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Curation as Methodology

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Curation as Methodology

Abstract:

The term *curation* was once only utilized by museum professionals. Currently, the term seems to have been borrowed by aesthetically-minded persons looking to collect ideas or objects. Through a detailed account of one curatorial process, this article aims to convey the richness of context, the depth of connection, and the promotion of new ideas classically associated with curation. Drawing on these methods, the author begins to develop an outline of curation as a transferrable methodology, useful for exploration of aesthetic works as they related to sociocultural histories. As an exemplar collection of artworks, illustrations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* provide content to explore the depth and breadth of curation as a methodology.

Keywords: qualitative research - methodology, big data, illustration & text, illustration (art)—exhibitions, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Despite museum provenance of the term *curation*, popular references to curating seem to mitigate the functions, skills, and products of curatorial work. On October 4, 2009, the *New York Times* published an article titled “On the Tip of Creative Tongues” addressing the appropriation of the term *curation* to tasks outside of the museum, in fields from food to fashion to music. The article states, “The word ‘curate,’ lofty and once rarely spoken outside exhibition corridors or British parishes, has become a fashionable code word among the aesthetically minded, who seem to paste it onto any activity that involves culling and selecting” (Williams, 2009). Since 2009, use of the term outside of a museum contexts, and as a synonym for selection has only become more prevalent. For example, a mass email from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) Prime Music promoted its “hand-curated reading playlists” (email communication, February 28, 2016). I can purchase from a display of “curated” snacks at my local coffee shop. I can “curate” my own sandwich with the help of a “sandwich artist.” The term *curation* is appropriated to refer to a variety of processes and products, effectively diminishing the boundless potential of curation as a methodology.

Curation as I situate it here extends beyond selection, places multiple artifacts in dialogue with each other, instantiates them around a complex set of themes, elicits multiple meanings from related artifacts and narratives, and promotes questions as often as answers. Curation is akin to multimodal content analysis in that it allows researchers to take into account “affordances, limitations, and relationships between the various media and modes used in contemporary forms of representation and communication” (Serafini and Ried, 2019: 2). Like multimodal content analysis, curation is a recursive process, wherein the researcher works through inductive and deductive observations and meaning-making. Curation, however, may rely more heavily on deductive thinking as curators build an exhibition to show viewers a path to thematic interpretations of the artifacts. Curation affords ways to situate historical

artifacts within their original contexts while identifying and explicating an evolution of ideas and themes over time. Developing a basis for viewers to understand an historical orientation toward artifacts is critical in curation, as the application of anachronistic viewpoints leads to misinterpretations of visual and linguistic messages. Significantly, curation leads to tangible and publicly sharable products, beyond the boundaries of academic dissemination. Curation affords researchers a methodology to identify, refine, interpret, and present social constructions surrounding bodies of artifacts while inviting viewers to ask their own questions and seek their own interpretations of the artifacts presented.

Situated in a museum context, the field of curation is oriented to educate the public broadly in concepts of design and culture (Moser, 2008). The word *curator* comes from the Latin root *curare*, meaning “to take care of” (Rose, Williams and Hawks, 2006: 47). In an attempt to better define the role of curator, these authors surveyed the job descriptions and resumes of about 200 “curators.” *Curators* were variously defined: *General Curators’* responsibilities pertain to their subject of specialization, collections management, exhibit development, education, public relations, fundraising, and administrative tasks (Rose, Williams, and Hawks, 2006). Accordingly, Moser (2008) succinctly described the field of curation as “complicated” (p. 27). Moser (2008) elaborated on some of the tasks of curators—organizing exhibitions, writing and publishing critical works, developing screenings and performances, coordinating fundraisers, conducting studio visits, and speaking in public about their work. These are concrete and important descriptors for those who curate.

I want to systematically elaborate the inquiry processes involved in curating, with the goal of creating a rigorous, trustworthy methodology. To explore the concept of curation as a formalized visual research methodology, I draw from the extant writing in visual research methodologies, multimodal content analysis, and museum studies to curate, as an exemplar, a collection of illustrations from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (hereafter

referred to as *Wonderland*). I interweave wisdom and experience from other curators with my own decisions, tailored and germane to the methods particular to my own curatorial work. Specifically, I interpret ideas from my *Wonderland* curation as I discuss the products of my curatorial work. Then I share methodological thoughts, questions, and possible implications stemming from my experiences with curation.

Wonderland, A Curatorial Context

When I first viewed Camille Rose Garcia's (Carroll and Garcia, 2010)) dark, Gothic illustrations for *Wonderland* (originally published 1865), I was intrigued by their striking dissimilarities to Sir John Tenniel's original illustrations that set the standard for *Wonderland* for me. I thought, "How could Garcia see this story so differently?" Garcia's hard lines, saturated colors, and abundant black ink shapes, dripping borders, bats, spiders, and other creatures of darkness reflect a dystopian *Wonderland*. The similarities and differences in Garcia's (Carroll and Garcia, 2010) and Tenniel's (Carroll and Tenniel, 1865/1866) illustrations exemplify the situatedness of artistic expression, as their images for the same story shine light on different messages about *Wonderland*. In 1865, when Carroll and Tenniel's edition was published, the book was received as a lighthearted story of nonsense written specifically for an audience of late-Victorian children. As a 21st century adult reader, my first view of Garcia's work evoked a dark impression of the story—a stark contrast to impressions brought to mind by Tenniel's portrayal of the book. My research revealed Garcia's experience of growing up in the shadow of a perfected world, outside of Disneyland, influences her artistic style and further shapes readers' image of *Wonderland* (Garcia, 2005).

