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The Collector's Zeal

Towards an anthropology of intentionality, instrumentality and desire

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> The Museum itself is unique. Unlike the rest of the city's chameleonesque landscape the building's façade remains unchanged, but its interior unfolds limitlessly. By utilizing an architectural system of Mobius expansion, the infinite cubic capacity allows an unrestricted exhibition space within a structure of minimal exterior dimension (Nick Bantock 1999: xi)

The most singular aspiration behind collections is the desire for completeness and graspable panoptical and universal gaze; to create 'the great metaphor of the world', or a defined part of it (Bal 1996: 17, Stewart 1984: 152, Olmi 1985: 13, Greenhalgh 1988: 22-23). Collections result from a sanguine, often sardonic longing for the whole, the totality of a domain in which individuals and humanity find their place and essential nature, and the personal ingenuity and worth of their assemblers is redeemed and acknowledged (Stewart 1984: 139, Burckhardt 2002: 161, Olmi 1985: 5). With the restitution of the domain's original form or completed series, the harmonious unity of divinity, secular nature or human ingenuity is made observable (Minelli 1985: 19, Hodgen 1971: 396); with the completion of an arcane architecture and internal design, windows, doors and observation points, the diversity of creation can be readily located, measured and compared to establish the full normative set in opposition to the grotesque, the deformed, and the unusual, and guarantee sure and stable vantage points that stabilize desired and expected landscapes and histories (Stuart 1984: 132 Hodgen 1971: 391, Carruthers 2004: 121). The constellation of objects project authority, ownership, control or influence or position: "it is to exercise control over existence itself through possessing every sample, every specimen, every instance of an unrepeatable and nowhere duplicated series (Elsnor and Cardinal 1994: 3). These insatiate dreams, or are they common desires? (Baudrillard 1994: 8), created museums in which the tangible material of the world was collected together while the ephemeral domains of words, literature, music and drama that expressed, described, explored, theoreticised or critiqued the observable world were rendered by imaginatively experimental suites (Stafford 1994: 153); allegorical paintings, botanical and zoological illustrations (Stafford 1994: 252); gardens (Hunt 1985: 195), scholastic philosophy and experimental science (Hodgen 1971:

397-8) and theatre. By intimating the limitations of dreams and provoking new discourses on their impossible projects, museums and collections have stimulated the imagination and critical creativity of artists (Tythacott 2003:104, Buchloh 1999: 17); writers like Suskind, Fowler, Kurzweil and Bantock (cf. Shelton 2001b: 16-17, Hawkins and Olsen 2003: ix-xi); philosophers and scientists (Leslie 1999: 59) and ordinary people alike (Shelton 2001a: 11, Windsor 1994: 50, Dilworth 2003: 9). In the more contemporary setting whether we regard museums as still performing some legitimatory function or hegemonic project (Duncan (1995: 129, Fierro 2003: 33), or as the refuse heaps of history that protect society by safely cordoning off and institutionalizing transgressive (anti-society) objects (Hunt 1973, Leslie 1999: 68), museums can be dangerous institutions. Although the supposed limitations of these uniquely western inventions have been reiterated to distraction - their materialism; decontextualisation; the radical disjuncture between ideas and objects; the independence of classificatory schemes from historical references; the suspension of their contents, caught between different memorializing programs but limited to fixing them through their seldom perfect representations, and their fetishism of progress - these self-same unresolved ambiguities and paradoxes sharpen their uniquely transgressive edge. Because of what they contain, museums and collections are always more than and beyond the society in which they are found. They carry an extra-societal / subjective surplus, accumulated from distant historical and geographical realities and the passions of their instigators that sit uneasily with the social present. In the context of the collection, objects usually exist both as the signifier and signified, meaning and referent. Museums as well as private collections are good to think and their catalytic effects have obliquely and surreptitiously influenced the societies in which they have grown more than is usually acknowledged. They create dissonant folds and discordant resonances in our contemporary everyday topographies of history and geography.

Other means of expressing and fixing our perception and conceptualization of the world, its diversity, grandeur, and recording the effects of human intervention, for memory, share fewer epistemological prejudices than those of museums. Printed encyclopedias reverse the museum's materialism, celebrating the idea independent of the object and proffer none of the ambiguity between sign and object; film, multimedia and digital media constitute new ephemeral 'realities', combining representation and content that is subjected to unlimited manipulation and transformation. In such media, objects are contained incorporated, mixed and reconstituted before being sowed back into new imagined gossamer-like fabric that has only virtual existence. In Peter Greenaway's film, *Prosperos Books* (1991), each work in Prospero's library appears animated by high-definition video and computer technology, metamorphosing the linear arrangement of word chains into a an endless interplay between words and images (Woods 1996: 189). In digital media the tangible / intangible (material / ephemeral) binary appears superseded within a third level simulacrum. The classifications it expresses might not be museological or bibliophilic; they might not be hierarchical or polythetic; they may not constitute stable classes

but classes that change depending on their originating category, exposing the arbitrariness at their heart, as Woods (1996: 23) describes for Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985) or *Drowning by Numbers* (1988). Greenaway has experimented also with exhibitions as a three dimensional representation with 'real' objects. The result, *Some Organizing Principles* (Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, 1993) or *Flying Over Water* (Fundacio Miró, Barcelona, 1997), are complex, moving and intellectually satisfying representations that have as their source the same problems of classification, the encyclopedia, mythical stereotypes and the production of aura, but are very different from his explorations of similar themes in his third level simulacrum. Clearly, many such representations are irreconcilable with walls, plaster, exhibition cases and printed catalogues, which might be the case of involuntary memory itself. Would the plates that Aby Warburg completed as part of his Mnemosyne Atlas, gain additional lucidity if constituted as a Greenaway-like filmic work? Digital collections and classifications are always in the process of becoming and such imaginary museums free of historical institutional constraints have their solace in Borgean paradoxes and Greenaway's allegories and obsessive and vane orders and classifications that eventually crumple under their own unwieldy weight and absurdity, just as do the collectors, busying themselves in their shadowy afterlife in a landscape that changes constantly, in Nick Bantock's ironic parody of the afterlife relations between collectors and their collections in *The Museum of Purgatory* (1999).

