"At the limits of reflection, the value of knowledge, it seems, depends on its ability to make any conclusive image of the universe impossible. Knowledge destroys fixed notions and this continuing destruction is its greatness, or more precisely, its truth."
Georges Bataille, **Guilty** (1944)

"We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein."
Michel Foucault, **Of Other Spaces/Des Espace Autres** (1967)

Dane Mitchell's practice is based on a definitively provisional position. Through the activities of locating, gathering, constructing and processing various kinds of evidence, data, and ephemeral material, he attempts to map the ideological, political and social spaces of the art world and the network of relations within which it operates. This ongoing project makes use of various methods and discursive formations to probe the systems or institutions that produce cultural memory and preserve orders of knowledge.

While Mitchell's methods often aim for a certain disinterested objectivity – analysis and display, demonstration rather than interpretation – his work belies any given reliance on the knowledge systems he deploys. This uneasy relationship with knowledge and the power status it assumes is suggested by the way his research projects, while earnest and rigorous in terms of approach, have a niggling ambivalence at their core. Ever elusive, the restlessly inconclusive, interrupted view that is thrown up by his work reveals an ethical dimension that operates against the idea of absolute knowledge. One term of reference for this acceptance of knowledge's slippage may be found in Bataille's concept of 'non-knowledge' or 'unknowing' by which "real knowledge emerges only contingently and in relation to its own activity. It can only be measured, therefore, by consciousness of what it doesn't know".[1] One aspect of the "realm of the unforeseeable unknown" that Bataille offers is that of the risible, and indeed harbouring in the smooth surfaces of Mitchell's work is something odd that destabilises – an element of rupture that bubbles through the surface.[2]

In **Present Surface of Tell** a strategic and manifold handling of available knowledge systems allows Mitchell to uncover illusory fictions with which those systems are embedded and to challenge the status they assume. Drawing on discursive formations customarily used by the museum – archaeology, geography, art history – the work 'reads' the museum as, variously, an architectural ruin, a series of archaeological finds, and a geographical structure. The museum, here, is conceived as a specimen, made visible through the 'window' of art history and the tools of interpretation and display familiar to the museological field. The work layers models of space (architectural, museological, geographical) and time (such that the work imagines a future that has, in theory at least, already past). Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' and 'heterochronia' may be fitting here as Mitchell configures interrelated and simultaneous slices of space and time derailing the inexorable progress and accumulation of history that the museum serves to represent.[3]

Present Surface of Tell operates through a slippery dislodging of both time and space that questions the bases and structures of knowledge implied by the museological model. We find ourselves simultaneously caught within the moral implications of systemic discursive modes and adrift from the rationale of their logic. This very instability gives rise to an unintelligible position that proposes new realms of possibility. The different elements of **Present Surface of Tell** erodes the myth of the 'permanency' and stability of the museum edifice, as it lovingly records traces of the once great figure of the museum, now fallen apart (as great figures do). Yet as this history of rupture, decay, diffusion and atomisation figures a crisis, does it not also figure the process of giving way to new possible configurations? This sense of a discontinuous continuity becomes not an endless revisiting of past monuments but proposes both deactivation and potential reactivation elsewhere.

[1] Michael Richardson in **Georges Bataille: Essential Writings**, ed. Michael Richardson, London: Sage Publications, 1998, 171
[2] Georges Bataille, 'Non-savoir, rire at larmes' in **Georges Bataille: Essential Writings**, ed. Michael Richardson, London: Sage Publications, 1998, 172
[3] Michel Foucault, **Of Other Spaces/Des Espace Autres**, (1967), Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité, October 1984, http://foucault.inf