and Mike Nelson, *Extinction Beckons*, London: Matt's Gallery, 2000. Designed by Phil Baines Studio, printed and bound by BAS Printers Limited. (Copyright Mike Nelson, Jacki Irvine and Matt's Gallery 2000.)

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[3] Irvine also employs this parallel fictional approach in her review of Nelson's exhibition 'Agent Dixon at the Red Star Hotel' for *frieze* in 1995. See Irvine, 1995.

[4] Irvine and Nelson, 2000, p. 36. '[I]n the spirit of Charles Manson's new-world idealism and the attempt to spark off race wars through the murder of Sharon Tate and her guests …. Tatlin's tower looms rockily overhead. Taken backwards it would echo in its spirals Manson's crazy take on the Beatles' "Helter Skelter" as a secret sign urging on the carnage (if listened to backwards) ... the helter skelter ride into chaos and death.'

A Forgotten Kingdom (Fig. 2), published to accompany Nelson's exhibition *Nothing is True. Everything is Permitted* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (ICA) in 2001, draws together Nelson's spectrum of literary influences more explicitly than *Extinction Beckons*. Featuring excerpts of texts by J. G. Ballard, Hakim Bey, Jorge Luis Borges, Richard Brautigan, William S. Burroughs, Albert Camus, Philip K. Dick, Franz Kafka, Stanislaw Lem, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, H. P. Lovecraft, Ed Sanders, Jules Verne and several more, *A Forgotten Kingdom* functions like a handbook for decoding Nelson's work, as each of the writers featured in the book have somehow informed the artist's ideas about time, history, futurology, geography, and storytelling. In this sense, *A Forgotten Kingdom* echoes the format of other, more well-known artist "handbooks" such as *Raymond Pettibon: A Reader*, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art to accompany Pettibon's major retrospective there in 1998. In the preface to the Pettibon reader, the curators of the retrospective explain that creating a "reader" seemed like the obvious alternative to a traditional catalogue for Pettibon, since reading and writing are such central features of his drawing practice.[5] However, unlike the Pettibon reader, the contents of which are neatly laid out and accompanied by an explanation as to how the curators and Pettibon came to select each of the texts, Nelson's book has neither a clearly discernible contents page nor statement of curatorial rationale. Without these guides, interpretation of Nelson's book thus depends on connoisseurship of the individual authors' prose on the part of the reader in order to determine who wrote what. Alternatively, it prompts a reading in which making such distinctions is rendered unimportant.

Fig. 2. Mike Nelson and William Bradley (ed.), *Mike Nelson: A Forgotten Kingdom*, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2001. Designed by Robert Johnston.

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[5] Anne d'Harncourt and Susanne Ghez, 'Preface', in Ghez and Temkin, 1998, p. ix.

A Forgotten Kingdom is less outwardly edifying than the Pettibon reader. Rather, it is distinctly affective. Correspondingly, two contrasting editorial methods can be seen to underpin the Pettibon and Nelson readers; they relate to the genre of the anthology and the logic of the cut-up respectively. Where Pettibon's selection of texts is clearly sign-posted, Nelson's reader unfolds in chaotic montage: the title page of Camus's *The Plague* cuts directly into the epigraph for Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?; Lem's contents for *Solaris* presage Lovecraft's introduction for 'Supernatural Horror in Literature'; and Burroughs's 'Invocation' from *Cities of the Red Night* jump-cuts to Hakim Bey's chapter on 'Pirate Utopias' from *Temporary Autonomous Zone*. This bricolage of excerpted, unnamed texts is punctuated in the middle by a series of fifty-two black and white photographic details of previous installations by Nelson. Each of these images is accompanied by a caption, yet none of these explicitly name the works shown in the images. For instance, they read, '6. The central bar' or '34. On the back wall of the blue room', not '6. Installation view of *The Deliverance and The Patience*, Venice Biennale, 2001' or '34. Detail from *The Coral Reef*, Matt's Gallery, London, 2000'. Again, distinguishing the separate works photographed in the book is a task relegated to the connoisseur, or else the act of making the distinction between works is considered to be of secondary import to the interpretation of the constellation of photographs as a whole.

There is one exception to Nelson's non-exegetical approach in compiling the *A Forgotten Kingdom* reader. It is revealing that he decides to include here *not* an iconic Lovecraft short story such as 'The Call of Cthulhu', but rather a section from the author's famous treatise on cosmic fear and the attendant 'atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread', taken from his expositional essay 'Supernatural and Horror in Literature' (1927, 1933–5).[6] Canvasing the work of a broad spectrum of authors, ranging from Edgar Allen Poe to Charles Dickens, Lovecraft argues:

> Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfil every condition of true supernatural horror-literature.[7]

The inclusion of this passage suggests that it is precisely the atmosphere of certain fictional stories that Nelson seeks to recreate in his works, drawing upon fictive compositional strategies — rather than constructing a specific narrative — to do so.[8] If we treat *A Forgotten Kingdom* holistically as a book, rather than as a series of discrete texts to potentially select and read independently of one another (as with an anthology, or as with the Pettibon reader), then its narrative structure can be described as montage-like. That is to say, *A Forgotten Kingdom*'s affect stems equally from the subjective connections that the reader makes between the excerpted texts, as from

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[6] Lovecraft, 1927, 1933–5 (1973), p. 14.
[7] Lovecraft, 1927, 1933–5 (1973), p. 14.
[8] In his 2008 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London, titled *To The Memory of H.P. Lovecraft (1999)*, Nelson cultivated a sense of dread by showing the tattered remnants of the gallery space after attacking its walls with a chainsaw. This work presumably references Lovecraft's 1923 short horror story 'The Rats in the Walls'.

