

THE MUSEUM PLANS
AT
The MILCOM MEMORIAL READING ROOM
and ATTENTION LIBRARY

PRESENTED BY THE
ESTHETICAL SOCIETY
for TRANSCENDENTAL and APPLIED REALIZATION
(now incorporating the SOCIETY of ESTHETIC REALIZERS)



A special supplement to the Proceedings

“Souvenir Programs and Pamphlets”
(In continuation of “Contributions on the ‘W’ Cache and Related Sources”)

Documents Ostensibly Pertaining to the Origins and Development of
“The Order of the Third Bird”

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THE MUSEUM PLANS

The Milcom Memorial Reading Room
and Attention Library
at
MANA CONTEMPORARY



2019

THE MILCOM MEMORIAL READING ROOM
AND ATTENTION LIBRARY
of ESTAR(SER)

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About ESTAR(SER): *The Esthetical Society for Transcendental and Applied Realization (now incorporating the Society of Esthetic Realizers)* is an established body of private, independent scholars and amateurs who work collectively to recover, scrutinize, and (where relevant) draw attention to the historicity of the Order of the Third Bird.

About the Order of the Third Bird: There remains some confusion about the history and practices of the body known as the Order of the Third Bird, but evidence points to its having been for some time a loose network of cell-like groups that engage in ritualized forms of sustained attention to works of art. The canons of secrecy around these activities — their structure and purposes — have traditionally been sufficiently restrictive as to leave some doubt as to whether any individual professing intimacy with the Order could in fact be genuinely associated therewith.

[†] Trustees residing more than fifty miles from New York City.

THIS PAST YEAR has brought flood but no famine to the Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library at Mana Contemporary. It is with deepest gratitude that we commend Nerissa Cooney for her unwavering support of ESTAR(SER) as we bailed out and rebuilt our basement space after a summer squall bested the drainage. So too, we recognize the new B.B. Chamberlin Fellow, Stevie Knauss, who, in addition to weathering that storm, installed in the Milcom Room *The Lone Tree Folds*, a work on paper discovered in the W-Cache that, in its new home, encourages experimentation both inside and across the grounds of Mana Contemporary. And much must be said of *The Museum Plans*, a breathtaking albeit enigmatic series of collages uncovered in the course of the aforementioned cleanup. Researched and presented in this volume by D. Graham Burnett and David Richardson, these floorplans offer an oblique perspective on Birdish tendencies reverberating from the late '60s through the present, as well as insight into the "Protocol of the Angel," an attentional practice newly under investigation by the Sprague Inquiry Working Group and soon to be presented at MASS MoCA.

In addition to facilitating research on and experimentation with practices of attention, the Milcom Room challenges visitors to consider deeply their own encounters with and behaviors toward works made to be seen. During her tenure as Curatorial Director, Alison Burstein has graced this space with her talent for using objects to ask (and to answer) hard questions, work that has galvanized the community both within and beyond these walls. For this, I, and the entire board of trustees, congratulate and extend sincere thanks to Alison. Finally, the ESTAR(SER) community gratefully acknowledges Mana Contemporary for making possible this ever-evolving installation of Milcom's works — and our own.

Jessica Palinski

FLYING BY KNIGHT: “L” IN THE ROOKERY

by D. Graham Burnett and David Richardson

In the course of cleanup from a recent (small, basement) flood in the Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library (no permanent damage), we happened upon a sheaf of papers heretofore undocumented by ESTAR(SER). The seven loose sheets, which are reproduced in the present publication, came to light during the rescue of a folding wooden chessboard. They had been slipped into the baize-lined case, and were found with a longhand note in blue ballpoint pen, reading: “L — the transparencies you requested, in gratitude for the movements of the last week...Yours, The Rookie.”¹

The sheets are striking: each amounts to a kind of collage, layered upon the floorplan of a notable European museum; onto each sheet a translucent overleaf has been pinned or tacked or sewn (in all but one case this overleaf is composed of blue-lined graph paper, a kind of ersatz vellum, looking to date from the late 1960s; the exception is a square of yellowing tissue); clips of text, snipped from a book and hand-colored in pencil, are affixed atop the overleaf flaps.

