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edited by

*Emily Miller Bonney, Kathryn J. Franklin
and James A. Johnson*

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of the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien)

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9.

Assembling subjects: world building and cosmopolitics in late medieval Armenia

Kathryn J. Franklin

This chapter will explore the role of assembling in mediating political subjectivity, or the situation of social actors within regimes of value and power, in late medieval Armenia and western Eurasia. The chapter will explore exemplars of the assembling subject: the early modern collector-prince and the contemporary artist-as-assemblage. From the space opened between these modes of conceptualizing the subject-assemblage relationship, the paper will turn to late medieval Armenia and the world assembling undertaken by the merchant prince Tigran Honents. The aim of this chapter is to explore the inherent politics of assembling by examining the links between arguments for power and performed relationships to valuative and imaginative totalities – whether of nature, the known world, or multiple worlds of material coherence and commensurability. By moving from the assemblings of 16th-century Italian collector Ulisse Aldrovandi to a 13th-century Armenian merchant prince situated along highland branches of what is now called the Silk Road, I will develop the argument that the politics of assembling are not dependent on historical subject categories (modern science, pre-modern superstition) but rather manifest in historically specific, contingent ways through the assembling and mobilization of materials, spaces and discourses to projects of distinction and difference – the foundation of politics.

KEYWORDS: MEDIEVAL VS. MODERN SUBJECTIVITY, POLITICS, COLLECTION

This chapter works between the frames of assemblage as collection and collection as microcosm, examining the ways in which assemblings of things are taken for worlds in model or in miniature, and how in turn these assembled worlds invoke as given an assembler. A discussion of material worlds enclosed in boxes, bookbindings, or *in camera* may seem odd in a book on *incompleteness*. However, the intent here is to draw attention to the performed assembling of totality as an ongoing and contingent production not only of intelligible order but also of the ordering subject. Building from archaeological interrogations of the assemblage (Harris 2012; Fowler 2013) and drawing on critical histories of collection (Findlen 1994;

Foucault 1994; Stewart 2007), as well as upon performative interventions in identity (Butler 1993; 2007), I want to engage with ‘world building’ as a process in two interrelated modes.

First, I am interested in the tendency or affinity of things in assembly to entangle into worlds and for open sets to seem closed. Second, I will explore the mutual attraction within the imagination between microcosmic assemblings and present or absent assemblers, subjects who are conjured to inhabit the world of the assemblage, and embodied with the authorial power of its assembling. This is a twist of a standard modernist account of the empowered subject ‘collecting power’ by amassing a definitive and complete assemblage of rare, costly, exotic, strange, wondrous or otherwise potent objects. This narrative has been applied to state collections like the Kunstkammer of Peter the Great and private collections such as that of Augustus Pitt Rivers (Chapman 1985; Alpers 1991; Findlen 1994; Foucault 1994; Clifford 1998; Daston and Park 2001; Chiang 2005; Gosden *et al.* 2007). Moving from these examinations of collecting power to the powers of the collection, I shift my gaze to inquire whether assembling intimate worlds might be a praxis of subjects, critical to the power of selves and others to be imaginable as existent and agent in the world.

This study of assembling worlds as a praxis of empowered subjectivity opens a new possibility: that subjectivity itself might become ‘entangled’ in the things it assembles and the meanings made from them (Thomas 1991; Hodder 2012). Much of this work of ‘tangling’ subjectivity and materiality has already been done, as archaeology and social science more generally have effectively re-appraised the ‘body politic’ as not just constituted of citizens but assembled of various things, objects, and matters of concern (Latour 2005; De Landa 2006; Smith 2015). What I am interested in chasing down is not so much the uncanny ability of things to act like subjects in the arena of politics, but the ways in which efficacy and authority as immanent to a social self are revealed through assembling and are entangled within assemblages as hybrids of collector-and-collection (cf. Knappett 2008). This subject-as-assemblage, if not a cyborg condensation of “imagination and material reality,” could at least be considered in terms of assembled affinities rather than an absolute identity (Haraway 1987, 292, 296).

Assembled worlds, assembling subjects

With the aim in mind of arriving at a political subject who is the assembling he/she performs, I will proceed with a number of examples of the tangled intersections between assembling, assemblage, and power. By moving from the assemblings of 16th-century Italian collector Ulisse Aldrovandi to the 13th-century Armenian merchant prince Tigran Honents by way of 20th-century artists and their assemblages, I develop the argument that the politics of assembling are not dependent on historical subject categories (modern science, pre-modern superstition) but rather manifest in historically specific, contingent ways through the assembling and mobilization of materials, spaces, and discourses to projects of distinction and difference. These assemblings, assemblers, and assemblages enable me to pursue the possibility mentioned above: to discuss politics not as the control of things by people or the relations between subjects, or even as the capacity of things to collect, but as the point of intersection between acts of assembling, the tanglesome tendency of things, and the easy slippage between assemblages and subjectivities. Critical to this conjuncture is the

persistent imagined connection between assemblages as meaningful worlds and assembling subjects who authorize those worlds of meaning, both as a bulwark of power and a concern of archaeological analysis.