Museums need become museums of the mind that begin with the mind and look outwards to the world rather than world objects that are assembled to retotalize a mental imaginary. As Munjeri puts it: "Cultural heritage should speak through the values that people give it and not the other way round" (2004:13). Collections are the expression of thought worlds, but thought worlds that once exteriorized are hardly ever re-totalized and remain material indexes divorced from their constantly improvised intangible imprints that live and wither in the world of experience. The requirement for such re-totalization is not only academic, but encouraged also by more pragmatic organizations, like The International Council of Monuments and Sites; "The distinction between physical heritage is now seen as artificial. Physical heritage can only attain its true significance when it sheds light on its underlying values. Conversely, intangible heritage must be made incarnate in tangible manifestations" (in Munjeri 2004: 18). This tension between essentially two approaches, two ideological screens through which the collection is approached – the one centred on the collectors themselves and the other on collecting institutions (Shelton 2001b: 14) – is readily expressed in the different organization of *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past*, where in its Amsterdam venue the exhibition was arranged according to collectors, while in Jakarta it was organized according to geographical region from which the object pertained. Collections, even more so when they have long been separated, with the passing of history, when spliced back together with those objects from which they have been separated, provide multiple reference points, open diverse orders and serializations and generate

a potential Babel of discourses that provide the conditions for a space of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation.

Viewed against the growing call for representations to become sowed back into the wider urban and natural environment in which they can breath back, respiring and expiring to enrich the sedimentation of historical identity and cultural significance, there may be good reason to wonder whether the traditional 'museum age' has reached its nadir. Digital and visual media are now able to network cultural representations and information across an environment much like telecommunications infrastructure and electricity are already routed, bringing new possibilities for the fulfillment of Malraux's dream of the universal 'museum without walls'. Although the contextual / decontextual debate on the role and significance of museums and collections has waged in one form or another since the time of Quatremère de Quincy at the turn of the 18th century, new technical possibilities capable of superseding its simple binary terms, together with the changed political cultures in which museums find themselves, may bring new possibilities and sharpened relevance to the reform of some, at least, previously entrenched positions.

I. The Problem. 'Hard' and 'Soft' Material Culture: Objects and the History of Collecting

Material culture has been studied from multiple theoretical perspectives, but the discipline's institutionalization in the social sciences has had a checkered and uneven history. A focus on collecting, classifying and researching objects to complete a universal human history characterized anthropology from its foundation until the 1920s when the subject, in Britain, was re-institutionalised outside of its museum origins (Shelton 2006b: 71-72). With the rise of functionalism and structural functionalism, with its focus on social relations, objects and material environments, when acknowledged at all, were treated as passive backgrounds or static props around which the drama of social relationships unfolded. Material culture received commentary only for its utilitarian and adaptive functions, or as providing markers of status, prestige or identity. Not until the 1960s with the introduction of structuralism, did anthropology give renewed attention to objects and materiality. However, while structuralism focused on vernacular architecture, ceremonial exchanges, masking systems or landscapes as expressions of wider structural patterns of thought, archaeology remained wedded to the positivist epistemology that anthropology had discarded. Yates dismisses even the suggestion that archaeology, with its former near monopoly over material culture studies, did anything to change its hegemonic practices during the last decades of the twentieth century. Has it, he rhetorically asked, only: "functioned to renew the contract, police the territory and watch over the realm of presence, leaving the citadels untouched?" (1990: 261).

Since the 1980s both anthropology and archaeology have eschewed any mainstream paradigm and embraced a plethora of varied approaches. Within this complex methodological and disciplinary mélange, material culture studies are commonly divisible into two approaches that

remain epistemologically and methodologically distinct and antithetical. Cooper, for example, representing the empirical school, writes:

> Firstly, inherent within any object are the raw materials of its manufacture, its form and decoration. The artifact's probable function and the methods affected to such an end may also be suggested by physical properties. The other type of information is largely historical or anthropological, and includes where an artifact was made, when, for what purpose and by whom (1979: 17).

Research into the identity and motives of the artifact's collector, she considers, only adds a useful additional field that can supplement, ameliorate and advance these two strands of knowledge. What for Cooper is the core of material culture studies, coincides with what Prown (1996) has referred to as 'hard' material culture, that forms one side of a dichotomous discipline that also includes 'soft' material culture studies in which practitioners claim a wider purview to study artifacts as signs. Taborsky (1990: 58-60) concurs that there exist two fundamentally incompatible models that govern the interpretation of material culture and collection history: the observation paradigm and the discursive paradigm. The former, like the 'hard' approach, is predicated on the idea that the object is a discrete sign, which has an apriori meaning that remains stable and consistent and is deducible through observation and description. In contrast the discursive paradigm is founded on the idea that the sign-object has no inherent meaning, but is socially constructed or recodified through a subjective and interactive process between artifact and human subject. The relationship between 'hard' material culture and collection history is viewed differently depending on the epistemology that is adopted. Unfortunately, the problem is that in much mainstream discourse where the observation paradigm is dominant, 'soft' material culture is reduced to the terms of 'hard' material culture, while any remaining residue, including a subjectively based collection history, is too often summarily dismissed or passed over to the historian.

This division between hard and soft material culture is not simply a distinction between the different paradigms and practices found in museums and academic institutions, but is deeply ingrained in both. Museum practices have been shaped by academic paradigms, both consciously and intentionally and unconsciously. This duality is particularly strong in archaeology that for a long time has held a near monopoly over the study of material culture and is also sometimes present in the division between social and cultural anthropology. This persistent fracture is common in US and Canadian university anthropology departments and has recently led to the break-up of one prestigious department and widespread discussion and concern in many others. Even those university departments associated with new material culture studies, based mainly in Cambridge and London, while laying new foundations for the study of the material world have still not, with a few notable exceptions, reintegrated the study of collectors

and curators as part of the essential dialectic that constitutes the field for which this article will argue. This second face of the 'material' is readily evidenced in the relationship between books and their collectors:

> First of all, a book says, Touch me. Pick me up. Hold me. Run your hand across my cover. Open me. Riffle my pages. Breathe in my scent. Turn me over. Stroke my back. Run your fingers down my spine. The initial experience of a book is physical, tactile and intimate. Bibliophilia is a seduction (Tousley 2004: 17).

The relation between collectors and the book's material manifestation is arbitrated by similar vocabularies of bodies and personhood; a book has a head, shoulders, joints, a spine, back and foot; the typographic vocabulary includes such terms as headpieces, tailpieces, headings and footers, and the type is referred to as the body of the text (Ibid: 18). The book is regarded as analogous to the human body as a physical support of the expression of thought, even soul, that determines a specific set of behaviour, conduct, respect, care, and moral regard and treatment of the object which defines both the human subjectivity that defines such domains as well as the domains themselves. While Belk makes a distinction between book collectors and those that purchase them "for their normal use – to read them', to refocus attention on the commoditization of the cultural sphere and the different manifestations of shopping (1995: 70-71), he, like most materialists, gives insufficient regard to the reciprocal shaping and reshaping that grows out of the active engagement of selfhood with material environment.