¹ It should perhaps be noted that the chessboard in question was stored with several others originally thought to be part of the “*Kriegsspiel Sammlung*” holdings from the W-Cache (see “Presenting and Representing the ‘W-Cache’: Problems of Selection, Access, and Documentation in Relation to the Material Culture of the Order of the Third Bird,” *Proceedings of ESTAR[SER]*, New Series, Part VII, Supplement [2016]: 22-3). Only recently did Easter McCraney draw attention to the fact that at least one of these boards was *not* an artifact from the W-Cache, as had been previously thought, but rather Milcom’s private possession. See: Easter McCraney, “Milcom the Metagnome,” *Proceedings of ESTAR[SER]*, “Special Supplement” no. 2 (2018): 9. It has subsequently been determined that a considerable number of the board-figurine configurations in the original “*Kriegsspiel Sammlung*” are in fact forgeries, and the Committee on Holdings has begun decommissioning these pieces, one of which recently sold to an anonymous buyer for a considerable sum. These monies, we note, have been used to fund the present publication.

We offer, as the frontispiece to this pamphlet, the largest of the series, which is anomalous in several respects (it features a diagram, as the others do not; its appliquéd text has a different form). Let us put it aside. The other six sheets display much formal congruence. In every instance, the collaged bits of text take the shape of an “L,” with the final word severed from the preceding phrase and thereby forming the short arm.

Gathering these enigmatic fragments (and using a “/” to signify the line breaks), we have:

*The birds filled the / tree-tops
attention looking / back
Once more, the object must / change.
consider different aspects and relations of it in / turn.
to get a glimpse is to / shun
In the highest phase the trance is / complete,*

Those having some familiarity with the workings of that enigmatic sodality known as the “Order of the Third Bird” will discern in these phrases certain very definite resonances. To be sure, we have the perfectly explicit invocation of an avian congregation from the *incipit*. Then the bell-like theme of “attention,” with which Birdish associates are centrally concerned, is immediately struck. The third line introduces the notion of an “object” (and we know that those affiliated with the *Avis Tertia* regularly convene to give their attention to *objects* — this being the central rite or usage of their community). A sense of absorbing, durational engagement would seem to be conveyed by the phrase “consider different aspects and relations of it in / turn,” even as the next line (with its notion of “shunning”) might be thought to have about it something of the mood of the phase of withdrawal/inversion/reversal that Birds call “Negation” (or sometimes “Erasure”). Finally, the language of “trance” and the para-ecstatic gestures in the direction of sublime transport perhaps convey a little shiver of the metempsychotic *apotheosis* of a canonical “Action” of the Order.

Moreover, additional research permits us to say, further, that all of these phrases (and the diagram and text on the larger collage reproduced as the frontispiece) have been snipped from an edition of William James’s *Psychology* — most of them from the chapter on “Attention,” a text known to

be of considerable importance to the Birds (particularly in the United States in the early twentieth century).²

Finally, we cannot fail to notice that this glimmering constellation of attentional themes finds itself here projected onto the detailed layouts of a set of *major art museums* — precisely the haunts most associated with the durational practices of attention conducted by traditional devotees of the Order.³

All of this clearly places us in the ambit of Birdish doings; we believe there can be no doubt that these suggestive sheets bear some relationship to activities of the Order of the Third Bird (or one of its adjacencies).



But no sooner have we made this positive statement than we are swamped by a veritable *tsunami* of uncertainties. Who is “The Rookie?” Is “L” our own Lennard (aka Learned) “Hogfoot” Milcom? What are the mysterious “movements” at issue? Why the “L”-shaped text-collages? Why the translucent overlays? Why the floorplans? *Why?!*

At this stage of our investigations, we are yet to see the floodwater of questions recede. At best, we are able hurriedly to toss our hypotheses from the deck of our wracking research vessel. We cherish them, but at present they may appear to some as mere flotsam in a storm of possibilities.