Ulisse Aldrovandi's ordered world

And so you may have in small compass a model of universal nature made private. The third [princely work], a goodly huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine hath made rare in stuff, form, or motion; whatsoever singularity chance and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature hath wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included ... and then when all other miracles and wonders shall cease by reason that you shall have discovered their natural causes; yourself shall be left the only miracle and wonder of the world. (Sir Francis Bacon, *Gesta Grayorum*, 1594)

Current visitors to the Palazzo Poggi Museum of Science and Art in Bologna wander through a collected narrative of the history of science in Italy. The centerpiece of the museum's collection-of-collections is the microcosm of Ulisse Aldrovandi, an aristocrat of 16th-century Bologna and a professor of the University in that city, as well as cousin to Pope Gregory XIII. Despite its current democratic availability to the public, Aldrovandi's collection was constructed as a private 'cabinet of curiosities,' the enclosed and ordered world of an individual whose aristocratic prestige was ultimately inseparable from his expertise in questions of the ordering of nature (Daston and Park 2001, 154). Consisting of "more than 18,000 different things," including animal, plant and mineral specimens, medical drawings, watercolors and woodcuts, and the in-process texts for his numerous published *Histories*, Aldrovandi's collection was a contained world of signification and portents pertaining immediately to the political world within which it was situated – and which it inscribed *in camera* (Findlen 1994, 20; Foucault 1994). Aldrovandi's labor of classification, not among species but among signs, portents, and 'marvels,' was situated in the space of his natural cabinet. That space was textually enclosed within the pages of his *Natural Histories*, which presented the natural and preternatural specimens of the cabinet in the form of textual account and authoritative illustration. The descriptions contained within Aldrovandi's *Histories* were intended to embody the essential characters of his specimens, following a paradigm later conceptualized by Foucault: "the history of a living being was that being itself, within the whole semantic network that connected it to the world" (Foucault 1994, 129). The printed texts of the histories therefore, as much as the sequestered space of the cabinet, contain and present the assembled natural expertise of their author: a world built from marvels, exemplars, and wonders.

Ulisse Aldrovandi and his collection have become a quintessential case study in the origins of the museum and discussions of the emergence of natural history (Findlen 1994; Foucault 1994; Daston and Park 2001; Panese 2006; Vai and Cavazza 2006). I am more interested in Aldrovandi as the assembler of a world, in his cabinet and in his *Natural Histories*, in which collected objects, bodies and discourses constituted an authoritative claim for the history of nature (the form of the world) and Aldrovandi's place within it. As Findlen (1994) argued in her analysis of early modern collection culture, the process of assembling a collection "was not just a recreational practice for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century virtuosi, but also

a precise mechanism for transforming knowledge into power” (Findlen 1994, 23). The key to this mechanism of knowledge-power lay in the capacity of assembled objects, narratives, descriptions, and depictions to cohere into an intelligible account of the knowable world. By guarding such a meaningful world behind the gilt doors of their cabinets or on the engraved pages of sought-after publications, collectors like Aldrovandi channeled the power that mobilized such meaningful microcosms, containing it within themselves as princely subjects.

The princely collector as a world assembler, self-fashioner

The engraved frontispiece to Aldrovandi’s *De Monstrorum Historiae*, or *The History of Monsters*, ably illustrates the near-total identity between Aldrovandi’s renown as a collector and his status as a political subject (Fig. 9.1). At the top of the engraving, a large portrait of Ferdinand II de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, is crowned by the twin allegories of Faith and Justice. Below this princely portrait, Ulisse Aldrovandi (the Patrician of Bologna) and his work are presented on a banner. Flanking this banner, putti assemble the contributions and accolades of the work found within – the Sign of Wisdom, the Hieroglyphic of Fame, the Indices of Fertility, and Life Perpetual, all associated with monstrous wonders from Aldrovandi’s collection (Aldrovandi 1642). The editors and posthumous publishers of Aldrovandi’s work represent in allegory the collector’s command of a marvelous and potent world, as well as the mustering of that potency in service of his sovereign, Ferdinand II. The covers of the book contain a whole monstrous universe: Aldrovandi presents aberrations and anomalies ranging from deformities to mythological creatures, animal–human hybrids, giants, androgynes, representations of normal and aberrant fetal development, as well as cannibal kings and inhabitants of foreign lands. Aldrovandi also includes a discussion of the usefulness of monstrous nature and the history of monstrous representation in art and symbol. This natural history of monsters could be considered the ultimate exercise in cosmographic authority, as Aldrovandi created an intelligible order for those phenomena, which in their preter-natures defied category.¹ As is indicated on the frontispiece, *The History of Monsters* was published by the senate of Bologna in fulfillment of the conditions on which Aldrovandi bequeathed his entire collection and works to the Senate in 1603, to be housed in the Palazzo Publico. Significantly, with this transferal the authority of world-building which Aldrovandi had assembled was also handed over to the state: the Senate would take it upon itself to appoint curators and publishers of Aldrovandi’s materials, making the capacity of microcosmic author an appendage of state power.