Pearce unsuccessfully attempts to overcome this dichotomy by advocating a typological approach to the study of material culture. She elucidates eight properties common to all objects and then stipulates the specific methodologies necessary for the analysis of each (1994: 129). Her approach is both empiricist and logocentric. Ignoring culturally specific frameworks of classification, she insists: "Objects do relate to each other in an objective sense, they do fall into groups with shared characteristics and it is our business to use our minds so that these groupings may emerge" (1994: 128). The study of an object's significance, ranked seven in her typological hierarchy, while acknowledged to be of seminal importance, is limited to examining their role in symbolizing 'prestige and social position'. However, the variant usages and significances even these limited categories can include is thought excessive, encouraging her to ask whether such subjects can be approached more systematically from a psychological vantage point; "to produce a theoretical basis which will render them intelligible in a more universal and less specific fashion?" (1994: 131). An object's significance she further reduces to its most common elements, posited as a psycho-functional quality constructed from the naturalization of different and distinct discourses. The eighth quality of an object, its interpretation or the "role of artefact in social organization", she simply subsumes as the; "sum of previous study, body of cultural knowledge and analytical techniques" (1994: 129). By ignoring epistemologi-

cal differences between the methods she lists for the examination of an objects varied qualities, Pearce is able to constitute a unified science of material culture, but only at the cost of imbuing artifacts a passive and mechanistic status.

The dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' material culture studies, whether acknowledged as in the work of Cooper and Prown, or unremarked by Pearce, that I have sought to capture by the differences of interpretation caught between instrumentality and desire, lies at the root of much of the postdiscipline. At its core, material culture studies remains haunted by the logocentric problem of intentionality; is it possible to divide and define distinct instrumental and desiring intentionalities?; do these correspond to an objective ('hard') and a subjective ('soft') material culture distinction?; and if not what are the implications of the demise of such a position for the study of material culture in general, and the future of interpretation of collectors and collecting in particular? Do we really know what an object is and what distinguishes it from a non-object (Dant 1999: 11), or for that matter, as Fernando Estevez Gonzalez, has asked - the answer to which will help determine whether much of the edifice of the discipline's objective / subjective dichotomy will be preserved or toppled - how do we distinguish the non-human from the human?

While sociology has traditionally concerned itself less with material culture than anthropology (Dant 1999: 9), a comparison can be made between material culture studies and religion and their respective relations with the study of the saints and their witnesses, and collectors. More attention has been given to the subject areas while the protagonists have been relatively neglected. Durkheimian anthropology with its emphasis on the study of representations as social facts has focused attention on the products and affects of collecting, the symptoms, if you like, rather than their motivations. There is a well-established literature, usually disseminated by professional associations, on how and what to collect while in the field, as well as advise on the appropriate documentation to be sought. Furthermore this empirical focus is found in Hodgen (1971) whom offered only a descriptive approach to 16-17th century collecting and cabinets of curiosities, seeing them as simply personal articulations of certain social practices prescribed by wider cultural fields. Mary Helms' innovative *Ulysee Sails* (1988), focusing attention on the origins of exotic objects and the formulation of new knowledge (collections of codified information), offers a pragmatic spatio-temporal explanation of the motivations underlying their protagonists; the instrumental needs to establish or re-establish difference by the knowledge brought and the display of former peripheral geographical localities and territories – bringing the unknown into the known; 'the light of reason' – has similar empirical constraints.

Marxist interpretations further re-orchestrate the opposition between the study of material conditions and signification. Marx saw collecting as a socio-cultural effect put into motion by a particular set of social relations determined by the ownership and control over the means of production. Particular categories of objects are made to appear independent of the means of their production, or of the technological means and organizational structure on which their

'discovery' depended. By removing these categories of objects from commoditized exchange relationships, as Bourdieu argues, exchange value is replaced by prestige value, and the constituent objects of such classes used as a means of social distinction.

> The devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things... The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object, it is the objectification of labour. .. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labour appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as loss of bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as alienation (Marx 1975 (1844): 323-4).

Collecting, like consumption, manifests itself as a form of false consciousness that masks the real social formation that underlies it and leads to increasing alienation, creating not only an intellectual but also a material phantasmagoria. Marx's focus on production over and above consumption, has been blamed for delaying the recognition of the importance of material culture and the focus on markets, consumption and commercial and non-mercantile behavioural motivation in sociology (Dant 1999: 9), though such bias has been reversed by various subsequent Marxist scholars like Benjamin and Baudrillard.

Both Durkheimian and Marxist approaches to material culture and collecting either ignore the agency of the collector or reduce it to the product of forming the collection. Collections themselves are defined as objective series that have been taken out of economic circulation and the objects that constitute them excluded from utilitarian calculation and general economic value formulae, but the new systems in which they are placed have been little described or understood. The collector is reduced to his actions; the product of his work is subsumed under the history of collective representations that assumes the existence of a community of interpreters and interpretees that understand it, while his motivation is considered nothing more than instrumental self-interest or as symptomatic of pathological regression (Shelton 2001b: 14-15). 'Hard' material culture approaches, exemplified by mainstream archaeology and museum practices, marginalize or efface the role of the collector as a social agent who recodifies the object. Thus, for Clunas (1996: 31), "the public museum collection ... is a way of loosing memories. It is a set of practices to induce the oblivion of certain kinds of illicit, personal knowledge, a forgetting machine". As Taborsky's work implies, the individual motivations of collectors cannot be explained by reducing them either to sociological, economic or even psychological factors. For Olsen (1990: 196): "Mainstream Western archaeology, dealing only with the distant past, has achieved a presumed innocence and a daydream-like image. Reading archaeological texts or visiting the museum entails a mystery of readerly, comforting pleasure without any distorting moments.... It is exactly a presumed innocence which has made archaeology into an ideal supplier of familiar bourgeois myths about human essence, individuality and rationality".

