# Written Component:

# Annotated bibliography:

**(Reference from own research)**

**Figurative System of Human Knowledge for Encyclopedia by d'Alembert and Diderot. (Diagram translated by Benjamin Heller). https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/tree.html**

The Figurative System of Human Knowledge is a diagram that created based on the structured knowledge from the Diderot and D 'Alembert's Encyclopedia. It is an early representative of classifying and constructing knowledge within a branching structure in a diagram, intending to compile the knowledge that were considered as "most advanced and contemporary " in the 18th century to its readers.

This diagram shows me the kind of imagination and ambition about knowledge, and as stated by Dan O'Sullivan, "We might classify any text as encyclopedic that speculates on its own processes of discovery and arrangement or on the nature of knowledge itself." Therefore, I listed this diagram as a key reference and a starting point to observe knowledge structure along with the exploration of diagraming.

**Erick Beltrán, (2012)** *The World Explained: Micro Historical Encyclopaedia,* **ROMA Publications**

Beltran collected and compiled the text of what he called "personal theory": the everyday, fragmentary knowledge from individual. In the preface of this publication, he articulated his observations about encyclopedic systems and pointed out their incompleteness and impracticality. At the same time, he proposed a micro-historical perspective to view personal knowledge, describing how individuals, as producers and communicators of culture, participate in the process of cultural production. It is, as he stated, "a constant dynamic process of making meaning", and contributes to determine our social reality. For me, the most intriguing part is the diagrams and individual knowledge production systems that he created and proposed in the beginning of this book, which clearly presented his observations and reflections on the relationships among clusters, individuals,

knowledge systems, and cultures production mentioned above.

**(Reference from Gcd reading list)**

**Rock, M. (2013). 'Designer as Author'. In Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers and Users (pp. 45–56, 91–95). New York: Rizzoli. (Original work published in 1996 and revised in 2009)**

This reference prompted a critical question for me: How do I define the positions of an author and a communicator? Should I draw a line between the two roles? This question confused and bothered me a lot when I was doing both writing and layout in my studio practice, and I always struggle to distinguish them.
The article debates the concept of 'designer as author' and analyzes several scenarios where the two roles coexist. It points out that when theories are not incorporated into the works, the outcomes are merely "scattered fragments of quotations." This is a common situation not only in the debate about authorship but also in today's design field, and it's something I have been constantly reflecting on. For now, what I can articulate is that we need to carefully distinguish each choice and evaluate each situation.

**Gitelman, L. (2014). Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1–20.**

In this reference, Gitelman analyzes the forms and functions of different documents, and the relationship between documents and information, institution and society. Transforming contents into a printed matter is usually the final step in my weekly practice, when the digital documents pass through the printer in library and become something physical, the contents seem to be solidified and become unalterable. This process of the change in media seems worthy of deeper observation.

In my project, the question seems to be: what does it mean to write down personal knowledge and print them out? In another reference in my list, titled "the world explained", Beltran proposes a system of production of unspecialized work, which is a live print shop, where the texts are collected on the spot and then printed and circulated at the site. This be seen as a specific response and solution to the question above and I should keep working on mine.

**(Practice/projects)**

**Suter, B. (2007)** *Batia Suter: Parallel encyclopedia*. **Amsterdam: Roma Publication.**

As I flipped through this massive collection of images from beginning to end, I've written down the following keywords: close-up, composite layers, fiction, imagination, container, comparison, analogues. While this reference isn't directly relevant in content to my practice, its form and method have shaped my understanding to some extent.

Each spread seems like a magical loose container, one without a specific shape or any boundary, transforming into different interpretations for everyone. Unlike those typical encyclopedias with a clear structured search index, I didn't have a specific target(keyword) to retrieve when flipping through the parallel encyclopedia. Knowledge and ideas formed while I actively wove connections between the images. Also, the approach of all-images has made my reading experience much lighter. The way this publication shifted my attention and experience of accessing and locating certain knowledge from a traditional media (in this case, a heavy book) has helped me to find a more specific angel to view my practice.

**Chen, Z. (2017) 891 Dusks: An Encyclopedia of Psychological Experiences, leather bound book with gold embossing, text panels, sound, oval light installation.** [https://zheis.com/C2-891-Dusks-An-Encyclopedia-of-Psychological-Experiences](https://zheis.com/C2-891-Dusks-An-Encyclopedia-of-Psychological-Experiences)

Chen Zhe's project involves a publication which is based on an adaptation of a pseudo-scientific book. Similarly, the content is not directly related to my project, but the changed way of how content is accessed within this publication has greatly inspired my exploration.

In this publication, Chen Zhe lists the 'symptoms' from the 891 transient experiences of dusk. Using the grammar of pseudo-science, she cataloged personal experiences and throughts into a black-cover book which has this rigorous look. Zhe's approach of rewriting and utilization of textual systems has evoked a strong sense of contradiction between order and disorder. As I

experienced the increasingly exhausting process of searching and getting lost, scattered poetics emerge from the process of retrieval. For me, this project is an effective case focused on exploring the retrieval structure within a publication and using this structure to communicate specific feelings and experiences.

