11. Scream IV

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The installment plan—the seriality and deferral—given in works of installation is always on location. *Scream IV* cites Stig Sjölund's January 1998 site-specific installation entitled *Titanic II*. Sjölund's site to behold fit the courtyard of the Hallwylska Museet, a private art and parts collection in Stockholm still housed in the manor for which it was custom-made. From the outside, out in the deep freeze, there was the totally Gothic facade looking at you. Sjölund commissioned two top ice cream firms to set up shop in this setting in special booths designed to match the ornate or funereal look of the Museet and compete—against the elements—for consumers. But that was just the tip of the iceberg: *Titanic II* invited a symbol-clashing juxtaposition of separate flows or floes of our genealogy of media.

For 1998 Europe decided to take out Stockholm in the corporation or incorporation of its culture. Next, the cultural capitalists in Stockholm set aside the Hallwylska Museet for the setting of its special son. Sjölund pulled the emergency break on another European-culture forgettogether. He stalled the monumentalism of museum collection by installing on location the dislocation to which we owe all that crypt building. What was jamming at the intersection among juxtapositions that Sjölund's thought experiment has admitted and addressed? Hallwylska Museet as specific citation from the genealogy of collection, the *Titanic* as the liner notes accompanying a tension that's still on the record between collection and invention, between melancholia and catastrophe preparedness, and the winter's sale of ice cream as the caption that emerges from the white noise, the static, and the surf of drowning out.

Sjölund's image line through the eighties was rapt around an unidentified object. But the science fictive lines got crossed with modernism and short-circuited the work's reception or recognition as ultimate object of identification. Sci-fi modernism,
Figure 1. Stig Sjölund, Titanic II (detail), 1998. Courtesy of Stig Sjölund.
like any psychotic delusional system all on its own, never went the extra wavelength of invention to install its own reception, following, or understanding. For the nineties Sjölund reinstalled his work within postmodernism, within an outer space of reception. Sjölund's postmodernist performance and installation work gives owner's manual instructions, the law and the language for his earlier contextless glimpses of outer-space horizons somewhere over an imagescape boundary-blending with photography, film, painting. The installation of reception—of the other—is always site specific. For his breakthrough into the new decade, Sjölund strapped IKEA relics, like postwreck flotsam, next to the surviving cibachrome photos finishing his former luxury line of sci-fi modernist productions. Sjölund's nineties move to take part, performance-style, in the mass cultures of reception—one that also moved to take apart the interplanetary look of his eighties work—coincided with his first visit to California and his visitation there by New Age mass culture. It is definitely still a look, just another kind of inside view, one that is neither soulful nor antisoulful. The new look is at once psychic (or psychotic) and technological. In the nineties Sjölund's work entered round-the-world, round-the-clock reception of communications with the good spirits and unhappy ghosts making up as they go along with the mass-media sensurround. Without the ghosts in technology, absent and accounted for, there is no outer space of reception, no future, no bottom line.

The modern or modernist museum, which is determined by the departmental and disciplinary boundaries that must be kept intact and undisclosed, has a history coterminous with that of every other cultural institution sharing the Enlightenment fantasy of origin. But it has a prehistory, too, one that belongs to a century-or-two older
emergence of all-out collection that surrounded an interdisciplinary or eclectic mix of oddities, curiosities, and wonders. What passes as miracle or wonder metabolizes the wound of separation, dislocation, long distance. The age of discovery brought back a grab bag of wounds and wonders, both from the new frontier of our first outer space over there in the Americas and from another new inner-outer space opened up by techno vision. Now we could see our way clear to catching life where it breeds and is undone. Through these lenses, between the lines of the supernatural, we first got the picture of circulation, it was in our blood, and then followed Harvey’s discovery of the circulatory system as model for all subsequent sciences and institutions of circulation, substitution, invention. But the vampiric conditions or conditionings of collection always bring up the arrears, the losses, the backfire of the look and march forward of techno invention. This was a tension that Freud mapped out in his first First World War essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death.” The Great War was what Europe had been holding back, swallowing and never digesting, while resting in one peace in a mode of cosmopolitan forty-year-old self-collection. The Titanic catastrophe gave us the horror preview of what would be coming soon. The ship-size state of European collection was to be the ultimate in the techno invention and perfection of safety. Technology would keep us all calm and collected even following contact with catastrophe or accident. But then the unthinkable, I mean unsinkable, went down, near-missing the ultimate safety net, the media-technological rehearsal of the World Wide Web: the ship’s catastrophic end ended up casting about our ongoing state of preparedness. In 1912, in response to the Titanic crash ending without rescue, twenty-four-hour wireless service was set up as the law for all ships passing in the night. Ever
since, we have been live, on-line, on-life-line. In the setting of the late-nineteenth-century Hallwylska collection, Sjölund’s Titanic II reinstalled the tension that’s still with us between collection and invention, between holding on and letting go in advance, between safety (for the dead or alive) and risk calculation.