Opposed to this compromised and acritical approach, following Krzystof Pomian, it must be agreed that:

> The collection is thus a unique domain, whose history cannot be consigned to the narrow confines of the history of art, the sciences or history itself. It is, or rather should be, a history in its own right, concentrating on 'semiophores', or objects bearing meaning, on their production, their circulation and their 'consumption', which most generally takes the form of mere viewing and does not, as such, involve any physical destruction (1990: 5).

Failure to focus proper attention on collecting, as Bann insists, leads to a reification of the product of the collector's work:

> It is that we loose sight, in such a reification, of the network of symbols, the dynamic interchange of signifying practices, in which the collection was strategically situated. It is by theorizing such a network, by placing the shift and stress in the web of interconnected discourses that a new estimates of the collector's work may emerge (Bann 1994: 9-10).

The excessive 'sociologisation' of the collector and the activity of collecting, ignores the individual's psychological disposition, life experiences,; the whole process of personal mediation through which the social becomes the personal and the collection, the testament of a specific human's subjectivity's comprehension, expression and often manipulation of his life world (Preziosi 2003: 64). Moreover, the same sociologisation dismisses the role of ideology or belief by reducing it to its instrumental expression; a plane already epistemologically and ontologically removed from its instigator. Bann (2004: 66) takes this argument further insisting that personally imputed signification is not limited to the object or collection itself but to the spatial arrangement in which its collector framed the work. As 'a term within a system', the integrity of objects, collections and subjectivities becomes an all too fragile and transitory system of signification, usually ignored or accepted as impossible to reconstruct in the history of collecting (cf. Preziosi 2003: 84). It is this pessimism brought about by the inflation and discoursive effects of 'hard' material culture studies that we must now reject.

II. Legitimating the Canon: Defining and Typologising Collectors and Collections

Within the field of material culture, much attention has been given to the definition of both 'collector' and 'collection'. Traditionally, curators have embraced 'hard' material culture approaches, while collecting has been reduced to a residual fundamental psychological disposition common to the whole of humanity (Shelton 2006a: 482). Germain Bazin, in *The Museum Age* (1967), traced collecting back to the Hellenic world and early China. Pierre Cabanne opined: "The origins of collecting are as remote and mysterious as those of art" and coincide with the

first revelation and apprehension of 'beauty' (1963: vii). Joseph Alsop, basing his argument on archaeology, traces such a primordial drive to the Paleolithic (1982: 71). For Pearce:

> It is clear that institutionalized collecting in various modes ... is an activity with its communal and psychic roots deep in the prehistory of European society, and can be traced in detail through the centuries of later prehistory in the Iron and Bronze Ages back at least to the Neolithic communities of around 3000 BC (1992: 90-91).

For Elsner and Cardinal the archetypal collector was Noah whose success at collecting all that was doomed was purposely linked to its recreation. "In the myth of Noah as ur-collector resonate all the themes of collecting itself; desire and nostalgia, saving and loss, the urge to erect a permanent and complete system against the destructiveness of time" (1994: 1).

By essentializing collecting, Western museums have legitimated their own activities. In the 1984 edition of the *Manual of Curatorship*, published by the United Kingdom Museum Association, Lewis concurs that acquisitiveness and the desire to record and transmit knowledge are basic human proclivities traceable to the Paleolithic. Museums, he speculates, are "a reflection of an inherent human propensity towards inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness combined with a wish to communicate to others" (1984: 7). Similarly Kenneth Clark justified museums and galleries on the basis "... that the majority of people really long to experience that moment of pure disinterested, non-material satisfaction which causes them to ejaculate the word 'beautiful', and since this word can be obtained more reliably through works of art than through any other means, I believe that those of us who try to make works of art more accessible are not wasting our time" (in Herrman 1999: 54).

All these statements are based on unquestioned criteria of intentionality underlying recorded activities. They depend on a concept of human nature that is resistant to social, cultural and historical contingencies and is essentially unchanging. How else could it be possible to posit with such surety the intentions behind historically remote civilizations that have left only material traces of their existence, to say even less the intentions behind the remnant evidence of activities left by long vanished species?

Susan Stewart distinguishes two distinct motivations underlying the behaviour of collecting, each giving rise to a specific form of collection. Collectors, she argues, are motivated to collect systematically following one or other externally articulated criteria of classification as the basis of their activity, or by impassioned instinct. She writes "... the boundary between collection and fetishism (is) mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy" (1993: 163). Conversely, collecting springs from an idiosyncratic desire to capture the events of a life by collecting its material associations or souvenirs. For Stewart:

> We might say that (the) capacity of objects to serve as traces of aesthetic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir. The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, and events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin. It represents not the lived experience of its maker but the 'secondhand' experience of its possessor / owner (1984: 134).

Souvenirs become the material support of what Benjamin refers to as 'intentional memories'. They witness and keep alive events for individuals and sometimes communicate them to groups. But, by materially marking such singular occasions, they transform them, both by their removal from the world and the selective and ill-focused fixation they can only give to unrepeatable, lived and emotionally engaged experience. Stewart's now famous distinction is further typologiced by Pearce (1992: 68-88) who distinguishes between three dominant modes of collecting; the systematic, fetishistic and the souvenir, though in her later work she concedes that many collectors "... operate in all these modes at the same time" and modifies her approach (1995: 32).

Stewart and Pearce's typologies appear to have been influenced by the earlier work of Jean Baudrillard whom, after defining the differences between accumulation and informed collecting, predicated on the latter's divestment of use value, characterizes collecting as a pathological form of behavioural regression. Noting that collecting is fairly common among children between seven and twelve, but disappears with the onset of puberty, reappearing mainly in men over the age of forty, Baudrillard posits a strong correlation with the growth and decline of sexuality and characterizes collecting as a compensatory mechanism that performs a regression to the anal stage (1994: 9). Objects attain their value only by their absolute singularity and absence, charging collecting into an unfullfilabe but passion-ridden pursuit that can end only with death. A series or class of objects, conceived by the subject's own imagination, becomes seen by him as fragmented and incomplete, leading the collector to surrender his very being towards achieving their retotalization and their originary unruptured coexistence. As the individual regresses even further, he becomes increasingly jealous, delighting in the prestige he attains through a possession which is denied all others; "withdrawal into an all-encompassing object system is synonymous with loneliness: it is impervious to communication from others, and it lacks communicability" (Baudrillard 1994: 24). This association of collecting with pathology has tainted common perceptions. Conner (2007: 4-6), in a newspaper article on collectors of popular culture and toys in the Vancouver conurbation reports the frequent, usually well humoured, use of expressions and terms around sickness: "... it's a sickness"; "she caught the collector's bug"; "I walked into another collector's house and witnessed first hand how out of control it could get"; "It was consuming and controlling". The collectors Connor interviewed