The spaces that Aldrovandi and his contemporary early modern collector-princes assembled (in their laboratories, in their texts) were understood by the naturalists as well as their publics as identical with their identities as men of knowledge about the world and power in the world (Bacon 1594; Findlen 1994, 23, 293). Those invited to his cabinet, and readers of the books, were enclosed within a world that was not only orderly, but also wondrous and private to the collecting author (Panese 2006). As the objects and specimens in the collection were a legible microcosm of a knowable world, so too was the identity of the collector legible and knowable from the specimens he collected and his methods of collecting. This identity is presented in the space of the collection and the pages of the histories in a mode that is both intimate and authoritative: Aldrovandi has invited us into his ordered world of



Fig. 9.1. The frontispiece to the 1642 edition of Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia* (image rights available under Public Domain)

marvels – but that world is always ultimately *his* to order. As I will continue to explore, this mutual ‘stickiness’ of the self of the assembler and the praxis of assembling has less, I think, to do with the ‘birth’ of natural history as a project of authoritative ordering, and more of a critical connection with the capacity of assemblages to entangle space and time into worlds of their own, and for those worlds to be ‘peopled’ by the imagination.

The assemblage as created world

Reflecting on Benjamin’s description² of his own avid book-collecting, Martin (2011) argued that the tie between assembled objects and constituted identity, of which Aldrovandi is so salient an example, adheres within even the most intimate collections – that ‘wonderment’ is not an artifact of pre-scientific superstition but rather a fundamental capacity of assembled things and the meaningful spaces opened between them: “Thus, the passion of the collector

for new acquisitions, and the opportunity that the new acquisition affords for recollection (and hence re-collection), is nothing short of the manifest desire to create worlds” (Martin 2011, 2). Within her larger essay on the imbrication of narratives and their objects within projects of self-and-world-creation in the modern western context, Stewart (2007) reflected on the function of collection as a mode of art concerned with the production of new context, yet:

unlike many forms of art, the collection is not representational. The collection represents a hermetic world; to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world – a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority. (Stewart 2007, 152)

I agree with Stewart that the primary power of the collection is not as a metaphor, a mere world-in-miniature; however, the authority of the microcosm is inseparable from boundaries of order and finitude which can only be drawn in relation to the infinite and the chaotic which remain outside. The power of the collection – and thus its politics – resides in its nature as a created world which is finite: the world of the collection has an author, and also has ecumenical boundaries, parapets of intelligibility, within which its values are contained. This practice of making and containing such worlds is intimate and personal, tied to the memory and authority of the collector – a phenomenon, which, Martin argued, comes critically to the surface when collections are removed from their assemblers (Martin 2011), broken apart, or otherwise lapse into incompleteness. For this reason in the contemporary context collections such as Aldrovandi’s, and the phenomenon of *wunderkammern* (curiosity-cabinets) in general, are frequently presented as a mode of “exploring the mind” of subjects who, like their collections, are construed as uncanny in their early or, indeed, incompletely formed modernity (Robertson and Meadow in Martin 2011, 12).

When the author and his/her collection are sundered, the containing boundaries of the assemblage take on critical significance as the process of assembling the collection is curtailed – furthermore, the identity of the collector is revealed as central to the process of making meaning from the assemblage. Consider for example, the boxed ‘magical worlds’ of 20th-century artist Joseph Cornell (Sommers and Drake 2006). Working in mixed media and in a mode that played with tropes of naturalist specimen collection, hobbyist decoupage, and bourgeois display, Cornell constructed small boxes within which he installed assemblages of cut-paper, found objects, sculpture and drawing (Fig. 9.2). Cornell’s assemblages have themselves been assembled by art historical discourse into various intelligible categories of meaningful representation: ‘museum’ boxes, ‘habitats,’ ‘dovecotes,’ and ‘soap-bubble kits’ (Sommers and Drake 2006, 41). The last category, Cornell’s collection of similar-but-unique assemblages called *Untitled (Soap Bubble Kit)* combines pipes, glasses, marbles, balls and other spherical objects, wire rings, and cut-and-pasted astronomical imagery into closed sets which play on resemblance and suggestion in the ways they seem to ask the viewer to create a total coherence for their contained worlds. Basic to the practice of looking at a series of Cornell’s works – as, for instance, in the Contemporary Art gallery at the Art Institute of Chicago – is an abiding reliance on the existence of Cornell as collector; one presumes that the artist assembled his boxed collections with meaning in mind, whether that meaning was a deeply personal relationship with Slavic romance or a life-long fixation with astronomy (Hoving 2009). The “affinity” between Cornell as artist and the practices of naturalist collection was reflected in the initial way his soap bubble kits were displayed: as collections of unique and marvelous objects, worlds in miniature (Hoving 2009, 29). There



Fig. 9.2. The collection of Joseph Cornell boxes at the Art Institute of Chicago (photo by K. Franklin)

is a politics to the regard of Cornell's assemblages: if they are microcosms, then they are worlds held in motion by the authority of the subjectivity who assembled them.