Carroll's *Wonderland* narrative provides a complex linguistic tracing of diverse, enduring, and universal ideas about nature, time, reality, identity, and more (e.g., Auerbach, 1973; Goodacre, 1977; Groth, 2012; Helle-Valle and Binder 2009; Hollingsworth, 2009; Lovell-Smith, 2003). Specifically, in its first appearance, *Wonderland* paralleled the rapidly changing

cultural, political, and social climate of Oxford, England in the 1860s, including Darwin's debates on natural selection, an increasing preoccupation with time, questions about what is real, and a new awareness of unique personal identities. Artists' individual interpretations of Carroll's words and Tenniel's illustrations have led to new universal understandings of the story over time.

The fact that Tenniel, Garcia, and hundreds of other artists are able to interpret the *Wonderland* story visually in ways that laminate meanings, so distinct and so dissimilar, yet still connected and reflective of Carroll's words, speaks to this story's longevity, universality, and enduring significance. Since *Wonderland* was first published, the book has never been out of print. No person alive today has existed without *Wonderland*; these stories and their related images have been continuously intertwined within stories of childhood and remain a part of adult life. This kind of rich history and wide interest create an ideal situation for exploring ideas and practices of curation. In this recounting, I created the motivational and situational contingencies that compelled me to use curation as a way to understand.

Regarding the evolution of meanings in *Wonderland*, I examined relationships between the unabridged *Wonderland* text, Carroll's (1864) manuscript illustrations, Tenniel's first published illustrations (Carroll and Tenniel, 1865/1866), and the illustrations of 111 other artists since 1864. To render the interconnectedness of culture, literary text, and the art of illustration, I documented my processes and decisions as I attended to words, existing images, and overarching ideas of *Wonderland* through the lens of a curator.

My Curatorial Process and Products

Following a seven-step iterative process outlined by Friis-Hansen (2001), I framed my thinking and actions using methods from museum curation: collect, research, thematically conceptualize, select, contextualize, strategically arrange, and interpret. The following

process, borrowed from Friis-Hansen's (2001) curation methods, provides details for each step of my process:

1. Image collection process. I collected over 5700 images across 111 editions of *Wonderland* and organized images for study.

- a. **Database and critical literature search.** Though a search of the worldwide library catalog, WorldCat, and a review of collections lists of Carroll collectors Selwyn Goodacre and Edward Wakeling, I compiled a comprehensive list of Carroll's *Wonderland* editions. From that list of 280 *Wonderland* books, then narrowed my focus to the 111 unabridged, illustrated, English-language editions housed in collections in the United States. These delimitations are critical to the integrity of the resulting data base. For any collection, there must be systematic rationale for any inclusionary or exclusionary decisions.
- b. **Locating editions.** Based on my review of WorldCat, I determined the following libraries held the most editions of *Wonderland*: The Effie Lee Morris Collection at the San Francisco Public Library, The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, The Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University in New York State, the Alfred C. Berol Collection of Lewis Carroll at New York University in New York City, the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and The Children's and Young Adult Literature Special Collection at the University of South Florida in Tampa. I visited these libraries to review the books and collect digital reproductions of all of their illustrations. The quantity, rarity, and locality of the illustrations within the parameters of this project

necessitated a digital collection of images for extended and iterative study. I own several editions of *Wonderland* and utilized my copies when possible. Note my access to fruitful collections was also delimited by resources, distance, and permissions.

- c. ***Scanning and labeling images.*** At each library, I made digital scans of the images whenever possible, but I also relied on assistance from librarians and other personnel. I used a high-resolution Epson Perfection V37 flatbed scanner to collect most illustrations, unless flatbed scanning could have damaged the book, or was forbidden by the lending institution, or if the scanning bed was too small to accommodate the book format. In those instances, I used the next best reproduction method reasonably available (e.g., digital photographs of the illustrations, or the institutions' available scanner). I created a digital folder named by illustrator and publication year for each edition. I named each illustration scan file based on its illustrator and position in the book. I labeled each book's illustrated front matter as chapter "0" and back matter as chapter "13". With this system, I could identify each image by a name (e.g. "Tenniel 3.1" indicates the first illustration in Tenniel's chapter 3).
- d. ***Organizing images and managing the data.*** I organized each image in a chart, chronologically aligning each illustrator's works (in columns) with the chapter of Carroll's text (in rows). I left blank cells as place holders in the chronology for each edition not containing a scene. Figure

1 shows a single page birds-eye view of this spreadsheet. My research collection contained over 5700 illustrations.