all recognized their passions, while some traced it to childhood memories and nostalgic recollections suggesting their collections were the result of all three modalities isolated by Stewart and Pearce. Pearce limits this unhealthy, narcissistic characterisation only to what she describes as fetishistic collectors; those who respond to their "obsessive need by gathering as many items as possible; … in contrast to souvenir collecting, the objects are allowed to create the self" (1995: 32). This enables her to continue to attribute social value to systematic collectors that follow an "ostensibly intellectual rationale" (Ibid.) and value the product of their enterprise as an important and essential activity for the advancement of empirical science. Moreover, for Pearce, museums can only be justified by their commitment to assemble systematic collections. This same essentialist distinction reoccurs again in Herrman's study of 18th and 19th century English collectors when he distinguishes between the " psychologically complex" motivations of the French and "… their staid and simple English counterparts" (1999: 5). Although he, somewhat inexplicably, sees psychological dispositions not as universal but national, his discourse nevertheless serves in equal effect to ignore the subject of motivation itself. Speaking of his authoritative work Herrman attests:

> The aim instead has been to chronicle what was collected, by whom, the sources of supply, the transitory nature of private collections, the astonishing survival of family accretions, the growth of expert knowledge, the emergence of permanent public galleries … and … the gradual transformation of what were once merely articles of domestic decoration into what are now items of considerable financial significance (1999: 5).

The distinction between fetishistic and systematic collecting becomes a criteria of what the museum values; what it should take and what it should reject because at the base of all such objects exist innate and intrinsic qualities which are attributed transcendental empirical values. The dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' material culture is re-echoed again in the designation between systematic and fetishistic collecting; the first pertaining to objects chosen for their innate qualities to illuminate part of the world; the second rejected because of their idiosyncratic, personal affective qualities that are mired in their own subjectivity.

Belk (1994: 317) has critically reviewed other definitions of the collection, while summarizing a large amount of empirically based field-data of his own from which he develops alternative classifications and definitions. Unlike most writers, Belk makes no distinction between the collection of material objects, ideas and experiences (op. cit) and investigates popular domestic collections on the basis of three oppositions; (a) whether they were put together consciously or unconsciously (whether they were purposive, instrumental, thematic, intentional or formally instituted, or conversely whether unintentional, haphazard and informally structured); (b), whether a collection is displayed or kept in a central core area or whether it is dispersed (a criteria of its integration and seriality), and (c) whether it is ordered, balanced and symmetrical as

opposed to being entropic and disarrayed (1994: 325). Using these three sets of dichotomies, Belk derives twenty-seven possible classes in which collections could be classified (1994: 325), but, the motivations behind their creation still remain obscure.

These attempted classifications leave a large area of collecting activity unaccounted for or reduced to banality; the surrealist's pursuit of objets trouvé, Neruda's collection of things of the sea or tools that contained the imprint of human touch, labour and exertion (Shelton 2001b: 16-17). They flounder if called on to consider Aby Warburg's incomplete Mnemosyne Atlas, a projected series of between 60-70 plates, each of which consisted of a montage of images that mapped the reappearance and metamorphosis of classical designs and themes in the Renaissance and early 20th century. Through the juxtaposition of images, the work was intended as a dynamic iconography pursuing the continuities and transformations of classic forms and providing 'a visual archive of European cultural history' (Rampley 1999: 99-100, Buchloh 1999: 17), as was Walter Benjamin's vast archive contained in the Arcades Project. Similarly illustrated collections, I am thinking of Georges Bataille's journal, Documents, Doctrines Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie (1929-30), collections of photographs, object images, writing and advertisements from different milieux, compiled under distinct headings and replete with a dictionary of surrealist terms. They ignore the rule of passion and its direction to systematicity or completeness as Connor describes among his Vancouver-based collectors. Typological approaches to collecting have served to reiterate the same 'hard' / 'soft' distinction we have seen elsewhere; to distinguish between a rational, scientifically informed collecting ethos and its pathological twin; a distinction that is used to link systematic collecting with museums, and souvenir hunting or personal collections with personal and private memory, or fetishistic or passionate incitation. In the empiricist hierarchy of values the former is valued over the latter, and usually supplants it entirely within museum institutions.

III. Against the Canon. The Return of the Subject

Lord Eccles, a formerly illustrious collector, connoisseur and dealer himself, when trying to define what a collector was, settled for an altogether broader definition of his personal pastime than Stewart and Pearce's early definitions allowed. In his semi-autobiographical work, On Collecting (1969), Eccles identified four general motives for collecting each of which could branch into many different modalities: Prestige, "the desire to be beautiful about your person or remarked for the value of your possessions" (1968: 13): Making money (Ibid: 21): Furnishing a house, and collecting for "purely personal motives, including the search for beauty, the expression of historical continuity, and a felt affinity with a particular artist or maker; "a kind of religious feeling that because the work is in him and he is in the work, he is participating in the mystery and power of creation" (Eccles 1968: 35). Collections are made for study, and the simple thrill of possessing unique objects made by human hands in an age of machine production. Eccle's himself opined;

> the chief personal motives for collecting are the search for beauty, the desire for continuity with the past and for the power of an age that has gone, the wish to participate, even at second hand, in the creation of works of art, fetishism, the passion to complete a series, and the need to escape from standardization; of these the search for beauty should always be dominant (Ibid: 41).

Not only does Eccles defy Stewart and Pearce and more recent writers who define collecting as a form of consumerism (Belk 2006: 534, Dilworth 2003: 3), but his first hand account subsumes the distinctions made by Pomian between semiophore-man and 'thing-man'; those who abstain from utilitarian activities and surround themselves with objects as sign bearers and act as mediators between the visible and invisible worlds, and those whose acquisitions are purposeful and practical manipulations of the world with little or no relation to the invisible (1990: 32). Collections not only express their creator's mediations of desire and instrumentalities, but they also press forward to their logical extension towards completeness and closure. The collector is always ahead of time, reflecting back on his sojourn, while giving scant attention to the present. Blom recounts a chance encounter with a collector of rare books who had just divested himself of his collection.

> I am 62 and have ten years left until I have reached the average life expectancy for Austrian men. It is time to start making my exit while I still can. It is a wonderful feeling of relief. All my life I have collected books, not as a hobby but as a passion, something, therefore, that creates pain. Never collect, dear sir … never! (2002: 233).