Before he invented the phonograph, Thomas Edison was the survivor in childhood of a host of sibling deaths. By age twelve he was well on his way to being a deaf gadget lover and rescuer concerned with supplementing the audio range of all ear sets, both for those quick to hear and for the deaf. Deaf rhymes with death. Edison’s works of invention represented an overcoming at least as much as an undertaking. Even at his most deaf, he could always still hear the tap, tap, tapping sounds of the telegraph. At first he sought to build a kind of recording machine for the messages transmitted by telegraph or by phone. Once upon a time, while testing the record he had made of a telegraphic transmission, he overheard sounds that sounded just like voices coming from the next room. The phonograph was born—out of the auditory hallucinations of one deaf gadget lover listening to his telegraphic recorder. The long distant, who are always also along for the connection going through across long distance, were receiving via the deaf safekeeper another voice of confidence and coincidence, another techno hold of storage and transmission. The votes that were thus in the deaf medium gave to his mother’s undead children a certain majority share in the new techno cultures of safety that were coming soon.

The deaf and the deaf-mute have been doubling as model mediums or media at least since the eighteenth century. Their reduced sensorium brought them closer to the apparatus that inventors and scientists began supplying with extended senses, techno senses that were soon new properties for the rest of us, too. The deaf-mute, the premier experimental subject in modern-science labs, was at the same time our first projected automaton.

When Edison was born the telegraph was already wiring up long distances. At the same time the American craze for seances started up around tap sounds that we were beginning to make out as the outside chance that the dead were getting back to us. Everyone was doing this tap chance.

In 1877 Edison, who was into perfecting all the sparks of invention that were out there, added to Bell’s invention his own invention of a carbon telephone transmitter, which was the practical piece missing from the realizability of the original phone. In 1885 Edison secured ways and means for the transmission of telegraphic signals between moving modes of conveyance and a station fixed in place. This was his essential contribution to Marconi’s project, the invention of the wireless telegraph. The Titanic catastrophe would give the rescue signal across air waves top priority in the new order of technologization. Radio control, May Day, and the black box were on the way or wave.

By the end of the nineteenth century the new science of phonetics had started collecting examples of “juncture” in which the sameness of sound shapes could be seen to rely for their distinction on a time interval, the pause button pressed within the newly discovered domain of suprasegmental features. There’s the example “night
rate/nitrate.” Another one made it into the big lights of the Good Humor ad: “I scream for ice cream.” Then there’s a well-known “knock knock” joke that elaborates on a third example: “Iowa penny to the library.” This collection of phonetic sameness and difference is unthinkable without the late-nineteenth-century introduction of media technologies of sound recording. At the same time a new system or science of phonetic notation was required to make the serviceable transcription: the audio record needed an owner’s manual, a typewritten hard copy for access and organization. But how to indicate for the supplemental record the difference in the sameness that was on the record of hearing? After a kind of Morse code of suprasegmental features was added to the basics, the new science of phonetic transcription could take note of all the new techno oral histories of primitive languages, local dialects, and last words of the dying that were out there, expiring and ready for the recording. But then, somewhere between phonetics and semantics, within the danger zone of unconscious histories and meanings, what about the “accident” that in Sjölund’s installment of our history of disasters makes ice cream scream?