A contrasting example of the artist as authoritative assembler is the case of the 20th-century artist Francis Bacon – or rather, the case of his studio. In 1998 the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin acquired and “reconstructed archaeologically” (Cappock 2000, 36) the entire contents of Bacon's studio, which had been located at 7 Reece Mews, London. This transportation was no small task, as Bacon's studio was at the time of his death a series of rooms waist-high in things: artist's tools and materials, boots and clothing articles, records, light bulbs and the artist's own slashed canvasses (Ogden 2001). Most of all, the studio contained – consisted of – a chaotic pile of texts and images: the gallery notes “570 books and catalogues, 1,500 photographs ... 1,300 leaves torn from books” as well as magazines and newspapers.³ In addition, Bacon used the walls and door of the room as a palette, smearing and slathering these surfaces with paint. The literature produced in tandem with the opening of the reconstructed studio to the public in 2001 emphasized Bacon's Irishness: in this context, the cataloguing, archiving, dismantling, transport, and final painstaking reconstruction of the artist's studio (including the painted walls) in Dublin took on the aspect of a repatriation of the body from its foreign place of death to a consecrated home ground (the artist himself died abroad and was cremated).

The studio space was the location of Bacon's works; yet the curation of the studio is based on its significance as more than a container for the artist and his creative process. The studio as an assemblage of architecture, objects, materials, air, and light (even the dust was catalogued and transferred) was constructed in the process of Bacon's painting; conversely and simultaneously, Bacon's paintings were assemblings of the textures, materials, images and energies collected within the studio by the artist's singular genius. The images and scenes assembled within the studio circulate as signs within Bacon's paintings: “all appear and reappear as if they were slabs from some lost fresco of devastating formality and scale” (Gowrie 2000, 19). In a conversation about his workspace in 1991, Bacon stated, “This mess here is rather like my mind; it may be a good image of what goes on inside me, that's

what it's like, my life is like that" (Cappock 2000, 35). To encounter Bacon's assembled studio is therefore to encounter the artist's creative subjectivity 'where it lives' within the frameworks of interpretation surrounding the phenomenon which is/was Francis Bacon. The assembled world of the studio becomes identical with the coherent world of meanings within which the artist produced his works, and within which those works can be made continually meaningful.

The collection of Aldrovandi, Cornell's boxes, and Bacon's studio: these collections make up worlds of meaning assembled by individuals which are taken as identical with and constitutive of the subjectivities of their assemblers; more importantly, the collections consist of things – objects, discourses, and images – which are meaningful in relation to one another only through this authoritative relation that they bear to an assembling subject. The relationship of the assembled Bacon and the assembled Cornell – as well as the assembled Aldrovandi – to the 'real' assembling subject is of critical interest to archaeology. We are specialists in knowing the past through assemblage; how those assemblages relate to the agencies and projects of people in the past becomes a prepossessing problem – but one which archaeology is well situated to address. Central to this interrogation of subjects and assemblages is an engagement with the concept of assembling as world-building in contexts beyond capitalist modernity and thereby to, gently, push against the solidity of the pre/modern schism in ways of engaging with and making power-laden meanings from things. With this aim in mind, I will turn to the late medieval Armenian highlands, and the primary example in this chapter of the politics of cosmic assembling.

Tigran Honents' inscribed cosmography

In the first decades of the 13th century CE, the city of Ani was a major center of trade in Armenia and a node in networks of travel and exchange through the south Caucasus that connected Asia, the Near East, and Europe (Marr 1934; Manandyan 1965). Located on the western bank of the Akhurean River, the ruined city now marks one of the easternmost edges of Kars Province in Turkey. Though already a prominent center in the 10th century under the Armenian Bagratids and a thriving city under the Seljuqs and Sheddadids through the 12th century, Ani underwent a period of renewed construction and investment beginning in the early 13th century under the administration of the Mxargrjelis, themselves vassal to Queen Tamar of Georgia (Arakelyan 1964; Mahe 2001; Bedrosian 2004; LaPorta 2012). While Zakare II Shahnshah Mxargrjeli fortified and renovated the walls of Ani, the city's inhabitants undertook renovations and new constructions within the fortified town.