their content or specific narratives. In this way, it is less that Nelson adopts 'a narrative approach, creating scenarios that are "scripted" in advance',[9] as Claire Bishop has suggested, and more so that he adopts an atmospheric approach, abandoning the specificities or 'dovetailing' of a plot to instead draw upon the less tangible moods, compositional structures and temporalities that structure the fictional stories written by Nelson's personal canon of authors.
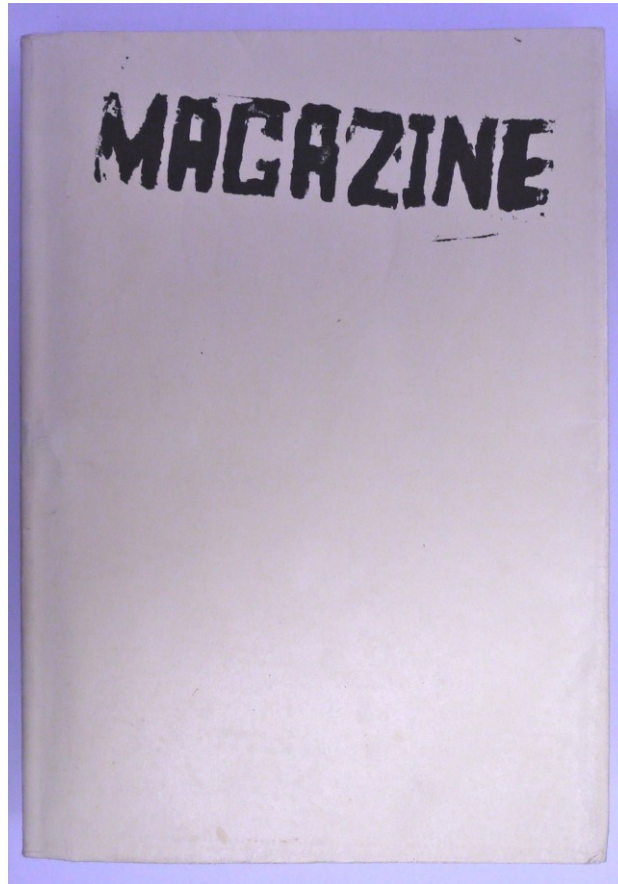

Fig. 3. Mike Nelson, *Magazine*, London: Book Works and Matt's Gallery, 2003. Designed by Christian Kürsters, printed by Drukkerji SNN. (Copyright Mike Nelson.)

Nelson applied the montage logic of the assorted texts in the *A Forgotten Kingdom* reader to a purely visual project for his next major publication titled *Magazine*, published by the London-based imprint Book Works in 2003 (Fig. 3). This book includes no text beyond the black 'MAGAZINE' stamped on the front cover, the typical details on the spine, and a short blurb on the back cover.[10] The pages of the book are a combination of full-bleed black and white, and colour photographs of details from six of Nelson's large-scale installations: *The Coral Reef*, 2000; *The Resurrection of Captain Mission*, 2000; *The Genie*, 2001; *The Deliverance and The Patience*, 2001; *Nothing is True. Everything is Permitted*, 2001; and *The Cosmic*

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[9] Bishop, 2005, p. 47. Here Bishop speaks of Nelson's installations rather than his books. I argue that there is structural continuity between the books and the installations, and therefore suggest that critique of the installations can be partly transposed onto the books, and vice versa.

[10] Details of the installations depicted, the photography credits, personal acknowledgements, and the publisher's imprint are located on the inside covers. However, this information is concealed under a full-width fold.

Legend of the Uroboros Serpent, 2001. The succession of photographs at first appears to be erratic: the depths of field, for instance, differ radically from page to page, which lends the book a randomised quality. However, a closer analysis reveals a suite of compositional logics to be undergirding the edited selection of images. For instance, certain shapes are repeated. In the first three pages, a vertical rectangle is iterated when a deep perspectival view of a corridor gives way to a dusty, wall-mounted mirror and then to a tightly cropped picture of a door. Other times, objects are repeated, such as when ceiling lamps from *The Coral Reef* and *The Deliverance and The Patience* are juxtaposed on either side of a double-page spread.[11] Moreover, the entire book is haunted by empty corridors and doorways, images of which are repeated with almost metronomic consistency.

In *Magazine*, the six discrete installations listed above are atomised into individual photographs, which are then dispersed throughout the book: each installation interpenetrated by photographs from other, now equally fragmented installations. Sometimes, the same space is depicted on several consecutive pages but from differing angles, creating a stuttered effect. Often, a single landscape-oriented photograph is used as a centrefold, but its composition is either so symmetrical that the double-page spread appears to be the same photograph repeated, or the photograph's composition is so severe in its vertical asymmetry that the two halves seem irreconcilable and thus appear to be two discrete photographs.[12] The most violent jump cuts, however, are made using colour. Repeatedly throughout *Magazine*, red and blue are played off one another: an empty room suffused in the red glow of darkroom safety lights cuts to a cool, blue-tinged neon-lit space (both from *Nothing is True. Everything is Permitted*); or the crimson-painted ceiling of the game parlour in *The Coral Reef* cuts to the cerulean blue-walled 'Captain's bar' of *The Deliverance and The Patience*. As with the repeated shapes, objects and spaces, these colour shifts demonstrate an editorial logic at play.