There seems sometime to exist almost a counter movement between the imposition of personal will in accumulating and displaying a collection and the effect of the material representation that thus gets to be formed on the psychological disposition, understanding and existential being of the collector. "Not only do objects help us master the world, by virtue of their being inserted into practical sets," according to Baudrillard, "they also help us, by virtue of their being inserted into mental sets, to establish dominion over time …" (1994: 15). Although Belk (2006: 534) distinguishes between institutional and personal collecting, a similar dialectic exists in the work of museum curators, a cycle almost between expectation and desire, invocation or the fulfillment of desire, and disengagement that can bring feelings of elation or depression.

The motivations behind individual collectors and the significance that collections hold for them are manifestly more complex than most social sciences or museum studies have acknowledged. Stewart's focus on the souvenir and Pearce's emphasis on the importance of systematic collecting have privileged the manipulated normative expressions of collecting over its informally structured and subjective alternatives, without examining the position of different types of collectors within a wider social and political field. Dismissed as misconstrued by Marx; pathologised by Baudrillard and de-intellectualized by Pearce and Stewart, this large constituency

of collectors, whose existence in the UK was impressively attested by the popularity of people's shows in the 1990s (e.g. 1991, Walsall Museum) and Leicester University's 1993-4 survey on collecting practices, and in the United States by the work of Russell Belk, have contrarily been celebrated by Benjamin as 'figures of the future' (Leslie 1999: 79).

Benjamin distinguished between intentional and involuntary memory, the first which accumulates objects instrumentally to fix, witness and abstract past events intrinsic to the construction of self, while the second follows a freer road of desire. "The mémoire volontaire ... is a registry providing the object with a classificatory number behind which it disappears"(Benjamin 1999: 211) The collection of souvenirs, for Benjamin, becomes a debased and inauthentic form of experience, that attempts to structure intentional memory which he opposes to true, involuntary memory (Leslie 1999: 68). Observing that children, researchers, antiquarians and book collectors follow a common passion to pursue an ill-defined spirit whose trail is found in objects, Benjamin, like Baudrillard, surmises that such objects become imaginatively transformed from inert materials into desired and passionately sought after items. Writing on Benjamin's own childhood collections, Leslie notes;

> ... every little stone, every plucked flower, every pinned butterfly formed the basis of a specialist collection and the whole lot, everything he owned, was his collection... To have cleared out the drawer full of treasured objects ... would have involved destroying a construction comprised of thorny chestnuts that were morning stars, tin foil that was a silver stockpile, building bricks that were caskets, cacti that were totem poles and copper pfennigs that were shields. ... Held in his hands, squinted at through his myopic vision, the collection became the locus of an imaginative enterprise (Leslie 1999: 64-5).

The charged, imaginative relationship between the child and the mature collectors and their collections that Benjamin discusses, promotes the imaginative construction of alternative pasts and futures. These are what he calls 'true' collectors, who are not transfixed by connoisseurship and the cult of the masterpiece, but who engage and excavate the social milieu for object meanings.

> What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this 'completeness"? It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressively devised historical system; the collection. And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic

circle, where as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone (Benjamin 1999: 204-5).

It is the memories and associations that accrue around an object that create its aura, the attracting force that the true collector pursues. "Collecting is a form of practical memory" (Benjamin 1999: 205). This depiction of the collector as an adventurer whom builds his understanding of that part of the world his collection represents often by chance has more in common with Pomian's semiphore-man or Bann's self-fashioning individual and the surrealist's flaneur, than with Baudrillard, Stewart or Pearce's fetishist or psychotic personality types. Writing in 1935 Benjamin opined: "The collector makes the transfiguration of things his concern". "The collector, infantile, irresponsible, immune to the world of calculation and appliance, exists outside an economy of use, in a realm of desire" (Leslie 1999: 67). Connor's Vancouver-based collectors and dealers invariably denied financial motivation, sometimes referring instead to it being a "self-realization thing" (2007: 4). It will be recalled that Eccles described collecting as sometimes creating "a kind of religious feeling"; a mystical participation in which the collector can commune with a maker because they both cohabit the same space and time through the longevity the object has achieved.

Curators and artists also often recall this same feeling. I shall proffer four examples taken from textual exegeses of Canadian Northwest Coast arts. Audrey Hawthorn, the first curator of the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology described the profound feeling, mixed with awe, she experienced while unpacking a mask of Komokwa (Coppermaker) wrapped in newspaper and shipped to her in an old container:

> In my hands was a work of art, vivid, real and perfect. Perfection was achieved through the culminating experience and intelligence of this maker. The shock of recognition was so strong and pleasurable that a door in the world of art opened to me then. This was not just a mask, it was not just an object, however carefully made for a special part in a ceremony held at a certain time at a certain place. That sort of scholarly identification has a primary place in museum work but here had been a transfer of power beyond ordinary experience, and the world was not the same for me (Hawthorn 1993: 30).

For many First Nations artists the process of making provides similar gasp of realizing the sublime and coming face to face with one's own identity as tied to something greater. Francis Williams, a Haida artist, recounts:

> When I look at the artifacts, I thought "This is what I'm about". It was a slow process of learning how important this was in my life. As I grow older, this becomes more fascinating. Because I think about how I could have missed the opportunity of discovering it.... it has given me an

identity. It puts more value into my life, being a vision maker, as one person said; being that part of a people that creates visions and pictures in the same way dancers do. They bring to life what I create on button blankets(Jensen and Sargent 1986: 27).

Or as Robert Davidson, another distinguished artist from the same nation, confides: "Creating is just a continual learning process. I keep forgetting what the exercise teaches us and the patience with the learning that we all have to go through… The lines are beautiful because everything works with everything else. It takes time" (Jensen and Sargent 1986: 21).

For their contemporary, the acclaimed Haida artist Bill Reid, there was greater distrust towards yielding to such experience. Not quite able to believe that the old cultural forms and meanings had survived or had been truly rediscovered in his own work or that of Mungo Martin and Doug Cranmer, he restricted his delight to the perfection of a work's formal qualities.

There was no magic about it, and yet we who practice it have become in the eyes of many of the people, magicians (2000: 168). It is buried now, that old, powerful magic , under the wrinkled grey curtain of age, beneath the sterile canopy of the museum, the meaningless pile of words of the experts. But it is still there, as strong as ever … (2000: 159).