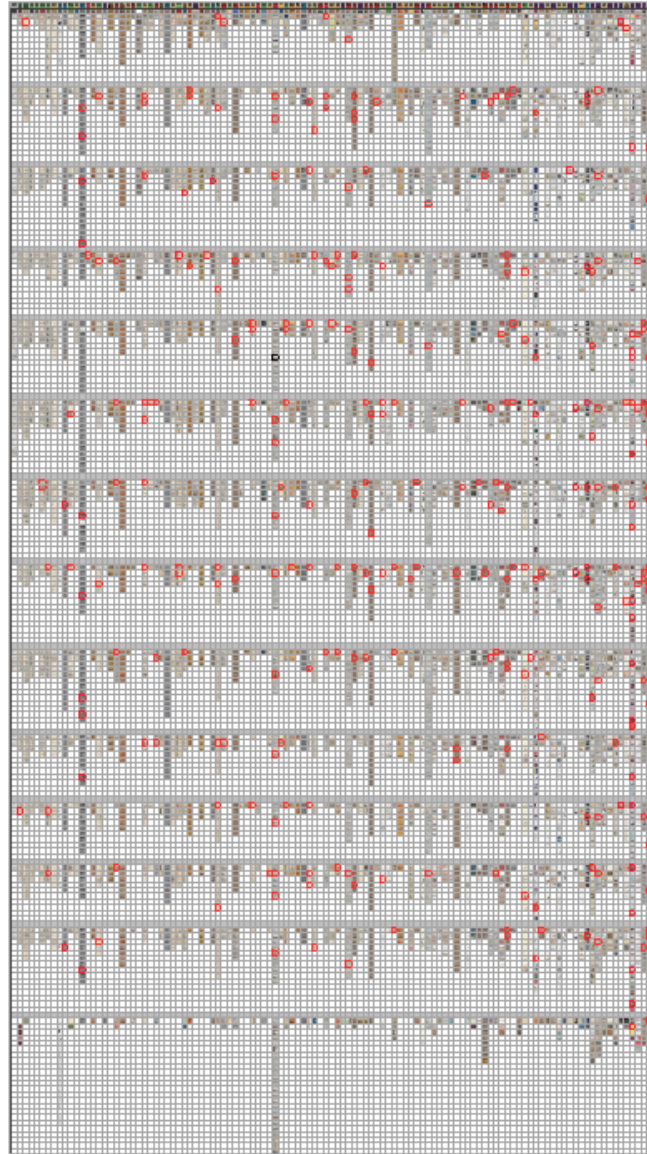


Figure 1: A birds-eye view of the chart of illustrations collected for this study.

- e. ***Recording preliminary interpretations.*** As my interpretive perspective changed (Erickson 1986: 153) while organizing the data, I made preliminary notes about emerging questions and observations of the

images. This process is not unlike other qualitative data analyses. When an image piqued my interest, I outlined its cell in red in the chart. An image may have received a red outline if it was of *unique artistic or linguistic value*. Illustrations of *unique artistic value* may have been created by illustrators with an *unusual or distinct style or artistic method*, or an *unusual perspective or framing*. Determining *linguistic value* was a process of identifying ways in which an illustration was positioned uniquely in relation to Carroll's text. Illustrations of unique linguistic value may contain messages not found in Carroll's text, messages differing from Carroll's text, messages found within his text but uncommon to illustration, or messages anachronistic to Carroll's late-Victorian Oxford, England contexts. Outlining noteworthy illustrations in red allowed me to identify potential emerging thematic categories, and made illustrations of interest easier to identify as I researched each illustration in my step 2. I analyzed each image in a second corresponding chart.

2. Research the story and illustrations. I looked closely at all illustrations in my image collection.

- a. ***Searching for critical reviews.*** I conducted a search of literature in art, literature, and education databases surrounding *Wonderland*. I sought comment and critique of Carroll's literal and inferential meanings from the book's initial publication to present, in each illustrated edition, published in each edition's own time, as well as retrospective critique, and recruited a special collections librarian to assist in the historical search. I also read literature I had collected since

my initial literature review for this project and reread literature I read during my literature review process.

- b. ***Close reading using illustration analysis prompt.*** Following the advice of curator Dana Friis-Hansen (2001), I began with the artwork, then learned about the artist. I recognized the need for a consistent approach for analysis of images. I studied each of the more than 5700 illustrations using an illustration analysis prompt I devised specifically for my project (See Figure 2 for my Illustration Analysis Prompt text). I conceptualized this tool as a prompt because I used it to focus my observations while allowing myself freedom to leave areas blank and fill in free form comments as illustrations presented themes or ideas I had not considered previously. I developed the prompts around text and image based on broad understandings of visual literacy and critical interpretations of literature (e.g., Barthes 1977; Berger 1972/2008; Dondis 1973; Erikson 2009; Hamer, Nodelman, et al., 2017; May, 1981; Nodelman 1998; Serafini and Blasingame 2012; Sipe 2012; van Leeuwen 2001), the contextual themes section through broad reading of *Wonderland* and Carroll scholars (e.g., Goodacre 1977; Hancher 1985; Hollingsworth 2009; Jacques and Giddens 2013; Lovell-Smith 2003), and the methods to methodology section through broad reading in the field of curation (e.g., Berger 1972/2008; Chambers 2006; Friis-Hansen 2001; Kuoni 2001; Moser 2008).

<p>Text and Image: [illustration number (chapter number and image sequence in chapter; i.e. 1.3 is third illustration in first chapter)]</p> <p><u>Image caption:</u> [if any was published]</p> <p><u>Who or what is pictured?</u> [a description of the subject of the image]</p> <p><u>What is happening?</u> [a description of the action in the image]</p> <p><u>When/where does it take place?</u> [a description of the setting in the image]</p> <p><u>How is the scene portrayed?</u> [a description of the way in which the image is shown; i.e., centered, bottom third of page, borders, long shot, low angle, color image, etc.]</p> <p><u>Other observations/notes:</u> [any other observations about the image]</p> <p>Contextual Themes from Wonderland</p> <p><u>Nature:</u> [a description of connections with nature in the image]</p> <p><u>Time:</u> [a description of evidence of time in the image]</p> <p><u>Reality:</u> [a description of way in which the image may play with what is real]</p> <p><u>Size:</u> [a description of evidence of size as a theme in the image]</p> <p><u>Personal Identity:</u> [a description of connections to the development or maintenance of personal identity]</p> <p><u>Other potential themes:</u> [a description of any other prominent or budding theme evident in the image]</p> <p>Methods to Methodology: Curation</p> <p><u>Image of interest?</u> [yes or maybe, otherwise left blank]</p> <p><u>Points considered:</u> [a description of how the image may relate to other images in the research collection]</p> <p><u>Counterpoints considered:</u> [a description of how the image may be read against other images in the research collection]</p> <p><u>Wonderings:</u> [any questions or possible connections to new themes]</p>
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Figure 2: Illustration Analysis Prompt.

I copied and pasted the Illustration Analysis Prompt text into an analysis spreadsheet organized in columns by illustrator (chronologically, by publication date) and in rows by *Wonderland* chapter (See Figure 3 for a snipped excerpt of this qualitative analysis spreadsheet), mimicking the set-up of my chart of illustrations. The prompt includes cues about the illustration and its interaction with the linguistic text, aesthetic qualities such as artistic style, techniques, and media, connections to established themes in *Wonderland*, whether or not the image may connect with my curated collection of ideas, and other notes about the image. This prompt guided my focus as I looked closely and systematically at each illustration in iterative phases.