Magazine, according to its blurb on the publisher's website, 'has no end point, no definitive reading but rather is a visual non-linear narrative'.[13] This structure naturally asks the reader to imagine the works pictured as forming part of a vast continuum: an accumulative or meta-artwork, not unlike Duchamp's miniature retrospectives in his *Boîtes-en-valise* (1935-41). This idea is reinforced when, at various points in the book, props from one installation (such as the evangelical signboard from *The Coral Reef*) turn up in another (the storeroom of *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent*). The implicit sense of a continuum is also reflected in the somewhat unusual format of the book. Rather than comprising *x* number of single pages bound at the spine as with regular, perfect-bound books, the vertical edges of the pages in *Magazine* fold back in on themselves accordion-style and are then bound at the spine, creating open-ended pockets between the images (Figs 4 and 5). Visually referencing earlier, seminal conceptual art books like Ed Ruscha's famous *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* of 1966, this binding technique, known as a French fold, lends a seamless

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[11] More oblique mnemonic references are also discernible, such as in the jump-cut from a painting of white horses running in the wild to a photograph of stacks of car tyres stored in industrial wooden shelving units.

[12] See Fig. 7 for example, which is reproduced as a double-page spread.

[13] '*Magazine*, Mike Nelson, 2003', *Book Works*, http://bookworks.org.uk/node/96; accessed October 21, 2012.

quality to the succession of images and further encourages a holistic interpretative approach to the subject matter.

Figs 4 and 5. Detail: French fold. Mike Nelson, *Magazine*, London: Book Works and Matt's Gallery, 2003. Designed by Christian Kürsters, printed by Drukkerji SNN. (Copyright Mike Nelson.)

Though later publications, like the book produced to accompany Nelson's 2011 installation at the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, brilliantly illuminate elements of his artistic methodologies through their editorial forms,[14] it is *Magazine* that most clearly echoes and, in fact, follows the compositional logic of his installations.[15] *Magazine* does so in three main ways: through a non-linear narrative structure, the technique of montage, and the form of meta-fiction.

Non-linearity, montage and meta-fiction

Non-linearity is a common narrative device in the literature that Nelson reads. Nelson's interest in the fiction of William S. Burroughs, excerpts of whose book *Cities of the Red Night* are included in both the *A Forgotten Kingdom* and *I, Impostor* publications, is telling in this respect — as Burroughs is renowned for his use of the 'cut-up' technique that he developed with the artist and writer Brion Gysin in the 1960s and '70s.[16] As is well known, Burroughs and Gysin would cut-up existing texts — ranging from newspaper articles to classical literature — and then rearrange these excerpts to form new, non-linear narratives that would, they hoped, reveal a deeper truth latent in the original texts, or somehow foretell the future. Non-linearity is achieved in *Magazine* in a similar way: by the splicing together of images from different site-specific and geographically disparate installations by Nelson. Yet where chance was a crucial element in the compositional process of Burroughs and Gysin, Nelson's compositions are much more deliberate. As described above, cogent visual rhythms are established across the pages of *Magazine*, and these rhythms are punctuated by the repeated imaging of doorways and corridors.

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[14] Nelson produced a publication to accompany his installation *I, Impostor* for the British Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Here, scattered amongst an essay by Dan Cameron, an interview between Rachel Withers and 'multiple Mikes' (meaning excerpted responses from interviews with Nelson over the last ten years collaged together with a contemporary interview) are: passages from the original ICA book of extracts (this time restricted to Burroughs, Bey, and Linebaugh and Rediker); documentation of the exhibitions *Magazin: Büyük Valide Han* and *I, Impostor*, along with photographs of other previous works such as *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent* and *Quiver of Arrows*; scans of various notes that had been left inside *Magazin: Büyük Valide Han* in 2003; preparatory sketches for *I, Impostor*; a still from the 1965 Godard film *Alphaville*; a portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; and a reproduction of Robert Smithson's famous diagrammatic drawing of the Hotel Palenque. The inside front cover was gleaned from an old issue of the Turkish fantasy magazine *Korku*, while the back inside cover derives from the Seventh-Day Adventist author Jan Marcussen's 1983 book *National Sunday Law*.

[15] The publisher Book Works effectively describes the project as an analogue of Nelson's installation practice, representing 'a logical progression and use of the book form by the artist'. See '*Magazine*, Mike Nelson, 2003', *Book Works*, http://bookworks.org.uk/node/96; accessed October 21, 2012. In the 2003 interview, Bradley explicitly compared the experience of reading *Magazine* with walking through one of his installations. Bradley noted that it felt as though he were 'constantly moving from one space into another, between different shows, times, and spaces', to which Nelson responded by saying that he consciously sought to create a sense of time travel when making of the body of exhibitions documented in *Magazine*. See Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

[16] When Nelson was asked to summarise what he likes about Burroughs's *Cities of the Red Night* (which was not composed using the 'cut-up' technique, but is nevertheless non-linear in its structure), Nelson noted the book's non-linearity. He stated: 'Two plots run concurrently through different genres and moments in history, interlinked through time travel.' See Nelson, 2010a.

In an interview with the artist at the time of *Magazine*'s publication in 2003, Will Bradley (the curator of Nelson's 2001 ICA exhibition and editor of the *A Forgotten Kingdom* book) noted: 'It's easy to imagine the shows [depicted in the book] actually connecting to each other through some kind of hidden door'.[17] The doorway, like the corridor, is the domain of Janus, the bicephalic god of ancient Roman mythology. Janus, with one head facing East and the other facing West, representing the manner in which he was able to simultaneously see back into the past and forwards into the future, was the god of transitions — and thereby of gates, doorways, corridors, passages, bridges, boundaries, and time. The transitory spaces over which Janus presides can therefore be seen to hold together multiple temporalities in a non-linear fashion. Tellingly, the opening and closing images of *Magazine* are photographs of empty corridors.