He could look back at a great artist like Charles Edenshaw, and marvel at the ingenuity and craftsmanship of his tools and appreciate his "beautiful, powerful bracelets" but reserved admiration for "the purpose and grace of line and the flow of image" (Ibid. 192). When confronted by extraordinary art, such as the ancient stoneware shown in the 1975 exhibition *Images Stone BC*, his incredulity muffled his response to declaring: "In the presence greatness, the most appropriate response is a respectful silence, and in the presence of the eloquent silence of these stone images, I find myself more at a loss for words than usual' (Ibid. 95). This was a response to the presence of greatness, he argued, found universally in such art, rather than the unique intuition between form and meaning which for so long he failed to recognize as a live Haida manifestation. By cautiously circumscribing his recognition of aesthetic experience, he could not nevertheless deny its agency. The recognition of this self-same agency appears to lie behind many First Nation's ambiguity towards collections of their artifacts preserved in museums (cf. Clavir 2002).

A variation of such experience is contained in Andre Breton's idea of the surreal object; which although "… old, bizarre, meaningless and ludicrous to the uninitiated", achieves meaning and purpose after it is inscribed into a wider poetic vision. Furthermore, he, along with Paalen and Ernst, identified the location of such objects in the Americas in the American Southwest, the Arctic and importantly the Northwest Pacific Coast (Tythacott 2003: 172). It was Paalen who collected most of the Pacific Northwest Coast objects now in Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology.

> The finding of an object served here exactly the same purpose as the dream, in the sense that it frees the individual from paralyzing affective scruples, comforts him and makes him understand that the objects he might have thought insurmountable are cleared (Tythacott 2003: 36).

Accounts like these are common among collectors and artists alike, and curators frequently define the ability to come into contact and touch objects in their care as one of the highest privileges of their position, but these experiences and the meanings attributed them need to be seen in relation to historical and contemporary social relations and political contingencies that have helped stimulate them. These experiences confirm Benjamin's thesis that the imaginative intervention made by collectors, confiscating objects from the dull, functional circulation in a utilitarian economy, to infusing them an imaginative function of their own is widespread. These descriptions also confirm the importance of the collector as a mediator or what Pomian calls 'semiophore man'. Perhaps, the association between the imaginatively constructed transcendental power of the object and the desire for its acquisition harbors back to the common origin of aesthetics and property as Cabanne hypothesized? For Benjamin: "The true, unrecognized passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive. For this is its dialectic; by loyalty to the thing, the individual thing, salvaged by him, he evokes an obstinate, subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable" (In Leslie 1999: 68). Collecting, like the rediscovery of self-identity, is essentially transgressive, it undermines the normal economic or social circuitry that binds society together and resists the constraints of metanarratives and their discursive effects. Not surprisingly Benjamin closely allies himself with the surrealists, preferring the arcades with their improbable constellations of objects thrown together with the antique and unfashionable that have been discarded by the rapid transformative whims of capitalist society to the then emerging palaces of mass consumption. The same taste characterizes modern collectors with their preference for the nostalgic signs of their remembered pasts, which a cynical market has appropriated to extend its operation. Connor describes the frustration felt by contemporary collectors because the abundance of objects, made possible by a rationalized market economy, plentiful copies, and the advent of ebay, mitigates the thrill and expectation of former hunts in flea markets and antique shops. "Collecting isn't what it used to be" opines one Vancouver collector (Connor 2007: 6).

The collector cannot be seen as degenerate of western capitalist society as much supposed empiricist and popular literature espouses, but potentially is one of its harshest critics whose activity, has historically been fundamentally transgressive to its very operation. Museums whose function Hunt (1973) sees as collecting and safely storing all the past debris of a society that it might otherwise contaminate and subvert, have their origins in the subversive activities of collectors.

IV Towards a Reconciliation of Material Culture and the History of Collecting

> The manner in which persons and things are to be understood in relation to each other depends crucially on the manner in which we conceptualize both these things – as commodities, gifts, resources, markers of identity, etc. – and the way in which we conceptualize human agency or subjectivity (Tilley 2006: 9).

'Hard' material culture approaches depend on the assumption that material objects possess formal qualities that exist independent of human cognition or agency (which although they well may, such a supposition is fundamentally unprovable and therefore invalid by empiricism's own criteria of what constitutes scientific knowledge). These qualities as Cooper acknowledges, include material, form and decoration. Secondarily such qualities may be used to ascertain an objects use and function as well as its functional efficiency. 'Hard' material culture studies treat the technology used in the manufacture of objects as if it can be apprehended empirically in a world imagined as being composed of fixed signs and natural correspondences. 'Hard' material culture approaches even when taken to embrace different methodologies, including functional and formal analysis, technology, social and historical functionalism, Saussurean semiotics, iconography (Pearce 2004: 129), in a world it believes to be made up of fixed and determinate values, qualities, functionalities and significations, remains complacent that reality is passive, a neutral medium readily amenable to empirical investigation. Many of its methodologies are those that have informed the operations of museology; classification and typologising, inventorying and storage and the criteria underlying permissible narrative interpretation. The implications of these methodologies are also what have most often been cited by collectors, connoisseurs and originating communities as the chief cause of their alienation from museums and galleries. Consider for example classification of Northwest Coast objects by cultural group, geographical area (following Murdock) or typology as opposed to vernacular, linguistic classifications, ownership history or ceremonial usage as First Nation people themselves often request. The formal realm of hard material culture studies is only possible by the imposition of a particular semantic regime derived from a formal grammatology and classification that disempowers interpretation by others. Not only does: "the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner", as Benjamin (1968: 67) notes, but the collection looses its meaning at the point it is ripped away from its original interpretive context.

Mieke Bal and Johannes Fabian have argued against the epistemological limitations of this narrow empiricist view. For them, knowledge itself is narrative and narrative is performed. Bal, after /enumerating the implications of Fabian's view through an interrogation of the epistemology implicit in his work *Power and Performance*, suggests, unlike the methodological presuppositions underlying 'hard' material culture studies:

such knowledge is not achieved at once, rather it develops; it is open to interpretation at different levels; it admits degree; it changes; subject and object positions in the process of knowledge construction are reversible.; it is a never accomplished constant process; the 'more or lessness' of this knowledge constantly affirms the need to reserve and revise judgment (Bal 1996: 174).