Illustrator	Chapter	Analysis
Illustrator 1	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 1.1
Illustrator 1	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 1.2
Illustrator 1	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 1.3
Illustrator 2	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 2.1
Illustrator 2	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 2.2
Illustrator 2	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 2.3
Illustrator 3	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 3.1
Illustrator 3	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 3.2
Illustrator 3	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 3.3
Illustrator 4	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 4.1
Illustrator 4	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 4.2
Illustrator 4	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 4.3
Illustrator 5	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 5.1
Illustrator 5	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 5.2
Illustrator 5	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 5.3
Illustrator 6	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 6.1
Illustrator 6	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 6.2
Illustrator 6	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 6.3
Illustrator 7	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 7.1
Illustrator 7	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 7.2
Illustrator 7	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 7.3
Illustrator 8	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 8.1
Illustrator 8	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 8.2
Illustrator 8	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 8.3
Illustrator 9	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 9.1
Illustrator 9	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 9.2
Illustrator 9	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 9.3
Illustrator 10	Chapter 1	Analysis of illustration 10.1
Illustrator 10	Chapter 2	Analysis of illustration 10.2
Illustrator 10	Chapter 3	Analysis of illustration 10.3

Figure 3: A snipped excerpt of my qualitative analysis spreadsheet using **Illustration Analysis Prompts**.

- c. ***Chronological analysis by image/chapter.*** I used the analysis prompt to record my observations, thoughts, and questions about each image, moving across each row block/chapter of the spreadsheet, from Carroll's manuscript illustrations of 1864 through Andrea D'Aquino's illustrations of 2015. First, following a chronological arrangement, I studied all illustrators' Chapter "0" works then subsequent each chapter. Some images held my attention in ways others did not. As an example of extremes, a small black-line, decorative shape holds fewer points for analytical description than a two-page full-color spread, situated within the context of a chapter. In many images, I did not find evidence of new or significant connections with the a priori themes of nature, time, reality, size, and identity development (e.g., Auerbach, 1973; Goodacre, 1977; Groth, 2012; Helle-Valle and Binder 2009; Hollingsworth, 2009; Lovell-Smith, 2003). These a priori themes appear recursively in literature about *Wonderland* and served as focal points for my attention as I began analysis of illustrations. For instances with no evidence, I left that section of the analysis prompt blank. I made note of any other potential or evident themes in the illustrations in this section of the analysis prompt. I continued to outline images of particular interest in red.
- d. ***Reverse chronological analysis by artist/creator.*** I looked at each illustration again, down each column of my chart, studying each illustrator's entire *Wonderland* work from D'Aquino's illustrations of 2015 to Carroll's manuscript illustrations of 1864, while recording a second round of observations about each image using the Illustration

Analysis Prompt spreadsheet. I was able to elaborate connections between and across illustrations over time, similar to my first step of analysis by chapter to inform my observations. Looking in reverse, I made stronger historical connections by tracing artistic influences back in time and had more to say about connections to themes. Johannes Fabian (1983/2002) offers some basis for understanding how time has been used to create distance between the researcher and the Other (i.e., the object of study). Fabian's work is specific to the context of anthropology, but speaks to the current analysis: an object's past is founded in the researcher's present. In this way, my present knowledge of *Wonderland* and illustration led me to create a storied past for scenes and themes of interest to this work. I approached "culture as a text, not a picture" (Fabian, 2002: 107) through the illustrations I studied. I continued to outline illustrations of interest in red in my image organizing spreadsheet and noted possible connections and my wonderings based on my experience with the illustrations in my illustration analysis spreadsheet. Even after this second close look at all illustrations, some images did not seem to contribute to thematic ideas and those spaces beside my analysis prompts remained relatively blank.

- e. ***Qualitative observations and controlled vocabulary.*** As I recorded my observations, I considered what I might say about each illustration if I encountered it in a museum exhibition, using my analysis prompt as a guide. This approach helped me look at each illustration as a unique work of art and render the work into linguistic descriptors. However, more often than not, an illustration was quite similar to another image

in the collection, leading to my development of a somewhat controlled vocabulary, utilizing the same term (rather than a synonym, alternate, or variant term; often employing terms from Carroll's text). I also used controlled vocabulary to describe ways in which the illustration is portrayed (e.g., long shot, close-up, high angle, no frame, marginal borders, etc. (UNESCO)).

With the large number of illustrations, I was aware I had to balance a sense of progress with physical fatigue. On most days, I could thoughtfully observe no more than 100 illustrations. This required considerable amount of observational time each day with intermittent breaks. I found that while my analysis spreadsheet was useful as a retrospective and reflective tool, it was most useful to help me process my notes about the illustrations in the moment.

3. Thematic conceptualization of an exhibition of ideas. I considered themes in the illustrations and their relation to changes in portrayals of scenes, characters, and ideas in the books.