The British writer and curator Jeremy Millar flagged the symbolic resonance of the intermediary space of the door to Nelson's work in a catalogue essay for his 2004 exhibition *Triple Bluff Canyon*. The doorway importantly evokes a feeling of transition that, for Millar, is not restricted to the physical space of doorways themselves, but extends to the types of rooms that Nelson constructs as well: 'anterooms, places in which we might wait, or pass through, but seldom dwell.'[18] Referring to the American philosopher Edward S. Casey, Millar speaks of the door in terms of a 'chasm' that is 'both an opening *between* two already existing things (e.g., earth and sky) and an *opening* between them (i.e., *that which* brings about the differentiation of these two things in the first place).'[19] The chasm is both the gap that separates, and the mechanism that holds elements together in comparison. In this way, the logic of the chasm can be associated with that of montage, a compositional technique that can be loosely described as the collation of multiple images into a single picture plane, or the editing together of segments of film to form a continuous whole. Millar writes: 'Just as in the paradox of the door that is both open and closed, the transitional space allows for seemingly opposing elements to be maintained without any form of simplistic resolution in synthesis.'[20] This resistance to 'simplistic resolution in synthesis' is typically understood to be the historical achievement of montage. Montage, according to its key theorists — like Walter Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein, or, more recently, Jean-Luc Godard, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Harun Farocki — moves centrifugally: it opens meaning, rather than closes it.

According to these theorists, montage is the most apposite method for dealing with the depiction of history because its images or its segments of film depend on lacunae and gaps — on chasms: that which cannot be directly known, represented or figured. For Didi-Huberman, a historiographer and image theorist obsessed by gaps, montage shows us, in spite of what cannot be seen, the 'figural detour' of history by bringing together multiple views and time periods into the same phenomenon.[21] Didi-Huberman argues: 'What we cannot see must therefore be *made into montage* so as to encourage, as far as possible, *thinking* about the differences between certain visual —

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[17] Bradley and Nelson, 2003.
[18] Millar, 2004.
[19] Millar, 2004. Millar cites Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of a Place — A Philosophical History*, Berkeley, London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, p. 9 (emphases from the original).
[20] Millar, 2004.
[21] Didi-Huberman, 2003, pp. 133-4.

separate, lacunary — monads, in such a way as *to know in spite of all* even that which remains impossible to see entirely, that which even remains inaccessible as an *all*.'[22] That is to say, it is the dialectical interplay of the several and possibly conflicting perspectival views and time periods with the gaps, lacunae and chasms of the montage technique that makes its strongest claims to truth.

In *Magazine*, Nelson employs the medium of photography and the technique of montage to hold together an otherwise impossible constellation of site-specific installation works from disparate times and places. Though rich in detail, as the individual photographs zoom-in and focus on minute aspects that might have otherwise been overlooked by viewers in the vast total installations, the experience of leafing through the book's pictures is in fact governed by lack: that which cannot be seen. These gaps simultaneously fracture the experience of looking and hold together another, meta-artwork — or an even bigger, constructed space.[23]

In *Magazine*, the technique of montage also functions to create a meta-fictional structure that absorbs the fragmented elements of the installations depicted and then represents them as a new whole. In literature, meta-fiction describes stories that are self-reflexive, that openly meditate on the conventions of fiction as a category itself.[24] The meta-fictional strategy resonates on several different levels of influence for Nelson. It governs the form of *Magazine* as well as many of his major installation works, which unfold in such a way as to incrementally reveal the operations of installation art as a medium. Regarding *Magazine*, Nelson spoke of wanting to make 'a structure that had the same sense as the work it was storing' and of the work 'becom[ing] its own archive'.[25] In the same interview, Nelson described the structure of the book in the same spatial terms of installation art, noting: 'It's a simplistic thing to say, but you fabricate a space, and that space never existed before.'[26] He attributes these impulses to an 'ambivalence between wanting to undermine or desecrate what [he has] done, and at the same time obsessively document it.'[27]

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[22] Didi-Huberman, 2003, p. 138 (emphases from the original).

[23] Photographic and filmic modes of montage can be seen to be equally analogous to Nelson's working methods. Nelson often incorporates elaborate, black and white, numbered and indexed photo essays within the pages of his artist books and exhibition catalogues. The book published to accompany his 2004 exhibition *Triple Bluff Canyon*, for instance, includes an 89-image album that juxtaposes book covers such as J. G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* or Brian Aldiss's *Earthworks* with voodoo illustrations, Freemason patches, newspaper clippings, and photographs of sites like the Uffington Horse in Oxfordshire, England. *Lonely Planet* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne in 2006 combined photo- and filmic montage. Here, Nelson experimented with the projection of slides through the windows of the installation onto its back walls — literally layering the experiential montage effect of walking through the rooms via the corridors with actual photographs projected on the walls, thus creating a virtual montage. These slides were reproduced in a grid format in the exhibition catalogue. See Coates and Nelson, 2006.

[24] A good example of this type of meta-fictional writing can be seen in the Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's book *A Perfect Vacuum* (1971). *A Perfect Vacuum* is an anthology of reviews of imaginary books, the first chapter of which is a review of itself. Notably, Nelson based the structure of his 2000 installation *The Coral Reef* on this book. The first of *The Coral Reef*'s fifteen rooms was a gallery reception area.