Chief among Ani's late medieval inhabitants in historical prominence was the merchant-prince Tigran Honents, who actively invested himself in projects of architectural endowment and pious donation which not only had a long tradition in Armenia and the Islamic Near East, but which were also central to the performance of princely status in the 13th century (Babayan 1976; Bedrosian 1979; Greenwood 2004; Jones 2007; Maranci 2008; Franklin 2014a). During this period Armenia was ruled by a class of princes and lords who drew their lexicons of authority from Sassanid Persian, Seljuq, as well as native highland frameworks. According to the late 12th-century *Datastanagirk'* or Lawcode of Mxitar of Gosh, part of the 'prerogative' but also the obligation of such princes was the construction and endowment of various institutions for the accommodation of their subjects such as churches and caravan inns, as well as market weigh-stations, roads, and bridges (Bedrosian 1979; Goshet'si 2000).

Producing architectural spaces was part of the performance of benevolent, pious authority expected of princes in Armenia, but it was also a practice by which princes like Tigran Honents and his contemporaries – the Vachutyans, Orbelyans, and Proshyans – enclosed their subjects within architectures of authority which situated their power and projects in relation to wider networks of relations in the medieval world. Charitable construction of spaces like caravan inns, bridges, or churches bundled the movements, practices, and projects of the people using those spaces and routes within the world of a prince’s own power; charitable donation – and further, the performance of such donation in the form of visible inscriptions – was akin to a transformation of such bundled relations in the service of a prince’s empowered subjectivity (Haroutyunyan 1960; Jones 2007; Pauketat 2013). Tigran Honents of Ani was no exception to this conjoined prerogative and obligation of princely place-making.

Nikolai Marr, the original excavator of Ani, observed that Honents was one of the most brilliant representatives of the late medieval Armenian world of trade (Marr 1934, 33); Honents’ exemplarity derives not only from his prowess as a merchant but also, and primarily, from the efficacy with which he recorded his acts as a princely patron. As summarized by Mahe (2001), Honents’ patronage is recorded in inscriptions throughout the city of Ani; his most famous endowment and the location of his most famous inscribed text is the church of St Grigor Lusavorich, built on the east side of the city overlooking the Akhurian River (Fig. 9.3). The church is a domed cruciform building typical of its period, decorated on the interior with frescoes and on the exterior with figural and vegetal carvings. On the eastern and southern walls these decorations include blind arcades surmounted by carved leaves and animals; between the arcades on the southeast corner, Tigran Honents commissioned a lengthy inscription⁴ which describes in detail his construction of the church and his provisions for the support of both church and attached monastery.

In the year 644 [1215 CE] by the grace and mercy of God, at the time of the rule in the city of Ani of the *amir-spasalar* and *mandarturtuxuces* Zakaria and his son Shahnshah, I Tigran, servant of God, son of Suleyma Smbatawrenc, of the family of Honents, for the long life of my lords and their sons built the monastery of St. Gregory, which was formerly called “Mother of God of the Chapel,” on a rocky spot with precipices and covered with thorns, bought by me from the owners with honestly acquired means to its hereditary owners and with great labor and cost I surrounded it with a rampart. I constructed this church in the name of saint Gregory the Illuminator and I decorated it with all kinds of ornament, with Signs of the Savior and with holy crosses of gold and silver and decorative images, ornamented with gold, silver, precious stones and pearls, and well as with gold and silver lamps and with relics of the saintly apostles, with a fragment of the divine and lord-receiving cross, and all kinds of precious vessels of gold and silver and various ornament. I built all sorts of apartments for the monks and princes and I placed there priests who offer the body and the blood of Christ such that the mass is offered without fail in order to prolong the life of my lord Shahnshah and of his son and for the forgiveness of my sins. And I have given in gift to the monastery of Saint Gregory the hayrenik that I have bought in cash (*hayrenik zor gnel eyi gandzov*) paid to their owners and so thus assembled: half the village of Gawrohonik, 5 dangs⁵ of K’arhat, half of the village of Mshakunik, half of the village of Kaghatk, the whole of the village of Shamaksov, the village of Khuzac-Mahmund in the land of Kars, two dangs of the village of Shund, fields and the pandok [inn or caravanserai] of Xatchorik. Of properties in the city the baths and the public fountain, the local hotel with its shops and the vaulted-roof pandok, the barn behind the baths, the stables of Ter Sargis and the barn which I bought, the threshing floor and the income from



Fig. 9.3. The church of St Gregory Lusavorich at Ani, built by Tigran Honents. The inscription discussed in this chapter is visible between the blind arcade arches on the far right side (southern wall, east side) (image: WikiCommons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license)

two oil-pressing mills, the stables and barns of the monastery, the garden which is in front of the gates of the monastery and the slopes from the Glijor Gate until the river, as well as the riverbanks, the garden that I bought at the Dvin Gate, half of a milling from the mill, all of [the revenue from] a fish trap, and two days a week [the revenue from] another fish trap, from the Glijor mill two days a week [the revenue] from a fish trap, between Besk'enakap until the bridge I bought a half of the river; 4 dangs of the hostelry of Papenc' and the shop which is at its door, all of the houses on the Street of Hatec'ik, all of the fields bought at the gates to the city, a vinery in Yerevan and one in Oshakan, a garden in Kosh and one in Aruch, in a place called Mazot, one garden in Mren, in Tsmak, that called "the field of the katoghikos." All the goods which I have bought, as well as the many others which are in mortgage which I have not inscribed here, I have given them to the monastery and their owners may reclaim them, as I have written in another will, if they pay in gold to the monastery ...

