

the database imaginary

Categories : [archaeology](#), [contemporary art](#), [materialities](#), [media matters](#), [the shape of history](#)

Date : November 18, 2004

- [another reason for the importance of categories and databases](#)

One of my interests is the way we use databases to organise and administer the collections that are at the core of our archaeological lives. (And have played a crucial role in state society since ancient Mesopotamia.)

Databases - sounds dull and tedious? Have a look then at a new exhibition at the Banff Center - [Database Imaginary](#) - a suite of works exploring the intersection of everyday experience and databases.

Databases drive culture. 33 artists take us on an imaginative and subversive ride. The artists presented in Database Imaginary use databases to comment on their uses and to imagine unknown uses. The term database was only coined in the 1970s with the rise of automated office procedures, but the 23 projects in this exhibition - which includes wooden sculptures, movies and telephone user-generated guides to the local area - deploy databases in imaginative ways to comment on everyday life in the 21st century. Using newly inflected forms of visual display arising from computerized databases, the works seem to raise questions about authorship, agency, audience participation, control and identity.

I like "How I Learned", by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy.

They asked the question, "what would you know about the world if the only thing you saw were episodes of Kung Fu?". They exhaustively catalogued all the individual shots from all of the episodes of the 1970s television show Kung Fu and recompiled the shots according to genres (see the artist's statement for a complete listing - [\[Link\]](#)). The clips are exhibited on over 100 CDs which are colour-coded and from which the viewer can choose to watch lessons about "Nature and Society", "Religion", "Capitalism" and "Filmmaking". Within these groupings, one can select discs with titles such as "How I learned to complain about my job" and "How to walk ceremoniously" among dozens of other categories.

[The art of accountancy in ancient Egypt](#)