What is in a name when, after all, it was the Carpathia that rescued what was left of the Titanic, leaving the greater portion of blame for all that was missing to the Californian? The Titanic’s posthumous legacy of nonstop wireless connectedness was addressed in the first place to the Californian, which, like a vampire, had been on for only one-half day’s broadcasting. In Bram Stoker’s Dracula (another late-nineteenth-century exhibition catalog or owner’s manual introducing, alongside all the occult collectibles, the latest in techno communication and recording), the vampire count is outmaneuvered by his hunters because they can rely, nonstop, on telegraphic live transmissions while, for the better half of the day, the vampire must rest in his “earthly envelope” and thus rest in one piece with and at the same pace as his designated mode of conveyance. The Titanic disaster made the emergency of round-the-clock live transmissions a fact of life even or especially for the Californian, at once the leader and the pack within a growing in-group of vampire hunters who are, in effect, in efficacy, new-and-improved vampires. The vampire, like any old occult medium, never goes away; it just gets superseded by more of the same, only better. That is what technology and group psychology are all about or above. They are just one crucial heartbeat or wavelength ahead of the occult forces they at the same time double and contain.

The hope was that the internal compartmentalization going into the Titanic’s designs on the future like a succession of submarines would offer on impact with any accident out there the emergency plan of automatic shutdown of all the undamaged waterproof compartments or encryptions, which, all together now, could, like emergency flotation devices or batteries, keep the tight ship unsinkable. But the iceberg proved to be just the top of the mourning breaking into the crypt plans of technology.

They say that the more cavalier passengers used the shattered ice glittering on deck to chill their drinks. Think again: others claim the ice mountain was dark and stinking from all the prehistoric debris ripening on contact with the air, the air waves of first contact with the human species.
In 1985 the sunken *Titanic* was located. After several open seasons for relics, a first sampling was put on display in 1994. Among the mix and match of mundane artifacts could be observed dollar bills, pound notes, leather wallets, cigarettes, silver salvers, white crockery, white chamber pots, hip flasks, leather bags, portholes, telegraph sets, internal telephones, and fuse boards. “The Atlantic depths give birth and a ridiculous junk-heap emerges. The objects recovered have no intrinsic uniqueness: there is only the association with the *Titanic*, which viewers must sentimentally supply for themselves.”

I attended the opening of James Cameron’s *Titanic* in Stockholm with Stig Sjölund right before the late-evening opening of his installation *Titanic II* that same day. It was odd that the representative immigrants in the film were overwhelmingly Swedish and largely spoke their native language in the American film for reality effect. But what’s more, the whole movie is held together by a kind of Wagnerian faith in art as re-collection. But it’s ambivalent, too, of course. There are two flagrantly sadistic ingredients in Cameron’s film. First off, the passengers don’t just fall into the ocean when it’s time to sink or swim, they often also first hit a rudder or whatever on the way down, with a big splash sound on the track. And second, when the young lady soon to be seduced by Leonardo boards the *Titanic* she bears with her traveling trunks all the modernist masterpieces she picked up one-stop-shopping in Paris. But we recognize these paintings because they exist. And yet they go down with the ship. That’s really sadistic. But it doesn’t matter because art’s about memories of a life, not our own, flashing before our eyes with each screening. But collection or recollection is indeed always an internal state, its materials ruinous, allegorical, and hence under the pressure of encryption or preservation, all of which often adds up to an endeavor that’s not always or necessarily so metaphysically comforting. But in Cameron’s world it’s the discovery by *Titanic* explorers of Leonardo’s portrait of the old survivor from back then down in its watery safe that attracts the old woman’s narrative frame of the moving picture. In the end she dreams or dies, it’s not clear. But a memorial underworld opens wide to admit the reunion of all the fellow *Titanic* travelers who celebrate her couplification with the long dead but deeply frozen, cryogenically preserved, Leonardo.

Shortly after I returned to Los Angeles from Stockholm, Sjölund faxed me the news of another accidental connection that his installation had unconsciously received: “I also got information on that library on the East Coast we had talked about. It is called Gardner Memorial Library at Harvard University. A rich lady founded that. In memory of her son who went down with the Titanic. Poor little Henry loved ice cream. So the library staff gets ice cream daily for free. From what I heard they are sick and tired of it. The source here is Johan Fornäs, Professor at the University of Stockholm, Department of Journalism, Media, and Communication. Yours, Stig.”

A certain Mudgett, whose original alias was Holmes, counts, *avant la lettre*, as America’s first serial killer. At the time of Holmes’s conviction, end of the nineteenth century, a Chicago journalist coined the term “multimurder.” Holmes was in the first place a swindler who amassed several fortunes and built one formidable “Castle”
just outside Chicago all on credit he never paid back. When the time came for repossession he sold the goods and split for another location and into another alias. He married several wives; some he left alone, in unwitting bigamous survival, others he killed for the money. His last "marriage" was one more thing he kept balancing in the final acts of insurance swindle and murder. Whenever he needed to go where the wife must never follow or understand, he told her he was once again negotiating patent rights for his invention of the ABC Copying Machine.