- a. **Analyzing a priori themes.** I utilized my previously recorded notes about ideas related to nature, time, reality, size, and the development of personal identity from the analysis spreadsheet. The contouring of time to a priori themes helped me focus my attention as I made observations, make sense of the vast body of visual data, and better understand how these themes continuously situate *Wonderland* in sociocultural evolution. Using inductive and deductive processes, from existing themes around *Wonderland* as well as emerging themes from my study of the illustrations, I was able to isolate and name new thematic ideas.

b. ***Studying new insights.*** I recognized different patterns across the illustrations and noted these new potential themes in my analysis spreadsheet. Thus far, I have studied in-depth four topics: the Hatter character, the character's gaze, Alice's fall to *Wonderland*, and anthropomorphized playing card characters. I have always been intrigued by the Hatter character and first noticed the wild variety of ways in which illustrators represent him during my initial study of *Wonderland's* Chapter 7: *A Mad-Tea Party*. Through an investigation of the history of treatment for the mentally ill, I found that changes in the Hatter's *Wonderland* portrayal tended to trace movements and counter-movements in understanding and treatment for mental illness. For example, when patients under treatment for mental illness were treated as wild animals (Porter, 2002), portrayals of the Hatter character often embodied feral glances, wild hair, and erratic body positions. My study led me back to illustrations of the Hatter character, to identify and write about the particular illustrations that exemplified treatment of mental illness in synchronous ways. Next, I realized the book(s) was/were looking back at me during my study. This feeling took hold as I completed my forward-chronological study of the illustrations. As I worked in reverse-chronological order, I added a focus in my notes on instances of characters' gaze directed toward the reader. This idea did not become fully formed until I thought through the beginning and ending scenes of the narratives. In the first chapter of *Wonderland*, I noticed an increasing prevalence of illustrations for Alice's descent to *Wonderland* (a scene often captioned "Down, Down, Down") and noted

Tenniel did *not* illustrate this scene. I also noted a prevalence of Alice's fall in my mind. A closer look at Alice's descent to *Wonderland* led me to more closely examine her return to the waking world. The playing card characters provide a basis for Alice to regain control of her surroundings. I realized I had never given much thought to the card characters, but in my observation of the body of *Wonderland* illustrations, card characters are illustrated in 91% of editions. The prevalence of these characters led me to consider their function in the story. The variety of physical identities given to them by illustrators led me to look more closely at portrayals of their bodies. As I studied and wrote about Alice's descent to the dream of *Wonderland* and the scenes that led to her return to the waking world, I looked more closely at ways in which illustrators granted readers perspectives of the book and how characters seem to gain their own perspectives of the world outside the book through the concept of gaze. I isolated illustrations from each of these four emerging ideas (Down, Hatter, Cards, Gaze) in a separate spreadsheet so I could look more closely and write about the evolution of each idea (See Figure 4 for an excerpt from the **Comparative Theme Analysis** which isolated and compared illustrations related to these four themes).¹

- c. **Conceptualizing exhibits.** I made notes about which illustrations and arrangements might effectively create vignettes of images and ideas for

¹ Before my focus on the playing card characters, I had already noted the prevalence of anthropomorphized characters in the story in my attention to the theme of *nature*. I isolated instances of anthropomorphization in my study chart. This isolated illustration chart led me to identify the presence of both animals and objects with human qualities. After further parsing my anthropomorphization analysis by animal and object, I saw the card characters as a curiosity and isolated illustrations of them in a separate tab for viewing.

a wider audience. In a sense, I conceptualized two exhibitions: (1) the physical exhibition of *Wonderland* materials and (2) the “exhibition” of ideas and digital reproduction of illustrations in my research write-up documents. The research document became a space to work out conceptual ideas, less constrained by size than the physical exhibition. During this project, my institution, acquired a considerable collection of *Wonderland* editions and I had the opportunity to promote this acquisition with my project. My institution allowed me exhibit space in the Special Collections Reading Room. I outlined topics for contextualizing narratives around each theme, selecting from available illustrations that exemplified talking points. Within the constraints of space and materials, I had to iteratively rethink and reorganize which illustrations and ideas to exhibit. I realized it would be impossible to address all my findings in the exhibition space available. As *gaze* was one main conclusion from the findings of the study I arrived at an exhibition concept for addressing gaze *through* instances of illustrations of the other threads of my findings. Utilizing the other three branches of my findings to build was a fitting choice for several reasons:

- illustrations at the intersection of these three ideas and the concept of gaze existed and were available to me,
- I already had a depth of knowledge about these ideas that would lend itself to creating the contextualizing text panels for the exhibition,
- these three ideas (*Down*, *Hatter*, *Cards*) represent essential elements of the beginning, middle, and end of the story, creating a logical sequence for viewers,

- there were four display cases available for my exhibition.

The thematic choice for my exhibition concept seemed logical and fortuitous.





















































































Down, Down, Down		Hatter		Anthropomorphized Animals		Anthropomorphized Objects		Card Characters		Gaze to Readers	
CY	CZ	DA	DB	DC	DD	DE	DF	DG	DH	DI	DJ
Maggie Taylor (2008)	Robert Ingpen (2009)	John Vernon Lord (2009)	Oleg Lipchenko (2009)	Rodney Matthews (2009)	Nancy Wiley (2009)	Jenny Frison and Jill Thompson	Camille Rose Garcia (2010)	Yayoi Kusama (2012)	Fran Parreno (2013)	Anna Bond (2015)	Andrea D'Aquino (2015)
											
											
											
											
											
											
											

Figure 4: A snipped excerpt from the **Comparative Theme Analysis** spreadsheet.

4. Select specific illustrations. Using preliminary selections of illustrations to represent different themes (see Figure 4's tabs with "Gaze to Readers" highlighted), I narrowed my focus to illustrations offering comparative and/or contrasting ideas and elucidating significant ideas in *Wonderland* based on my observations, questions, and conclusions.

- Selections for research write-up.** For my research write-up document, I selected illustrations to help me tell the story of the themes from my research collection with few limitations.