Tigran Honents' inscription is a rich resource because it provides a "portrait and nature of a man who had made his way by personally acquired wealth" (Manandyan 1965, 186); more acutely, the inscription demonstrates how merchant-princes like Honents assembled their authority and prowess at the intersection of space, materiality, labor and discourse. Within the text of the inscription, itself carved in tuff stones framed in arches soaring over the head of the reader, Honents enumerates himself as a person of substance – and that substance is an

assemblage, a list of things, places, buildings, and the fruitful labors of people. The ‘things of concern’ (Latour 2005) out of which Honents’ authority is constituted include objects (church vessels and pearl-crusted vestments and lamps), places (riverbanks, villages, and gardens), and architectural spaces (apartments, shops, mills, stables, inns, and of course the church itself). Honents also assembles to himself and endows to the monastery the labor of persons (fish-trap tenders, hostlers, storekeepers, priests) and parts of persons (relics of saints, the body and blood of Christ). These combine into a late medieval world in microcosm, which simultaneously contains Honents’ authority as a patron and constitutes his ability as a vassal: it is by the power of this assembled world that he renders longevity and potency to his lords, and prestige to himself.

Read as a world-assembling rather than a ledger, the St Gregory inscription allows us to configure Tigran Honents as a historically situated subject. It would be straightforward and simple to read the inscription as the tallying of a canny capitalist: Honents obviously is aware of the cash value of the things he lists, even down to providing a ‘returns receipt’ for their original owners. But the abstraction of the things, places and people listed by Honents into capital obscures the nature of his project as surely as it alienates value from materials, soil, labor. The archaeological task is to construct Tigran Honents not as a man who built churches and owned lands, but in his own terms: as an assembling of church building, gold and silver, horses and fish, shops and caravan inns, and farms in nearby fields and villages three days distant. In the space that is produced through the practice of inscription, his personal power and the world he assembles are coterminous. In this way we can talk materially about princeliness in late medieval Armenia, and about subjectivity as well. Tigran Honents and his contemporaries were not situated within the humanist discourses that influenced Ulisse Aldrovandi, for example, that the princely self could and should be fashioned through cultivated practices of emulation, imitation and invention (Findlen 1994, 296). The world Honents assembles is not the “model of a universal nature made private” conceived of by Bacon in his *Gesta Grayorum* (Bacon 1594). But Honents was historically situated within discourses of medieval cosmology premised on the conceptual, nested unity between the body of the princely patron, the architectural space of the church he/she endowed, and the ecumenical world within which that church was itself situated and circumscribed (Le Goff 1988, 83–5; Dadoyan 2011; Martin 2011, 23; Brown and Segol 2013). Available information on medieval Armenian philosophy suggests that subjects like Honents understood their own bodies (vessels for spirit) in a metaphorical relation to the created world, and saw as well fractal relationships between the architectures of body, church, and cosmos. This enclosed-and-enclosing unity of created worlds is suggested by the phenomenon of patron representation on the walls of medieval churches in Armenia (and in surrounding regions). On the walls of endowed Armenian churches such as Aghtamar (in Van, Turkey), Haghpat, Sanahin, Harich⁶ and the circular church of St Gregory at Ani, the church patron was represented in carved relief or statuary holding a miniature model of the church (Marr 1934, xxvii; Ghafadaryan 1957, 44; Xalpakhchyan 1963, 15; 1980, 267; Jones 2007, 42). These representations in series – church, body, church – are often paired with foundation inscriptions after the model of Honents’, which evoke the person of the patron-as-assembled in yet another mode. The effect of these representation-assemblages is to combine what Susan Stewart has conceptualized as the interiorizing capacity of the miniature and the microcosmic power of the collection (Stewart 1993). The prince’s endowed church contains

a total, coherent world which is set in motion by the authority of the prince and identical with his body-bound subjectivity.