# Extended critical analyses

**Figurative System of Human Knowledge for Encyclopedia by d'Alembert and Diderot**

The Figurative System of Human Knowledge is a map of knowledge attached in the beginning of the d'Alembert and Diderot's Encyclopedia. My observation of this diagram begins with two other reading references: One is an article called *The Anti-Encyclopedia from Poetic Disorder to Political Anti-Order (and back again)* [1]*,* in which the author discussed the limitation in constructing and organising knowledge within traditional encyclopedias and listed out projects that explored alternative knowledge structures in printed media. To me, the most intriguing practice from this essay is *The World Explained: A Micro Historical Encyclopedia* by Erick Beltran, in which he analysed an unspecialized knowledge branch (referred as "personal theory") through clear diagrams, illustration of producing processes and collected texts. The other is *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, in which Borges critically analysed an ideal taxonomy, proposed by John Wilkins in his utopian language system, through a fictional manner. From the two references mentioned, I gained a different perspective on viewing the structured knowledge systems in a publication: the knowledge retrieval systems and the organising of knowledge in encyclopedias, or say, in printed publications, are not merely collections of knowledge, but also condensed structures revealing reflections and perspectives about knowledge. These structures can usually be observed in diagrams, glossaries or (the absence of) table of contents from a publication.

When I downloaded an image of the printed copy of the Figurative Human Knowledge System from Google, I can clearly see the colour and crease on that knowledge map. It is a typical and well-known knowledge diagram, epitomizing an encyclopedic representation of knowledge, with its deceptive appearance and branches, creating an illusion of comprehensiveness and its authority—— if you sit down and take time to read, you would find that human manufacture and industry are placed under the natural history category, and you would also read about terms such as alchemy and natural magic which are no longer considered as science of nature today. Between these branches, a knowledge system of the past emerged, appeared as a flat, static, ink-smelled and out-of-date image, and very much contrasting to the

way we engage with personal knowledge and the real world in everyday life. Here's a hunch: will this specific diagram reveal new perspectives for me to understand knowledge construction, if placed in an intertextual relation with scattered personal knowledge? (In my practice, I narrowed the scope to a specific word, "fence") In another word, I was trying to retrieve my personal knowledge about the fence by utilizing this branch structure as an index, an intertextual comparison and an attempt to approach diagrams.

While doing writing in my studio work, I got to see how my personal knowledge was filtered by the structure, as well as how the original diagram is transfromed into a close-up, individual narrative on fence. And after that, while making the layout, I tried to juxtapose the two diagrams on the left and right side in a spread, to show the relations and divisions shifted between knowledge by breaking the two diagrams into parts and using connecting lines to visually organize. At this point, I identify my focus as observing and translating knowledge and the retrieval system through diagrams. One direction is to further look at diagrams and maps related to knowledge construction.

[1] Christel Vesters. The Anti-Encyclopaedia from Poetic Disorder to Political Anti-Order (and back again). (2013) https://metropolism.com/nl/feature/23282_the_anti_encyclopaedia/

## On *The World Explained: Micro Historical Encyclopedia*

I encountered this publication while searching for references and it immediately caught my attention as it specifically articulated a collection of knowledge, which is something what I was trying to explore in the "positioning through iterating" brief. In the preface of this publication, Beltran proposes and describes the matter of "personal theory" as: the everyday unspecialized knowledge, which seems incomplete and trivial, and is consist of "hunches, makeshift ideas, crude understandings and impremptu explanations...the limited knowledge and experience we have at hand." Outside of the structured knowledge systems in those encyclopedias, personal knowledge forms a neglected, unindexed branch of knowledge, which to some extents points out the failure and unrealistic nature of the encyclopedias. It is also the fundamental way that we engage with reality —— that is "a constant dynamic process of making meaning," revealing how individual as cultural producers participating in cultural production.

As to catch that process, Beltran's introduces a micro historical perspective. As Beltran states, "zooming in on a single place, a single life or a single event," and "follows the logic of the close-up as a means to constantly thrust

back into discussion the long shots of cultural history." I consider it as an efficient approach of engaging in a close observation of things as an effective approach to bring theory into practices and fight the kind of over-generalizing structure.

Aside from the contents, the working methods which Beltran engages with the to assist the production of meaning are also insightful. One method is to use diagrams to explore and demonstrate structures and processes. Interwoven symbols and text are used to show the texture and pattern of the cultural and social dynamic observed in "personal theories". Beltran also uses the zoom-in and zoom-out of point of view in a set of diagrams to show the whole picture of his system.

Another method is to work on systematic way to collectively produce knowledge. Beltran created a system that he called as "live local print shops". In these shops, a set of processes were carried out: interviews with different people, editing and designing on spot, printing, displaying and compiling. The texts collected and compiled through this process could be viewed together as a cultural pattern to the site within a narrow timeline. It's worth mentioning that, during the interviews, the questions were not random, they were composed as a set of question that "open up a field of tension" and is able to "confront people" to "reveal their personal theory". This is quite an interesting approach while the Beltran performs both as the designer of the structure and the author as director, utilizing the printed media to practice documentation.

I find both the content and methods from this reference highly relevant for advancing my understanding of my own practice, which is about observing and analysing the existing structures that I found and think about "what does it mean for us to understand the appearance of things," as well as " what does it mean for individuals to perform as communicator."