- b. ***Selections for the exhibition.*** Because of space parameters for the exhibition, I utilized illustrations to build connections between the four thematic ideas while focusing on the book's gaze directed toward the reader. I chose illustrations from editions held in my institution's collection or my personal collection. Creating the final design for the exhibit was one of the last steps in my process.
- c. ***Framing the exhibit of each theme.*** I created visual outlines of each idea by seeking illustrations to elucidate ideas about the narratives I drafted around the ideas of Alice's fall, the Hatter, the playing cards, and gaze, regardless of their mention in critical literature. I began to highlight and integrate these illustrations in my written discussion of findings in my document. I began to determine which selections could represent the concept of gaze in the exhibition.
- d. ***Writing academic text in the curation process.*** As my research document began to take shape, I also worked in an inverted process, selecting critical points in my discussion, then selecting images to illustrate them. I often searched my illustration analysis chart for keywords to locate illustrations pertaining to my developing discussion, then wrote about ideas surrounding those images. Re-ordering and transitioning coherently from one idea to the next in a linear academic text was one of my greatest challenges in my project, as those ideas came about through iterative and tangled processes.
- e. ***The aesthetics and sociocultural messages of exhibits.*** I considered aesthetic appeal (in both a positive and negative sense) and considered

which artistic and sociocultural eras were present in my selections and which were not represented.

- f. ***Choosing stopping points.*** Through this process, I realized my conclusions could never be final— my vast collection of images present new and appended ideas for as long as I continue to think, read, and write about *Wonderland*. Some stopping points became logistic, like choosing only enough illustrated editions for the exhibition based on the available physical space. As for my research write-up document, choosing stopping points was more difficult, as a digitally-produced document has almost no size constraints. Time and attention became greater factors for stopping points in my document. I knew my anticipated readers would have limited time and attention to devote to reading. I reflected on the academic writing process to help me establish appropriate stopping points in the research write-up.

5. **Contextualize the illustrations.** I contextualized the illustrations using academic discourse in the research write-up and through descriptive narratives for the exhibit.

- a. ***Consulting the literature.*** I contextualized my selected illustrations of *Wonderland* by synthesizing research from published critical and biographical literature then added my observations and findings. Political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual histories helped me understand historical contexts (Grenby, 2011; Rudd, 2011). These personal understandings are embedded within the contexts I provided by nature of the curatorial process. If art “invariably reflects the political and sociocultural contexts in which it is made” (Sipe, 2011),

art is a product of the culture, initially perceived within its own context. But, those perceptions change over time. As I laid out my selected illustration and connected them with words, chronology again became important to building meaning around these images.

- b. ***Selecting quotes and framing ideas.*** I sought quotes from Carroll's story to offer evidence of his unique literary voice and the narrative context related to images from the story. I quoted other scholar's works and added my own findings and questions. Throughout the writing of contextualizing narratives, visual and artistic content, logical links to Carroll's words, and the contexts in which they were re-illustrated played large roles in what I wrote about the illustrations. Figure 5 is an example of a contextualizing poster I created as an introduction to the exhibition.



Figure 5: An introductory poster to the exhibit.

6. Strategically arrange illustrations. Three sources of influence guided the strategic arrangement of illustrations in my document and in the accompanying exhibition: critical literature, my findings, and utilizing a mindset like that of museum curators. I integrated relevant points from ideas I developed in the research write-up document and used them as a basis for development of informational panels for the exhibit.

- a. **Image and text arrangement.** By drafting image and text arrangements in my research write-up document, I was able to identify what I could

add to each arrangement to represent various artistic movements, eras, and sociocultural ideas.

- b. **Representing data.** I aimed to connect moments in history and in the narrative, rather than to suggest a singular path of development in *Wonderland* illustrations. My intent was to draw attention to the nature of the illustrations, questions about them, and possible responses to those questions. Perhaps because of my chronological analysis method, or perhaps because of the historically-situated nature of my research purpose, chronological arrangement of these illustrations was most logical. When illustrations were absent in the chronology of ideas, I explained their absence and the significance of non-representation to the theme in words.
- c. **Data constraints and work-arounds.** Arranging illustrations for the exhibition presented new challenges, necessitating my selection of a subset of images. With space constraints and limited *Wonderland* edition availability, I had to pare down my illustration selections, then revise my contextualizing panels and talks. My goal was to maintain some richness of content while working within real physical limits. I eliminated earlier selections based on a variety of criteria: unique representations of particular illustrator's work, presence of particular artistic movements, and availability of editions. I worked out final arrangements on paper before I arranged the books in three-dimensional space (see Figure 6). In this way, I conducted a physical rehearsal for the exhibition setup. I was able to foresee problems and develop work-arounds ahead of the installation.



Figure 6: A rehearsal of the exhibit installation.

7. Interpret illustrations and themes. My project constitutes an idiosyncratic interpretation of *Wonderland* as a response to my research questions and to promote new questions.

- a. ***The impact of genre and audience.*** As I reviewed my notes from the first six processes in my project, I revised the series of texts necessary for the curation process. Curators often compose contextualizing panels and a curator's talk for the exhibit. I composed my conclusions, new questions, and overall impressions of the collective for my research write-up document. These rehearsed interpretations through written documents constituted another form of interpretation through the process of writing. Developing a exhibit of illustrations forced me to pare down my ideas and address only the most essential parts of my message about *Wonderland*. (See Figure 7 for a photo of one portion of the installation.) Writing a curator's talk for the unveiling of the exhibition further helped me process my ideas. My curator's talk consisted of a framing statement about the exhibition, a summary of my research processes, and highlights about the ideas showcased in the

exhibition. I was available to respond to questions from the audience. Further interpretations derived from other casual and academic conversations about my work, never recorded word for word, were vital to furthering the development of my ideas about *Wonderland* illustration. This part of my process is never finished and contributes to ever-developing understandings of messages conveyed to readers through *Wonderland* illustration.