² The clippings hail from the 1910 Henry Holt “American Science Series” textbook version of James’s work; the chapter on attention in this edition is redacted from the full treatment in the original *Principles of Psychology* of 1890. On the filiations of James’s work in relation to the Order, see The William James Working Group, “Fix Your Eyes Right Here! The Life and Times of Inyard Kip Ketchem, the Performing Attention Doctor” forthcoming in the *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*.

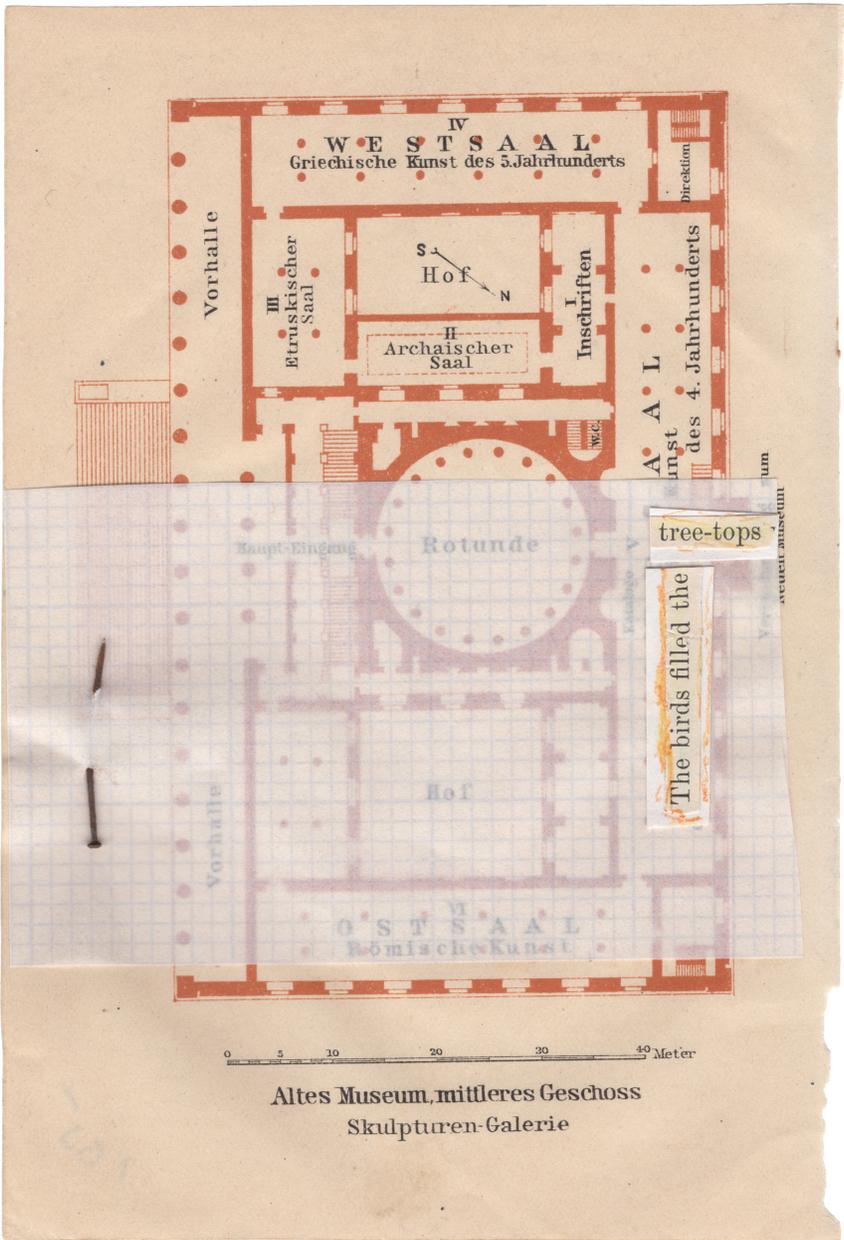
³ The actual floorplan maps have clearly been pulled from a set of Baedeker guides, which (given the profusion of very similar editions) makes the individual sheets difficult to date precisely. But all appear to hail from the early twentieth century. The art museums in question are: the British Museum (London), the Altes Museum (Berlin), the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna), the Vatican (Rome), the National Archaeological Museum (Naples), and the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam). In the sheet depicting the only non-art museum included in the series (London’s Natural History Museum), it will be noted that the collaged prompt text has been positioned directly over the avian galleries — and *the textual “turn” points directly to the door of the infamous “Bird Room – Private.”*