[25] Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

[26] Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

[27] Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

A key point of reference here is Kafka's unfinished short story 'The Burrow' (c. 1923), which Nelson lists as one of the most influential texts on his thinking and his practice in a feature for *frieze* magazine's 'Ideal Syllabus' section in April 2010.[28] 'The Burrow' is a suitably circuitous tale about a mole-like creature that has built a labyrinthine system of 'quite narrow, tolerably safe' tunnels below the surface of the earth so that it can exist in solace, away from other creatures. The creature is a self-described 'connoisseur and prizer of burrows, a hermit, a lover of peace'.[29] Yet as the burrow becomes increasingly elaborate, so too escalates the creature's paranoia of being discovered and its peaceful existence being overturned by potential 'robbers', 'enemies', and 'pursuers'.[30] The creature obsessively tends to the upkeep of the tunnel, building ever-more elaborate snares — such as decoy rooms stocked with food in order to throw prospective enemies off its scent. Eventually, the creature is driven to reside in the 'upper world' for long stretches of time in order to watch over the entrance of the burrow, disguised by a removable layer of moss, and ensure that no one intrudes.[31] Musing over these stints in the outer world, the creature explains:

> I seek out a good hiding place and keep watch on the entrance of my house — this time from outside — for whole days and nights. Call it foolish if you like; it gives me infinite pleasure and reassures me. At such times it is as if I were not so much looking at my house as at myself sleeping, and had the joy of being in a profound slumber and simultaneously of keeping vigilant guard over myself. I am privileged, as it were, not only to dream about the spectres of the night in all the helplessness and blind trust of sleep, but also at the same time to confront them in actuality with the calm judgment of the fully awake … In this connection — it may be in others too, but in this one especially — these excursions of mine are truly indispensible.[32]

The relationship that Kafka establishes between the narrative and the narratorial voice in 'The Burrow' has been acknowledged as engaging the conventions of meta-fiction. In his 1977 analysis of the story, Henry Sussman suggested that: 'The voice of the animal is … also the voice of construction [of the burrow, of the text], the voice of the rhetorical constructs employed in this particular production.'[33] Likewise in his 1981 analysis of the story, J. M. Coetzee — himself a famously meta-fictional writer — speaks of 'a flattening of the distance between narrator and narrated, till the adventures of the creature seeking a way into his burrow become identical with the adventures of the signifying subject seeking to find a way to keep the narrative moving'.[34] In 'The Burrow', the narrative, the narrative structure, and the physical space of the burrow are equally winding, erratic, and repetitive — they are

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[28] Nelson, 2010a.
[29] Kafka, c. 1923 (1971), p. 337.
[30] Kafka, c. 1923 (1971), p. 330.
[31] The creature speaks of his 'profitless vigils' thus: 'I should have so constructed the first passage that it had two entrances at a moderate distance from each other, so that after descending through the one entrance with that slowness which is unavoidable, I might rush at once through the passage to the second entrance, slightly raise the moss covering, which would be so arranged as to make that easy, and from there keep watch on the position for several days and nights.' See Kafka, c. 1923 (1971), p. 338.
[32] Kafka, c. 1923 (1971), p. 334.
[33] Sussman, 1977, p. 104.
[34] Coetzee, 1981, p. 573.

labyrinthine. And curiously, the story's meta-fictional form is effectuated through the physical, transitory space of the burrow — a type of corridor or hallway.[35]

With *Magazine*, Nelson echoes Kafka's content–form correlation in 'The Burrow' by making 'a structure that had the same sense as the work it was storing'. *Magazine* is both a photo album, containing photographs of pre-existing installations sutured together by an imagined network of doors and corridors that open onto disparate times and places, and a storage room, housing these previous works in a newer, bigger and more temporally and spatially elaborate configuration. This latter point is reinforced by the recursive imaging of storerooms across the pages of *Magazine*. These photographs largely derive from Nelson's 2001 installation for the Turner Prize, *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent*. Nelson built this work around a circular corridor structure (a corridor that, like Uroboros, eats its own tail) and designed it to 'store' his installation from the previous year, *The Coral Reef*.[36] *Magazine* makes its most self-reflexive (or meta-fictional) gesture in relation to the former point, vis-à-vis its being a photo album, when it includes a photograph of the point of entry to *The Coral Reef* that shows two copies of Nelson's first catalogue raisonée-style publication *Extinction Beckons* propped up on a shelf next to the gallery's visitor book. *Magazine*, then, is both a structure for storing old artworks (by way of photographs) and an artwork itself.

Montage, meta-fiction and the logic of installation art

Nelson has said that he 'liked the idea' of Kafka's paranoid being scuttling back and forth between inhabiting the burrow and watching over its entrance sentinel-like.[37] This scuttling back and forth between inside and outside, structure and superstructure that Nelson evokes also articulates the logic of his medium, installation art, more broadly. This logic pivots around an understanding of the fragment and the whole not as diametrically opposed, but as thought together.

As has been widely lamented in books on installation art, installation artists are confronted with a unique problem when it comes to documenting their work.[38] While a painting's colour, texture, and scale can be reasonably captured by a high-resolution photograph, an installation possesses qualities that cannot be distilled in this way. The

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[35] There are stylistic symmetries between Kafka's and Nelson's temporal structures too. Numerous attempts have been made to unpack the 'extraordinary temporal model' of 'The Burrow'. Perhaps the most comprehensive of these is made by J. M. Coetzee in his 1981 essay 'Time, Tense and Aspect in Kafka's "The Burrow"', in which he analyses the relationship between the 'time of narration (the moving now of the narrator's utterance) and the time of the narrative (referential time)', only to reveal that Kafka's representation of time in this short story 'cannot be compressed into a rational model'. See Coetzee, 1981, p. 556.