On the inside, the Castle was labyrinthine in its layout, crowded with doors and hallways leading nowhere, and shoddy and makeshift in its construction. But Holmes had functionalized what otherwise suggested the allegorical services accorded the dead in ancient mortuary palaces. When investigators opened up the abandoned Castle in their search for more evidence of Holmes's insurance scams, they stumbled across the bottom line along which the swindler had been signing his double-dealings between life insurance and the other's death. "They were dumbfounded by what they encountered—a dizzying maze of unmistakably sinister design. Gropping their way around the twisting passages, they came upon secret rooms and hidden stairwells, blind hallways and mysterious sliding walls, trapdoors opening onto tightly sealed chambers and camouflaged chutes feeding into the cellar." It was a "murder factory."³

In 1893 Holmes rented out rooms in the Castle to visitors to the Chicago Exhibition, a major display of all states and departments of collection devised to celebrate the discovery of the New World. But at the bottom of some lubed chute, at the latest, many of the guests would discover that you may check in but you never check out of the "Horror Hotel."

As soon as the Castle was under investigation or excavation, the work of the police had to compete with the one-stop-collecting by curiosity seekers of the wonders of murder that will never cease. One investor recognized a good thing and turned the site to behold into the Murder Museum, which offered, for the price of admission, guided tours conducted by the detective who had been in charge of the investigation. In Philadelphia, where Holmes was on trial for murder, another investor turned the already profitable Dime Museum, which featured sideshow oddities or wonders, into the Holmes Museum, where visitors could contemplate a replica of the Castle, phrenological chartings of Holmes's cranial abnormalities, and a skull that was identical to one found by the police and attributed to another one of Holmes's murder victims. The case generated similar collections of sensationalisms between book covers. One bestseller, *Sold to Satan: A Poor Wife's Sad Story*, was quickly translated into many languages, "including German (Dem Teufel verkauft Holmes!) and Swedish (Massemorderen Holmes, alias Mudgett)."⁴

Holmes spent final days on death row arranging for the fulfillment of his last wish. The condemned man, who had produced all his special effects of invention, progress, and success only through interminable collection and recycling, right down to the skeletons of his victims, which he sold to medical colleges for mad money, just did not see his own corpus being in turn metabolized somewhere between collection
and disappearance. Safer even than a mummy's encrustation, Holmes's burial plan saw his execrated body encased in an unexcavatable mound of cement. Any collection of his body, in parts or in whole, would remain—unthinkable.

According to the terms of Isabella Stewart Gardner's will, power, nothing in her 1903 collection was ever to be replaced, moved, emended. Hence the frames of the works stolen in 1990 hang empty, marking the spot a collection is in without recourse to substitution or invention.

Sarah Winchester built the so-called Mystery Mansion in San Jose nonstop under orders she took down daily in a seance room deep inside another impenetrable web of blind-alley diversions. Here the allegory of relations with the already dead remained intact. Sarah Winchester came to build this last resort upon the crypt of a daughter, dead in childhood. The small-world-after-all proportions enfolding special stairways and corridors within the ongoing construction did not so much fit her own tiny size (as tour guides to this day reassure us). These were the little footnotes leading inside Sarah Winchester's immediate underworld. Her husband had been the guardian of the crypt. Once he was gone, too, the building projection in the land of the setting sun began. She switched coasts following advice from the Boston psychic she consulted after her husband died on her:

You must travel to the West Coast and there build a beautiful home of the most costly materials in woods, crystals and metals. And... construction on this building must never stop day or night. I'm saying that as long as work goes on continuously in making additions onto your house, just so long will you, Mrs. Winchester, remain alive. I'm given to tell you that you, alone, can make restitution and balance the ledger for the thousands of men killed by Winchester firearms in the Civil War and in skirmishes all over the Country, and even in Wars to come in the near future.

There were good spirits with standing room invitation to her open house, but there were unhappy ghosts, too. The good spirits were helping her outwit with their non-stop construction directives the vengeful ghosts that were out to get her. Like the suicide crawling out of the grave at the crossroads where he had been buried to protect the living, the angry ghosts who entered the fun house of defunctionalized passageways wouldn't know which way to turn to get a fix on a victim. A few days later yet another diversion would replace the one even a ghost might learn to avoid and circumvent.