Be that as it may, briskly, over the gunwales: 1) we surmise that these sheets document some form of *attentional protocol* heretofore unattested in the annals of the Order; and, 2) we further suspect that this protocol (whatever its exact form) activated the spatial dynamics of the L-shaped “knight’s move,” by which the horseman advances on a chessboard; implying, 3) that the collaged phrases on the overlay sheets should be read as recording the physical trajectories (the *footsteps*) of Birds as they walked to or from specific works of art located within the galleries depicted; further implying, 4) that it may well be possible to reconstruct the *actual works of art* upon which these protocols of attention were performed (since they would seem to have lain under the first and/or last letters [and/or punctuation marks?] of the collaged phrases).

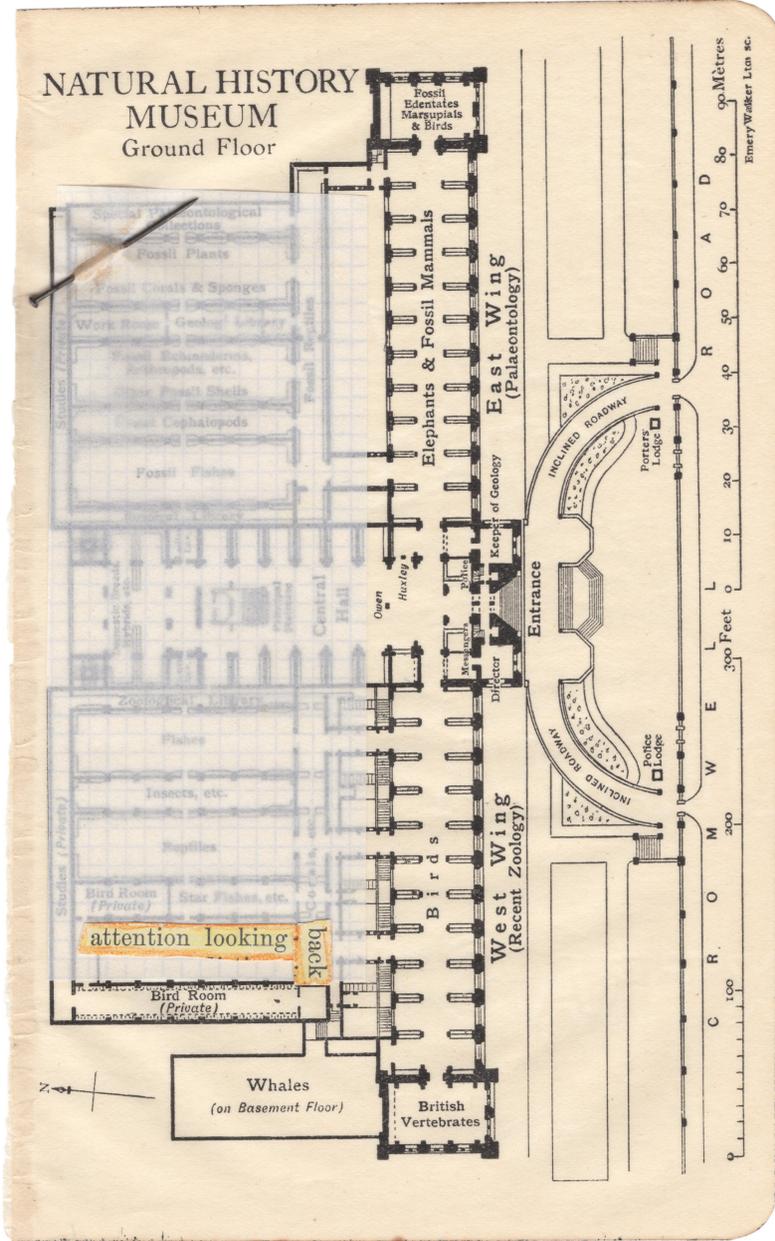
Our evidences for these bold claims will be elaborated in a full study to appear soon in the *Proceedings*. For now, we are obliged to keep our powder, like the Milcom Room itself, dry. Suffice it to say that our argument hinges on recent discoveries made by the Sprague Inquiry Working Group, who have uncovered a “Protocol of the Angel” that involves precisely such an L-shaped choreography. Its origin remains obscure, but we have reason to believe it can be traced to the great Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, whose 1923 volume *Knight’s Move* opens from the premise that art is governed, like the chess board, by the straightening vectors of lockstep convention. The play of the critic, Shklovsky suggests, like that of the knight, must simultaneously follow and defy those conventions — approaching the work *obliquely*.