[36] Nelson stated: 'the Turner Prize piece was, in fact, *The Coral Reef,* stored within something that emulated its own structure … The whole structure of *The Cosmic Legend* was based on an alchemy symbol, with that long corridor the serpent trailing around the outside. I had the idea of making a space to store *The Coral Reef,* but I couldn't figure out the structure of it, then this drawing that I'd done in my notebook years ago suddenly jumped out at me. The corridor circled around the space but it had a doubled entrance, emulating the doubled mini-cab office in *The Coral Reef.* I thought it was a pretty conceptually neat piece, in its long and winding way.' See Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

[37] Bradley and Nelson, 2003. Nelson also extrapolated this allegory to describe, bleakly: 'A state of being that can be equated to all humanity, whatever they do, and whatever system they do it in.' See Nelson, 2010a.

[38] See, for example, Claire Bishop's introduction to *Installation Art: A Critical History* (Bishop, 2005).

spatial relationships between discrete environments and objects inside an installation, as well as the relationship an installation shares with the space directly outside its perimeter, can only be gestured towards by photography. Smell and sound, on the other hand, are irretrievably lost. While a film made by someone walking through an installation would partly repatriate the temporal and sonic aspects that are banished from still photographic documentation, a filmic representation would dictate the later viewer's path through the installation environment, creating a singular experience of it, and would thus contravene the much celebrated agency of the viewer of installation art who is responsible for actively negotiating the space. Rather, when a viewer experiences an installation artwork, he or she must constantly reconcile his or her present vision of the work with an understanding that this is an inherently partial or incomplete image — because no single vision can encompass a large-scale installation in its totality.[39] The maker of installation art faces an identical problem when it comes to documenting the work. At some point, the installation artist must stop taking photographs and dismantle the work — satisfied (or more likely unsatisfied) that the selection of photographs taken will give some sense of the experience of the installation. In this way, the logic of installation's experience and its documentation resonates with Didi-Huberman's characterisation of montage when he writes that it 'transforms the partially remembered time of the visible into a reminiscent construction, a visual form of haunting'.[40] A thinking-together of the fragment and the whole, the dialectic set into motion by montage, is thus a prerequisite of the experience of installation art.

Nelson's installations express the logic of installation art as an experience that is simultaneously partial and complete, fragmentary and whole. If we characterise the logic of installation art as, simply, the construction or fabrication of space, then Nelson's installations can be seen to reveal the operations of installation art by self-reflexively pointing back at themselves *as* constructions or fabrications. Nelson's installations reveal these operations by drawing upon the form of meta-fiction, which likewise underpins many of Nelson's artist books, and particularly *Magazine*, which is a type of meta-artwork — like Duchamp's *Boîtes-en-valise*. As such, Nelson's artist books, which are also heavily dependent on the logic of montage for their structure, can be seen to function as a direct analogue of his installations — rather than a tool of exegesis or exemplification. A brief case study of Nelson's 2001 installation *The Deliverance and The Patience* neatly demonstrates this point.

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[39] My argument correlates in parts with Bishop's typological characterisation of some modes of installation art (namely the total installations of Ilya Kabakov) under the heading 'The Dream Scene' in Chapter One of *Installation Art*. Drawing upon Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Bishop argues that these types of installations are like dreams for three main reasons: (1) they rely on 'the sensory immediacy of conscious perception' of the viewer; (2) they have a 'composite structure'; and (3) their meaning is highly subjective because it is elucidated 'through free-association' (Bishop, 2005, p. 16). Of these categories, it is the composite structure that resonates most strongly with my reading of Nelson's work as montage-like: 'if [the dream is] taken as a whole, it will seem to be nonsensical, and can only be interpreted when broken down into its constituent elements, rather like a rebus.' (Bishop, 2005, p. 16.) However, my approach differs from Bishop's stated 'psychologistic mode of interpretation' that ultimately argues for the importance of the work based on the degree to which it undermines and destabilises our, the viewer's 'hierarchical and centred relation to the work of art (and to ourselves)' (Bishop, 2005, p. 47). In short, where Bishop understands the medium-specificity of installation art to pivot around the physical presence of a viewer (thus necessitating a psychologistic mode of interpretation), mine pivots around the construction or alteration of a space (and thus necessitates a formal approach that is attentive to the works themselves).

[40] Didi-Huberman, 2003, p. 138.

The Deliverance and The Patience

Nelson's large-scale installation *The Deliverance and The Patience* was presented at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 as an off-site project commissioned by the British public art organisation, the Peer Trust. It was ambitious in its physical scope, building upon the success of Nelson's first major multi-room installation *The Coral Reef*, exhibited at Matt's Gallery, London in 2000, which comprised fifteen rooms connected by dark, dingy and winding hallways. *The Deliverance and The Patience* was composed of sixteen rooms spread over three sections of the mezzanine level of an old brewery building on the island of the Giudecca, a remote location situated away from the Arsenale and the national pavilions of the Biennale's Giardini. The installation engaged the Giudecca's heritage as an industrial site scattered with shipyards by encoding into its fabric a number of historical references to maritime trading. In this way, the work also engaged the more ancient merchant history of the city of Venice as a key interlocutor for trade between East and West.[41]