I have argued elsewhere (Franklin 2014a) that 13th-century politics in Armenia inhered within such projects of world making, undertaken at various scales and with varying stakes by subjects situated within the highlands but encompassing both ‘local’ and ‘world’ within the scope of their assemblings. Action at a scale beyond the local in medieval Armenia therefore required a ‘cosmopolitics’ premised on negotiating not just ‘the world’ but plural worlds constructed in the course of political projects like that of Tigran Honents. Located at the intersection of trade routes and major routes of travel, and between rival and contradictory claims to absolute power in late medieval Eurasia, local actors in medieval Armenia were cosmopolitan in their practice, with cosmopolitanism defined as a ‘worldliness’ derived not from edifying exposure to a world culture, but based on the negotiation of plural and imperfectly commensurate assembled worlds. Honents and his contemporaries often mentioned that they had paid the cost of all or part of their renovations, construction or gift in cash made from trade (Babayan 2005; Franklin 2014a). That profits from market trade and the care of “the barn behind the baths” share space in carved stone inscriptions implies an attention to all scales of activity within the collection of relations which is the prince’s world of authority. The cosmopolitanism of Tigran Honents and his contemporaries was therefore highly contingent, since their status as subjects and authoritative actors was situated between the embodied action of assembling and the coherent meaningfulness of the multiscale worlds they assembled in space, materiality and discourse. Within the inscription itself, Honents evokes various of the constructed cosmographies which by overlapping constituted this late medieval cosmopolitics; his epigraphic microcosm contains besides churches (themselves ecumenical worlds writ small as discussed above) pandoks or caravanserais as well.

Through the later medieval period in Central Asia, the Near East, and the Caucasus, the caravanserai as an institution of hospitality and patronage was closely linked to pious authority – in other words, to the identity of a patron as a force that unified his/her world of power (Goshet’si 2000; Constable 2003; Franklin 2014b). More explicitly, the inn was itself invoked as a metaphor for the world in Persian political writings from the 11th century, as a stopping place on a longer journey (Hajib 1983, 84). The prince who built and endowed road inns therefore enclosed travelers within stone microcosms of his authority. When its doors were locked for the evening, the pandok (from the Greek *pandocheion*, “all-receiver”) constituted a world in miniature. The prince Vache Vachutyan, a contemporary of Tigran Honents, likewise announced his endowments of farms and fields to newly-built churches to the east of Mt Aragats from Ani; in 1213 CE Vachutyan constructed a pandok or caravanserai on the road running north from the Arax River Valley towards Tbilisi (T’oramanyan 1942; Harutyunyan 1960; Xalpakchyan 1971). Excavations at the caravanserai in 2011 demonstrated the intent to construct space for traveling humans, goods and beasts: the inn was an ordered world within the larger world of princely care (but also princely control) within which medieval travelers moved (Franklin 2014a; 2014b). This care is reflected in the attentiveness with which Honents assembles stables, mills, fish-traps, and shops – and by extension horses, fish, grain, humans and their crafts – into the world carved in the wall of St Gregory’s church. Within the rubric of medieval Armenian cosmopolitanism, building such worlds of caring control was the praxis of a good prince.

This convergence of princely self, assembled world, and inscribed space raises the question

then of whether it is possible to conceive of a medieval Armenian princely subject apart from his/her assembling. Tigran Honents' assembled authority was a temporary world, contingent on material and spatial relationships that unraveled over time and subject to the assembling of other (sometimes more powerful) agents. On the one hand, Honents was powerful in his ability to bundle the labor, bodies and products of people and places as he did in his inscription; the implication of this political-subject-as-assembling is that Honents' agency as a patron of St Gregory's monastery and as a life-prolonging vassal of the Mxargrjelis was contingent on the continued productivity of mills, fields, and fish-traps, the strength of horses and humans, and the ongoing incomes of trade and travellers-inns. These practices and relationships perhaps continued through Tigran Honents' lifetime, and possibly after his death (but how can we speak of 'death' when his assembled 'body' still stands on the edge of the Akhurean River?) – though his listing of the resale values of his mortgaged properties suggests, perhaps, a prescience that his assembling will at some point begin to unravel. While the exact timeframe is unclear, sometime between the end of the Ilkhanate in the mid-14th century and the consolidation of the Safavid Persian empire at the turn of the 16th century, Ani faded from the scene as a political center and trade entrepot, and was slowly left in ruins.⁷ Of the self assembled by Tigran Honents, what remains is his endowed space, and the written record of his fuller assembling. The lost (or perhaps attenuated) ties of care, labor, and time between Honents and his millers, oil-pressers, hostlers, bathers, innkeepers, priests, fruit trees, plowed furrows, horses and fish are replaced with another set of relationships, as archaeologists and historians are faced with the question of how to cope with an historical subject who was an agent because he assembled.