We concur.

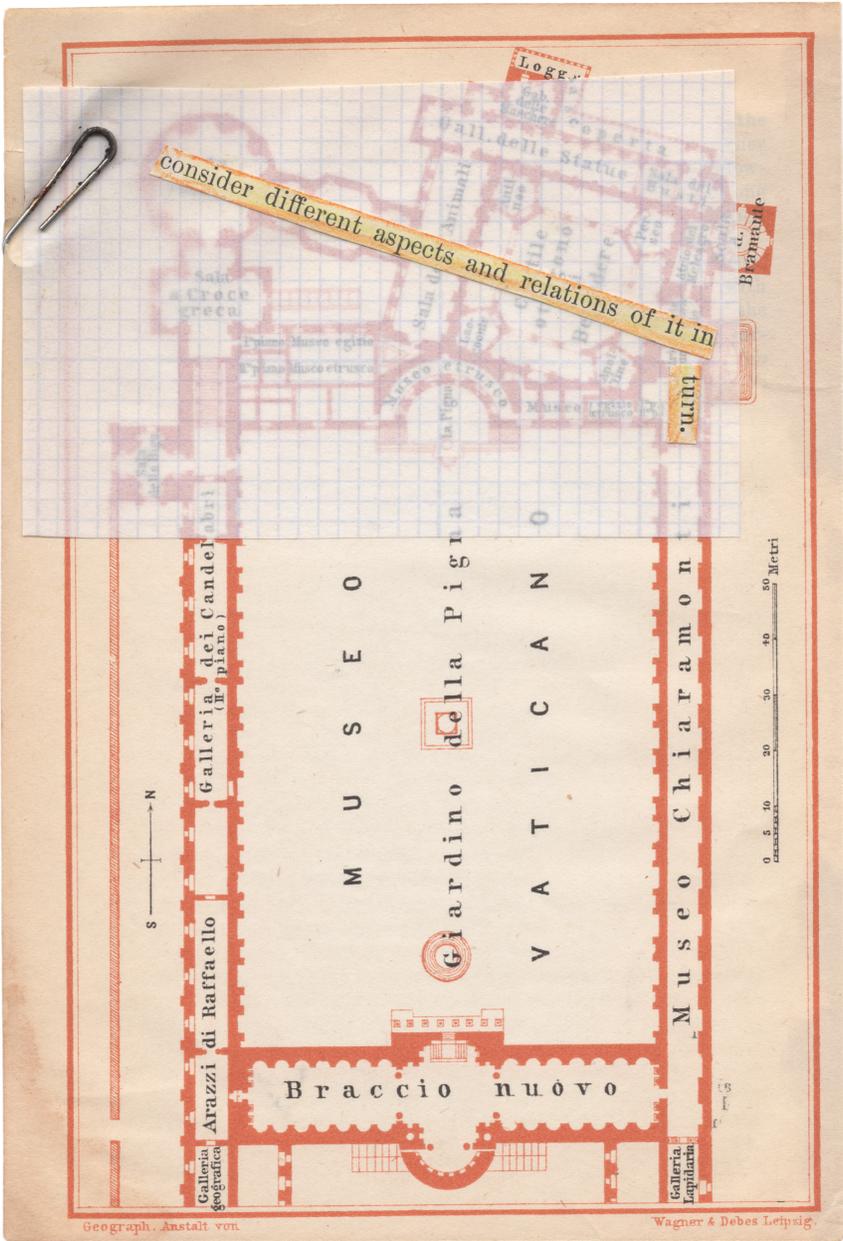
THE MUSEUM PLANS



I. ALTES MUSEUM (BERLIN)

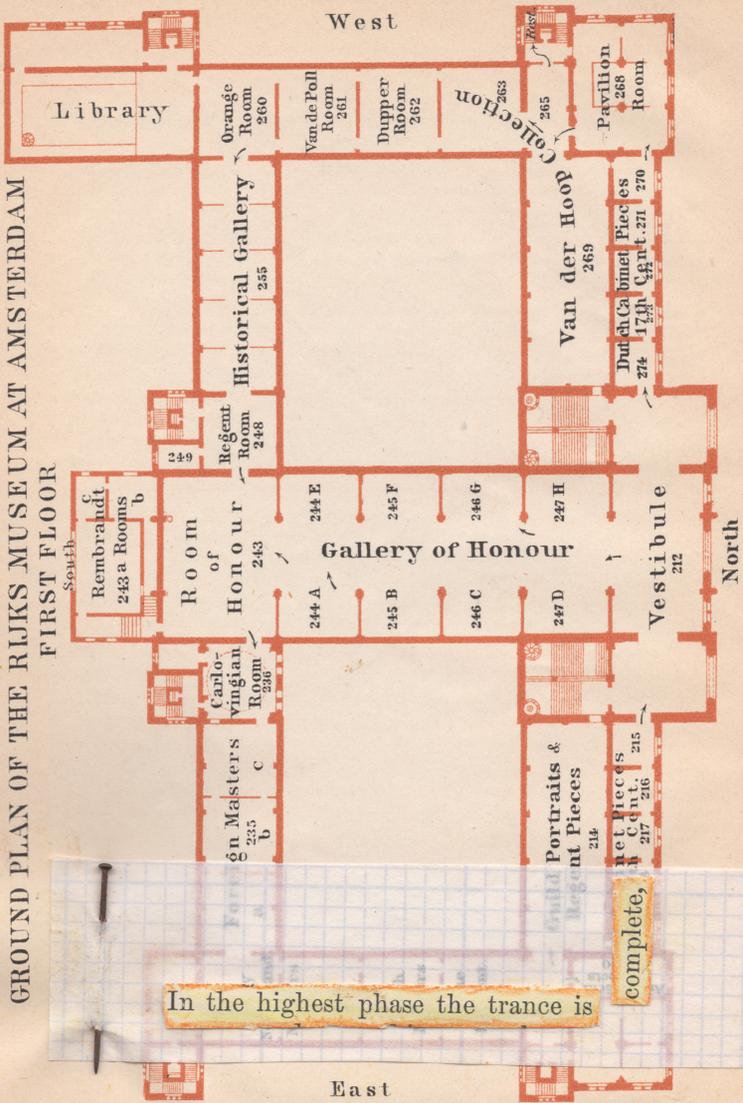


II. THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (LONDON)



IV. THE VATICAN MUSEUM (ROME)

GROUND PLAN OF THE RIJKS MUSEUM AT AMSTERDAM
FIRST FLOOR



In the highest phase the trance is

complete,

VI. THE RIJKSMUSEUM (AMSTERDAM)

NOTES