Upon entering the installation, viewers were presented with a series of doors behind which the rest of the work's elaborate structure unfolded. The rooms were mostly narrow with low ceilings, and their atmosphere was unanimously claustrophobic — often heightened by the overwhelmingly vivid colours of freshly painted walls in yellow, indigo, red or cerulean tones. Each of the rooms bore the traces of human occupation, for instance jackets were left casually draped over the backs of chairs in several rooms, however their occupants were nowhere to be seen. Bare light bulbs hung from many of the ceilings alongside whirring fans. One room featured a bar decorated with political propaganda. Here, a map of 'The World According to Ronald Reagan' (where the United States dwarf the rest of the continents combined) was tacked on top of two other posters: one bore a photograph of Bertolt Brecht alongside his famous tract 'Praise of Communism'; the other was a vintage, silhouetted human gun-target. In a different room with purple walls there was a 'non-denominational', lacquer-black alter boasting an admixture of animal skulls, a miniature statue of Buddha, two candle sticks, a pair of blackened animal horns, an instructional spiritual DVD in Hindi, and a camouflage-covered army helmet. In another comparatively drab, off-white-walled room there appeared to be a type of sweatshop. It featured a makeshift workbench ram-shackled together from wooden crating pallets that displayed the off-cut fabric remnants of garments and had a large pair of scissors tethered to it with an oppressive iron chain (Fig. 6). Around the corner there was an industrial sewing desk with the name "AHMED" carved into its laminate-covered surface (Fig 7). In another, yellow-walled room lay the accoutrements of a travel agency: its walls lined with glossy, though out-dated, Singapore Airline posters, as well as a foreboding map of the world captioned 'Reactions — Sedgwick Natural Perils', which hung on the back wall behind the travel agent's desk. There was also a 'Captain's bar', its bright blue walls decorated with paintings of ships with puffed sails. These were accompanied by a further two model ships and a large illuminated shell propped up on the bar itself — presumably in reference to the installation's title, *The Deliverance and The Patience*, which derived from the names of two seventeenth-century pinnace ships. There was also what appeared to be a Muslim

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[41] Later in the twentieth century, the Giudecca also housed a film studio, which corresponded, fortuitously, with Nelson's style of installation, which is frequently likened to a film set.

prayer hall, which was very sparsely decorated with only a few rugs covering the floor and a small wooden table upon which an antique book and a selection of Arabic paperbacks lay.

Fig. 6. Mike Nelson, *The Deliverance and the Patience*, 2001. Originally commissioned by PEER. (Photo credit: John Riddy. Image courtesy the artist; Matt's Gallery, London; 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Torino.)

The corridors connecting these distinctly themed rooms, on the other hand, were much less culturally specific. Instead they could be characterised by the general theme of transition. At one nexus point, luggage had been left — ostensibly waiting for its

owner to pick it up and travel off somewhere with it in tow. Moreover, the entire maze of corridors was punctuated by green exit signs emblazoned with the universal hieroglyph of the forward-slanted man-on-the-move. These signs were also utilised in the corridors of Nelson's multi-room installation of the preceding year, *The Coral Reef* (the disorienting floor plan of which was based on the shape of a swastika with each corner turning back in on itself), to literally signpost a way out for confused viewers. Likewise in *The Coral Reef*, the sister piece of *The Deliverance and The Patience*, the corridors housed several dustbins overflowing with sawn wood, metal offcuts, powdered plaster, and industrial piping — that is, construction materials — along with Coca-Cola and beer cans, McDonalds wrappers, and empty cigarette packets that presumably once belonged to a workman or -men, perhaps even to Nelson himself. These vestiges of construction gave the sense of being 'behind-the-scenes' of the installation, and were transposed to the corridors of *The Deliverance and The Patience*, which also housed the tools and leftover materials of the rooms' fabrication.

Fig. 7. Mike Nelson, *The Deliverance and the Patience*, 2001. Originally commissioned by PEER. (Photo credit: John Riddy. Image courtesy the artist; Matt's Gallery, London; 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Torino.)

Eventually after snaking through the various rooms of the installation and its complex of corridors, viewers climbed a staircase to a separate mezzanine level where they were made privy to an aerial view of the installation as a whole (Fig. 8). While MDF-board ceilings concealed the rooms' interiors from this vantage, an exposed wooden armature adumbrated the installation's general layout. This lookout reminded viewers that the installation was a man-made construct, despite its convincing, immersive

quality in the lower level. It literally revealed the physical conventions of this particular installation (the wooden armature), showing it to be an artificial environment. Echoing the paradox of Kafka's creature in 'The Burrow', the mezzanine level also demonstrated the impossibility of conceiving of the entirety of the installation from within.

Fig. 8. Mike Nelson, *The Deliverance and The Patience*, 2001. Installation. (Photo courtesy of the artist. Mike Nelson is represented by 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Turin; Matt´s Gallery, London; Galerie Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.)

Viewers' movement between the rooms via the corridor system of *The Deliverance and The Patience* thus generated a type of montage effect: the corridors, the space in which viewers connected the distinct rooms, literally became an analogue of the *monteur's* desk. The filmic metaphor here is not heavy-handed. The abrupt changes in colour schemes between rooms — from bright purple to yellow to blue to red — distinctly recall the associative editing technique made famous by director Nicolas Roeg in films such as *Don't Look Now* (1973) or, less subtly, by George Tomasini in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). These editorial tactics were similarly shown to underpin the composition of *Magazine* too.

Fig. 9. Mike Nelson, *The Deliverance and The Patience*, 2001. Installation. (Photo courtesy of the artist. Mike Nelson is represented by 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Turin; Matt´s Gallery, London; Galerie Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.)

Nelson has explained the complicated format of his room-corridor structure in *The Deliverance and The Patience* in the following cinematic terms:

> [I wanted you, the viewer] to forget you were looking at art and fall into a more relaxed state, where things can affect you on a subliminal level. I think in terms of Sergei Paradjanov, the Georgian film maker, or Tarkovsky — they saturate you with images, and the narrative isn't linear. The structure of Paradjanov's work came from Georgian folk stories … The images are tableaux, and after a while you're no longer watching it, you're absorbing it directly.[42]

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[42] Bradley and Nelson, 2003.