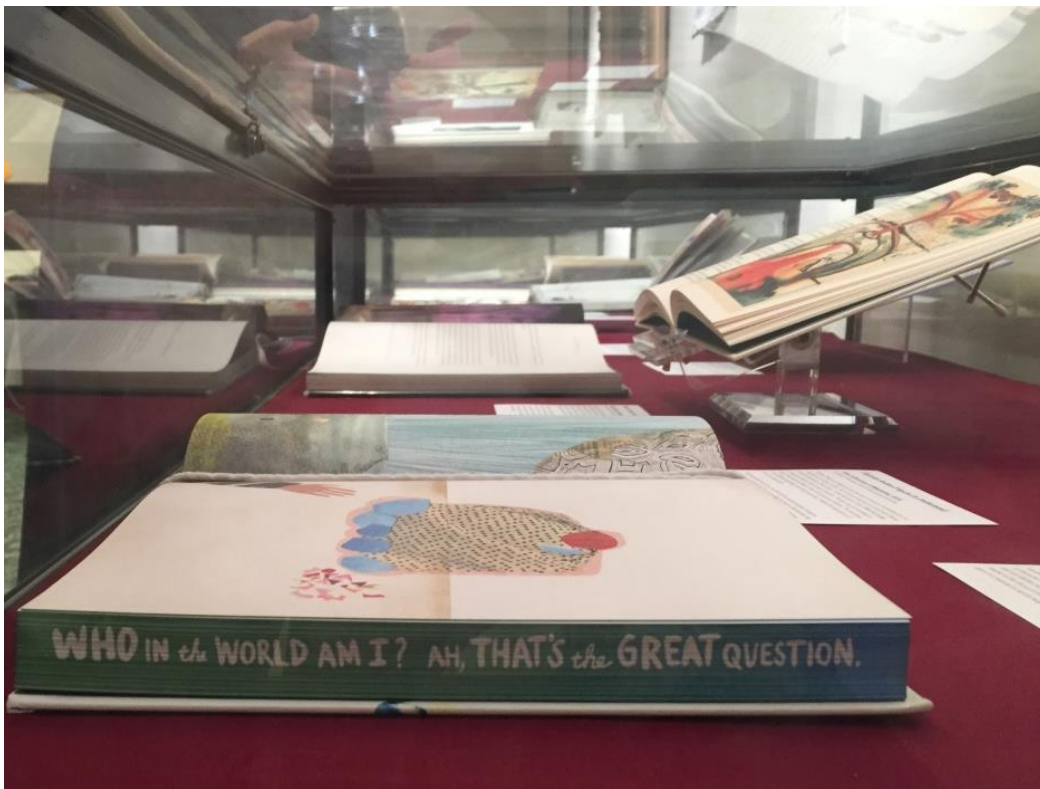


Figure 7: One portion of the physical installation.

Curatorial Findings

The physical and intellectual work of curation happen iteratively, arriving at a sharable product. In the instance of my project, the work of each new *Wonderland* illustrator offers a different perspective on the story. Studying the body of *Wonderland* illustrations

offers a glimpse at consistencies and changes in the story's imaging over time. Underlying messages are situated synchronically in the times in which they were adopted, and then echo diachronically through the work of subsequent artists who reflect, extend, and counter meanings in the story over time. The curatorial process helped me to see the images in this way-- waxing and waning of ideas about the story, presented visually over time. This process was long, iterative, and at times tedious, but the above outlined steps were necessary to arrive at a broad, flexible, and insightful way of thinking about *Wonderland* without losing sight of the aesthetic and culturally significant underlying messages in the story's images. My organizational techniques (i.e., the multiple spreadsheets I used to house the illustration scans and my descriptions of them) helped me to remain broad-minded, flexible, and appreciative of the works I studied, mitigating fatigue that would have been more prevalent without this systematicity.

Throughout my curatorial process, it occurred to me that museum curators must experience similar processes in their work, though perhaps in a different manner, and likely without documenting them in this detail. While curators may not make their processes tangible by organizing digital reproductions of artifacts in spreadsheets or studying their artifacts within uniform research protocols, one goal of my research was to explicitly document the process in order to make it rigorous and trustworthy. My review of the field of curation reveals curators write about their subject matter, rather than their processes. I envisioned curators performing similar steps as they arrived at various decision points. Phillip Townsend, a curator at the University of Texas, Austin, customarily identifies themes in the artist's work as the driving force in his conceptualization of an exhibition. Once a theme is identified, the exhibition and its contextualizing narratives direct viewers to create their own conceptualizations of that theme (Townsend, personal communication, December 29, 2015). It is more likely museum curators typically operate through implicit mental processes of

examining a collection of related artifacts, while holding particular themes and questions in mind.

Though the specific work of curators varies, essential qualities of the work described by practicing curators are useful to move beyond the casual conception of curation as a synonym for “selection.” How does one instantiate these ideas to achieve such lofty and important goals? Beginning my analysis with a frame of well-documented themes from *Wonderland* literature focused my attention and helped me to channel thinking toward ideas from the text as they have been reflected in the story’s illustration. Looking at the illustrations in forward- and backward-chronologies brought ideas to my attention as I watched them develop then traced those ideas back to their first instances. This process is widely applicable to artifacts of sociocultural significance.

Wonderland Findings

To begin from the beginning of my curated example, Alice’s fall down the rabbit hole represents not only her entry into the world of *Wonderland*, but it has also been a source of psychoanalytical examination since Freud. Although it was not originally a scene illustrated by Tenniel, its details across time are relatively stable and offer some clues to understanding multiple perspectives on falling and Freud. I examined how this one scene (the setting, the character, the theme), presented over and over, captures aspects of culture as influenced by diverse fields. Impacted tremendously by Disney’s animated film scene, the history of *Down* is a timeline of intersections between illustration and culture.

Alice’s encounter with the Hatter character comes near the middle of the story. Variations in this character’s visual portrayal in illustration signal variations in sociocultural treatment of people with mental illness. My study of the Hatter was conducted through a forward chronology of the evolution of one field of study as represented in the portrayal of a

character. The Hatter presents a timeline of culture-level reflections on madness— much like Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1988).