Income calculated daily from her shares of Winchester Repeating Arms Company was recycled into a day's worth of building. Every morning it all started over again from scratch, the scratch in the daily record of what the good spirits told their haunted medium to add and take apart. The repeater or serial firing of guns had brought back serial hauntings. The open invitation to all the spirits had been extended by a little one, who had her foot in the door.

Down to certain details the construction was gadget-loving, too: the kitchen, for example, featured energy-saving innovations she even patented and marketed. Somewhere
between the crisscrossing lines of diversion and collection the mystery house was a lab space for invention.

In 1920 Wilhelmina von Hallwyl gave her Stockholm palace and collections to the Swedish government for safekeeping. The collections spanned the double movement of eclecticism and totalization: “I will include everything, brooms, dust mops, and the like, because the day will come when these items are unusual and remarkable once everything is done by electricity.” Even the impulse to collect, to supply souvenirs for whatever is gone, can be entrusted to the sparks of technologicalization. Thus she gives a future tense of push-button reanimation to the significance of her own archival project, her mumification of all the scenes of a lost, preelectric life. In 1921 her husband could die. From that point onward she was home alone inside the collections that she cataloged until her death in 1930. This doubling of the collection contained itself within a final set of seventy-eight leather-bound volumes. The collection had all along been about Wilhelmina’s interests, which began collecting themselves in childhood. “Between 1853 and 1854 I received a small shell from my father. The shell had been found inside a quantity of raw hides. This shell was the start of my collection.” The palace was completed in 1898. The year 1998 marked the centenary of the house that Wilhelmina built on the crypt of her little girl who was dead, they said. Undead! Undead! The surprise shell that spilled out from unbound leather was the start of a collection that in turn would be bound up, seventy-eight times, in the catalog volumes. The catalog exceeds the collection in one item, another bit of stray unbound leather from another’s childhood. “The frozen moment captivates us. Not to add to or take away from it was another one of the donor’s inspirations. Only one object was rejected—a pen dryer made of rat hide. . . . By tradition, the Christmas gifts from grandchildren and great-grandchildren should be handmade by the children themselves. Great-grandchild Hans solved the Christmas gift problem by killing a rat, preparing the hide, and making a pen dryer with the gray-brown skin mounted on a half circle of blue satin.”

Hallwylska Museet, a late arrival of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century “cabinets of curiosities,” or “wonder rooms,” entered our era of more compartmentalized or departmentalized organizations of public collection tagging along on the margin. But like anything that survives under the force of displacement, this margin, too, was only awaiting the big blast of return. Now we can begin to recognize that there just is not so far to go between the eclecticism of contents collected by Wilhelmina von Hallwyl, or buried inside time capsules during the eighties, and what will be all aboard the space capsules taking off soon to launch colonization of the latest wide open outer spaces for the survival of the species.

The pop seriality of postmodernity addresses the tension going down between collection and invention on its own terms. Anything that is serial is also in language, like it or not, and therefore open to intervention and invention. But every mourning we chew on the serial order until it retains itself in all those volumes, compartments, capsules of collection and incorporation. The details of these mergers have been in-
evitably murderous. Sometimes the victims were alive first, alive to their collectibility, sometimes they were already undead.

Something like a historical change or chance can be seen to open up over the replicational interests and investments of those of us, of those parts of all of us, with both feet in the underworld. The frontiers of language — of the future — are expanding. The age-old dialectic of mourning, which guaranteed prospects for invention, progress, or civilization as long as couplification, reproduction, and future generations coming soon gave us same-old comfort, is now more than ever not the model going into or coming out of the future. It is not what the other has in store for us. The time to come, the time that is coming at us, has us scrambling for survival in a new eclecticism of bit parts. Only the melancholic chips on our shoulders are required for the future force of replication. The short circuit of merger and murder that kept replication from making a difference by limiting its realization to suicide belongs now to what the blastoff of autoreplication or autodivision has already left behind.

Notes

3. Ibid., 281, 283.
4. Ibid., 309.
7. Ibid., 3.
8. Ella was poisoned by a paint set. Wilhelmina was henceforward and in short order more interested in preserving the species than in the collection or production of art. (Another daughter survived childhood to become the family scandal, banned from the mansion.)