In Nelson's transposition of Paradjanov and Tarkovsky's directorial methodologies from film to installation art, he echoes Lovecraft's privileging of a general atmosphere (of 'breathless and unexplainable dread') over the specificities of plot in 'Supernatural Horror in Literature'. The atmosphere of *The Deliverance and The Patience*, as with its sister piece *The Coral Reef*, is frequently described as one of alienation.

While the rooms in *The Deliverance and The Patience* were incredibly distinct in character (and colour) from one another, what they had in common was an 'othering' effect. More precisely, the sixteen rooms combined to produce an atmosphere of estrangement or alienation as a whole. As mentioned, the rooms — as opposed to the corridors — were characterised by a series of closed cultural cues: like the prayer mats, the political propaganda, or the new wave religious ornamentation. It has been argued, by both the artist and art historians alike, that these props functioned to repel viewers by way of social, political, spiritual and linguistic specificities that, necessarily, exclude the majority of viewers.[43] That is to say, the viewer was othered or alienated by the rooms and their specific cultural signifiers because they could not identify with them — they could not find their own subjectivity reflected in these phenomena, these objects. Even if some viewers could identify with individual objects or rooms, it is unlikely that any viewer could identify equally with all of the rooms in their combination. Thus, the experience of the installation as a whole was characterised by alienation. As Millar wrote of Nelson's 'anterooms', these were spaces for viewers to pass through, but not dwell.

This strategy of 'othering' the viewer is reinforced by Nelson's emphatic citations of particular, and often obscure histories, books, political events and films in his installations — such as to the site-specific history of maritime trading on the island of Giudecca in *The Deliverance and The Patience*. The British art historian and theorist Claire Bishop has suggested, quoting Nelson, that:

> The complex layering of references, many of which are impossible to fathom without assistance, can give the impression 'that somebody knows the purpose of the space, what's happening behind the scenes and you don't'; as the artist observes, this powerlessness offsets the psychological absorption [of the installation] with feelings of exclusion and otherness, 'whether that be cultural otherness, intellectual otherness or political otherness'.[44]

In *The Deliverance and The Patience*, these citations extend beyond the general history of the Giudecca to pivot around three main literary texts: William S. Burroughs's 1981 novel *Cities of the Red Night*; Peter Lamborn Wilson's 1996 study *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegadoes*; and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's alternative history of globalised capitalism from 2000, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. The theme of pirate democracies clearly unites these disparate texts. Though there is not scope to discuss it in any length in this essay, a pirate democracy is understood to be a self-governed, autonomous community of pirates that is predicated on the rejection of

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[43] Bishop, 2005, p. 47.
[44] Bishop, 2005, p. 47.

nationalist association. These pirate democracies came into being as early as the seventeenth century, at which time Linebaugh and Rediker note that: 'The [English] government often told pirates that "they [had] no country", and the pirates themselves agreed: when they hailed other vessels at sea, they emphasised their own rejection of nationality by announcing that they came "From the Seas."'[45] The in-between, self-identification of these motley, multiethnic pirate communities as "From the Seas" correlates with the alienated experience of the viewer in *The Deliverance and The Patience*, who is rejected or 'othered' by the installation's rooms, which constantly deny him or her mental or spiritual access.

In *The Deliverance and The Patience*, the neutral space of "the Seas" is literalised by the in-between space of the corridor. Like the alter-nationality of "the Seas", the space of the corridor is constructed in non-positivist terms. It is the liminal outside to which the rejected viewer of the heavily culturally-coded rooms is repeatedly driven and displaced, and the space through which they must travel to continue their journey though the work. In as much, the corridor can be isolated as the primary viewing framework of the installation for the viewer. This vantage point is significant. The transitional, in-between space of the corridor allows viewers to traverse and connect the different tableaux-like imagery presented from room to room via a montage-like process. This process is similar, but not identical to montage proper in that photo- and filmic montage is predicated on the immediate juxtaposition of two images (the cut), rather than a languorous exposition of the gap that connects them (in this case, the corridor). In this way, it may be more accurate to say that this necessarily protracted process of treading the corridors and creating the 'jump cuts' in Nelson's installation echoes the conventions of editing — rather than the affect of — montage. Nelson's displaced viewers, pooling back into the hallways, are encouraged to interpret the installation from a type of meta-position: from the perspective of the editor's desk, to employ a Godardian analogy. They are asked to envisage the constellation of rooms as a whole, rather than as a series of discrete narrative points. Of course, this is an impossible vision — as the aerial view from the lookout on the mezzanine level demonstrates. However, Nelson does not aim for a resolved synthesised view of the entire installation, but rather advocates a fractured and elliptical vision of its multiple components — a vision through which the 'figural detour' of the whole can be discerned. This vision is effectuated through the chasm, the gap, the corridor: the ambivalent space that both differentiates two things and is that which brings about their differentiation.

An analysis of *The Deliverance and The Patience* in relation to *Magazine* reveals a structural continuity to operate between two key facets of Nelson's output: the installations and the artist books. This structural continuity takes an editorial form (likewise reflected in the *A Forgotten Kingdom* reader), which is most clearly evinced in Nelson's use of the compositional devices of non-linearity, montage and meta-fictionality. The ultimate significance of discerning this continuity between the books and the installations is hermeneutic: it provides a model for interpreting other — indeed potentially all — of Nelson's artworks. This interpretative model then, which could be termed Nelson's 'editorial approach', connects — like the bicephalic god Janus, overseer of corridors — *The Deliverance and The Patience* with works from its

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[45] Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000, p. 165.

past, such as *The Coral Reef*, and its future, such as *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent*.

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