At the end of *Wonderland*, anthropomorphized playing card characters facilitate Alice's exit from her dream. My study of the card characters began with a timeline within the book, looking at the first instance of anthropomorphism and the card characters' significance in the plot as a point for further study. I observed changes in their bodily appearance over time. Illustrations of each character suggest their characterizations are at once fixed and flexible. The materiality of the body and Alice's firm stance in rejecting the cards as immaterial ("You are nothing but a pack of cards!" in Carroll, 1865/1866: 187) allows Alice to exit her dream and, in a sense, grow up.

Studying these three *Wonderland* scenes/characters collectively provided evidence of a shift in the readers' perspective and authority through the artistic and critical concept of *gaze* (Deleuze, 2015). *Gaze* pertains to the cast of the eye in an exchange of subjectivity and objectivity. In *Wonderland* illustrations, the image of eyes is increasingly prevalent, particularly in editions published in the last few years, giving me the impression the book was looking back at me. This observation led to new questions about why a book would look to its reader—for reactions, for clues to current sociocultural status. The body of *Wonderland* illustrations reveals there is reciprocity in the illustrative process, as they reflect not only each artists' personal context but serve as a reflection of readers' contexts in an evolving relationship between author, illustrator, and reader. The process of narrowing my focus to four major ideas was necessary in such a large body of works and was based on my observations of the anthropology around these ideas. Narrowing my focus was also necessary to arrive at a research product I could share.

Challenges and Opportunities of Process and Products

These various ways of studying a vast collection of image speaks to the flexibility of curation as a methodology. Curation afforded a lens for seeing other meta-ideas across the collection of illustrations. I made observations relating this qualitative meta-analysis to studies I previously conducted using time-lapse photography (Author, 2015). In my time lapse study, I photographed my teaching at short intervals over time to learn about my own habits in instruction. As I studied illustrations of *Wonderland*, I realized I had created a different kind of “time-lapse” study, using available consecutive images of the story. The first aspect in common with both studies is the amount of visual data, several thousand images in each study, many of those images quite similar in composition. With time-lapse photography, I found the technique useful for identifying overarching themes and patterns in qualitative data, the same purpose I undertook in studying *Wonderland* illustrations.

The process of writing about research necessitates a metaphorical smoothing out of the tangle of real challenges. The curatorial steps outlined here overlapped each other and often necessitated much time and space for theoretical thinking and logistical problem-solving. Some steps, such as the illustration collection process or the illustration analysis process, summarized in a few paragraphs here, took months to complete for a collection of more than 5700 images over 150 years of historical ties and varied critical views. From project proposal to completion of the research write-up and exhibition, three years passed. The methods detailed above, while they convey a complexity of the tasks, cannot sufficiently convey the challenges unique to the parameters of this project or others undertaken under the auspices of curation, and likely will not convey the unique challenges and opportunities of curation as a research methodology.

Conclusions

Like other qualitative research methodologies, curation requires the researcher make sense of data, sometimes large amounts of data, then identify themes to construct a public

display of both firm and tentative conclusions, while posing new questions for further exploration. Data analysis for a curator is simultaneously holistic and parsed, inductive and deductive, and highly dependent on the artifacts and their situating contexts. Curators' analysis of "data" stems from broad knowledge of the art world, experience with the work of other curators through academic study, and exposure to a variety of curated exhibitions, lending itself to a holistic exploration of themes relevant to the curator's life and times. Each work is studied for its individual characteristics and message, while drawn into interpretations of a body of work. The inductive processes of curators require the responsiveness Susanne Langer (1953) described as a qualification for understanding art, contextualized by a deep understanding of the artistic subject matter and a framing concept for broadly selected themes. The process is deductive at times as well, as curators may observe previously undiscovered or overlooked ideas within the body of work at hand. Each artifact tells a story, but those stories are interconnected, each informing another as a metanarrative unfolds. Curators select artifacts and construct texts around those selected artifacts to convey the story in an exhibition.

Dana Friis-Hansen said, "A great exhibition is like a seven-course meal with good wine and fascinating conversation, not a stew in which many ingredients have been tossed together and boiled until each is indistinguishable from the whole" (Friis-Hansen, 2000: 67). Jane Farver (2001) also likened the exhibition to a conversation: "As moderator of the 'discussion', the curator must be able to elicit passionate, even extreme, opinions, yet keep the dialogue lucid and well-paced..." (p. 59-60). The data analysis in curation is the development of this conversation, within any practical confines of the exhibition space, time, and potential audience. Hasty application of the term *curation* to snack displays and auto-generated playlists, without the development of rich conversation around the selections, seems to miss many opportunities for meaning-making.

Based on my project, built on Friis-Hansen's (2001) verbs for curation, I propose researchers interested in curating their own exhibitions loosely employ these action verbs tailored to the specific content and contexts of their project: collect, organize, research, conceptualize, select, contextualize, arrange, interpret. My goal in including Chart 1 below is to make available to others a comprehensible blueprint for curation. The curated exhibition of ideas is derived from a depth of knowledge about the subject matter that extends well beyond the trite use of the word as a synonym for "selecting." My experiences curating more than one collection of *Wonderland* illustrations suggests curation is a flexible way to identify complex and profound ideas in a body of work as they relate to sociocultural aspects of the world around us and then share those ideas with an audience. The process of curatorial work offers many opportunities for robust making meaning, for both the curator and the potential viewer.

Chart 1: Curatorial Verbs and Their Definitions Summarized

Collect	Corral and organize potential artifacts for study
Research	Learn about the artifacts through the study and work of others
Conceptualize	Begin to develop thematic ideas based on the artifacts
Select	Choose artifacts that well-represent the thematic ideas
Contextualize	Compose texts to convey themes around selected artifacts
Arrange	Group, sort, and order artifacts and texts to create flow of thematic ideas
Interpret	Review artifacts and texts to further develop thematic ideas for sharing

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