Assembling and subjectivity

William Gibson's classic cyberpunk novel *Count Zero* (sequel to the genre-defining *Neuromancer*, and second in the *Sprawl Trilogy*) imagines a near-future world stretched between the annihilating vacuum of outer space and the infinite connectivity of the 'net' (Gibson 1987). One of the novel's protagonists, Marly Krushkova, is commissioned by an eccentric, wealthy recluse to track down an unknown artist who is producing boxed collages in the style of Joseph Cornell – but decades after Cornell's death. The boxes are no mere tribute or imitation: each is "a universe, a poem, frozen on the boundaries of human experience" (Gibson 1987, 15); the boxes capture the microcosmic allure of Cornell's works, and Marly's thread of the novel is driven by her search for the master maker of these boxed collections. This quest ultimately leads her to a derelict hunk of space station circling earth at a distant orbit, containing the cast-off memory mainframes of an equally decrepit family. In deep space, Marly finally comes 'face to face' with the maker of the boxed worlds, and the futuristic horror of *Count Zero* condenses in a moment of aghast revelation as Marly discovers that the assembler is not a person but a robotic arm, powered by an abandoned and randomly-firing, insane artificial intelligence. Watching the arm assemble a tiny world in a box with the deliberation of its constructed, simulacral memory, Marly is filled with wonder but also with sadness – the "sadness of time and distance," of encountering a servomechanism where she expected to find a subjectivity (Gibson 1987, 229).

The terror of Marly Krushkova at the assemblage-without-an-assembler speaks to the longstanding anxiety of archaeologists that our attempts to deduce agentive identity behind patterns in the archaeological record will yield an empirical void or, worse, shadows of our

own essential categories (Flannery 1967; Wylie 1991; Dobres and Robb 2000; Meskell 2001; Smith 2004). The examples of assembling and assemblage I have (briefly) examined here suggest however that a solution might lurk in the crisis itself, in the need to find a collector behind the collections because things once assembled ‘entangle,’ generating microcosmic meanings which suggest, even demand, a prime mover. The tendency of things to get entangled is not so much an inherent property of matter, but a critical part of why things – and assemblages of things in particular – matter to us. Assembled and entangled things ‘play’ with space and time, whether through the systematics of categories, the erasing of prior relationships and constitution of new orders, or through the containment of memory and desire in boxed microcosm (Biddick 1998, 175). The resulting elision between assembling as practice, collection, and assembler-subjectivity, hints that perhaps, in fact, the singularity of subjectivity is itself assembled; Aldrovandi, Honents, Cornell behind his boxes, and even the reconstructed Bacon were, like their assemblages, only whole because they were complete, only as ‘total’ as the fullness of their assembling.

If we can build from accounts of ‘assembling subjects’ to a definition of subjectivity as itself an assembling, then we might arrive at a view of assembling as praxis, and of “identity [as] performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 2007, 34). The materials, actions and discourses implicated in assembling are ‘tools to hand’ not so much in the sense of representing a finite pile of collage-able fragments in a closed world of meaning (Levi-Strauss 1969), but rather lending and revealing themselves to projects in ways that are always tanglesome, and so tending to both deceptive solidity and dissolution. There is no ‘political subject behind the assemblage’ rather, assembling things, people and discourses into a world made intelligible by (historically particular, contingent) logics of authority is the doing which is everything, and which allows – or requires – us to construct the doer as an archaeological afterthought (Nietzsche 1997, 26). In the case of Tigran Honents and the late medieval Armenian ‘merchant princes,’ it may be possible to probe the apparently solid edges of the categories ‘merchant’ and ‘prince,’ and talk about actors like Honents in terms of the worlds they assembled – and how these assemblings constituted them in turn as ‘princely.’ This will in turn open the discussion of medieval Armenian politics wider for marked actors: the ‘princesses’ who also built churches and endowed lands, whose longevities were coterminous with the worlds they built in spaces, relations, and inscribed stones (cf. Heller 2005). Finally but not least, we can start to talk about the subjects about whom we have been silent, made squeamish by the message control of the historical record: the less-empowered assemblers who built worlds around hearths and between fields, in sight of mountains and in the streets of cities like Ani.

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Notes

- 1 For John Locke, for instance, monsters provided direct indication of realms of essence and perception which defy human capacities of understanding: the un-categoricalness of monsters

- indicates a perfection of Creation beyond comprehension (both of the human mind and its encompassing schema) (Locke 1997, bk 3, chap. 6, 17, p. 401).
- 2 In *Unpacking my Library* (Benjamin 1968, 59–61).
 - 3 From “History of Studio Relocation” at <http://www.hughlane.ie/history-of-studio-relocation>.
 - 4 Translation via Garsoian’s translation of Manandyan (1965, 185–6), altered from my own translations and drawing from Mahe (2001). The Grabar inscription is presented in its entirety in Orbeli (1966, 63) and translated in Marr (1934, 35). An updated version is also available in Avagyan (1978).
 - 5 1 dang is a unit of currency equivalent to 1/6 dahekan, which was in turn equivalent to the Byzantine *nomisma* or solidus. From Thomson (1997).
 - 6 In the case of Harich the church model held by the depicted Mxargrjelis was replaced in the 19th century with an icon carved from marble.
 - 7 The particular causes and processes leading to Ani’s transition from a vibrant city to a vacant ruin would be a major focus of continued excavations at the site; systematic and extended archaeological research has not been undertaken at Ani since the close of Marr’s excavations at the start of the First World War.

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