If we reverse the formal Saussurean equation and give primacy to the contexts in which objects perform over and above their formal constitutions and classifications, not only does the 'hard side' of material culture studies becomes contingent but its indifference to the study of collectors and collecting, including the motivations, instrumentalities and desires of their assemblers, dissolves, thereby ending the discipline's paradoxical bifurcation and the reductionist reifications which constrain its development. The study of collectors and collecting then includes the contingent and unstable qualities defining material, techniques, form and decoration that have been employed in the formation of the collection and can be identified as distinct from those of originating communities or successive institutionalizations and classifications. Even aesthetic affect and aura can be incorporated into analyses once material culture is acknowledged to be contingent on unstable and changing social situations and mental operations. Such a position transforms our concept of objects making them into dynamic and changing material supports of ideas and memories that have taken shape within specific social fields. O'Hanlon (2001: 216), summarizing the implications of similar views in recent studies of Papuan material culture, convincingly pleas for the recognition of indigenous agency and its interplay with different colonial orders in the creation of collections. These approaches collapse typological distinctions like those made by Stewart and Pearce and potentially undermines the legitimacy of the presuppositions on which museums and other collecting institutions are based. For Benjamin, as previously commented, the souvenir and the systematic collection are equally spurious products predicated on different but equally inauthentic experiences preserved and articulated through intentional memory. Collecting involves heterdoxical fields of social and personal relations that are differentiated by culture, class, gender and age. These fields are socially, politically and judicially constrained, but operate and develop through the mediation of individuals. The 19th century field of childhood collecting encouraged in 19th century Europe by school and church and guided by boys organizations and published field guides, is different from the field Pearce and Belk uncovered in late 20th century Britain and the USA where up to one third of the adult population claimed to be engaged in collecting activity. Institutional collecting is determined by history, politics and prosperity and unfolds in a different, though sometimes related field to elite collecting.

The turn in material culture studies for which we are arguing, has of course, already began but its holistic implications for the wider field of the history of collections, material and visual culture studies and museology itself, have hardly began to be explored. Appadurai and Kopytoff's elicitation of the various biographies that objects assume and shed; Nicholas Thomas'

explication of the changing values, significations and uses to which objects are put in inter-oceanic exchanges; Hommis Bhaba's concept of the role of interstitial cultural spaces in creating, re-signifying and rearticulating categories and object meanings implicated in social encounters and the work of Alfred Gell, Mike Rowlands, Chris Tilley, Mike O'Hanlon, Chris Gosden and Danny Miller have all began to lay the ground for a more integrated discipline of material culture and, within it, a more sophisticated appreciation of the role and significance of collectors. The new material culture study, embedded in a sustained theoreticisation of practice, brings with it the promise of a new collections history in which typologies are replaced by particular subjectively grounded studies in which the role of memorialization replaces the simpler semiotic understanding of material representations and communications, and objects and collections are seen as encoding societal contingencies in sculpting institutional and individual biographies; "collector", according to Bann "is not merely an attribute of the self but also, in a real sense, the model through which the unity of the self is, progressively and retrospectively, achieved... To collect is to consolidate identity, through a retrospective specification of fragments, which is also the discursive articulation of those fragments as part of a personal narrative" (Bann 1994: 78). Objects can trigger complex chains of memories with extraordinary lucidity and, as we have seen with Northwest Coast artists and curators, sometimes a sense of euphoria, that reframes the past in the conditions of the moment. Objects can disrupt linear temporality, "telescoping the past through the present", "The object focuses knowledge. Employing the collected material telescopically, the collector sees through the object into its whole past, its origin and manufacture, its uses, its value across time" (Leslie 1999: 69), and, we would add, his own relationship and articulation of and with it.

Collectors cannot adequately be understood through conventional historical biographies like those of Wilson (1984) on Franks, Lewis Wilmarth (1952) on Horace Walpole, Macgregor et al (1994) on Sloane, or Duveen on Duveen (1957), no more so than they can be made intelligible only through the description and histories of acquisitions. As Fabian (2000), among others, has provocatively suggested, ethnographic collecting, far from being conducted according to strict scientific protocols often took place under 'ecstatic' conditions, and was determined by political, economic and military protocols. O'Hanlon (2001) supports his general position by drawing attention to the complexity of the field and its attendant social and cultural relations in which colonial collections were made. "Classification precedes collection; ... the plenitude of taxonomy opens up the space for collectibles to be identified, but at the same time the plenitude of that which is to be collected hastens the need to classify" according to Elsner and Cardinal (1994: 1-2). In the majority of cases, collections, far from being assembled by strict scientific criteria, were subject to caprice, individual disposition and changing tastes and fashions which seriously disrupts the empirical equation which posits that the activity of collecting led to the formulation of scientific hypothesis, that led in turn to dissemination and eventually the growth of markets in like artifacts to supply the examples museums needed to mount such series. Fur-

thermore, the exploration from which collections of objects and knowledge were derived, was itself composed of "a set of cultural practices which involve the mobilization of people, and resources, especially equipment, publicity and authority" (Driver 2001: 2). As Fabian (2000), O'Hanlon (2001) and Driver (2001) have explicitly identified there exist specific cultures of collecting in which the organization and equipment required by expeditionary fieldwork, the division between the field and the study, the organization of professional societies and public receptions and professional induction, all influenced the activity, target and interpretation of collecting. In the contemporary world, this should also include the depersonalized world of collecting via the online auction houses. These have brought radical changes to the meaning individuals attribute objects, even to the extent that, acquisition under conditions that excludes the operation of involuntary memory, may encourage the objective or formal qualities of objects to gain a phantasmagoric domination over their personal significations. As one of the Canadian collectors interviewed by Connor commented regarding the advent of ebay and market organization: "Its too much like a business. I like it here where you can hang out with other freaks like yourself so you don't feel so alone" (2007: 6). At a time when collecting has become so popular and exerts powerful market demands, the collected itself may be shedding its aura and reverting to a simple commodity.

Earlier work, particularly Stephen Bann's study (1994) of the 17th century Kentish collector John Bargrave, emphasises the role of objects in the conscious fashioning and refashioning of the 'self'.

> "... each object that he collected was intensely semiophoric; it was a sign bearing a message" (11).

For Bann

> "... his subjective identity is formed in the process of mastering not the events themselves but, instead, their interpretation. In becoming a traveler, in becoming a collector, he creates the material conditions for that communication of that interpretation; a fragile perishable legacy that is at the same time a mass of indices bearing witness to the concrete circumstances of his everyday life" (1994: 21).

More recently Kastner (2003) and Barnett (2003) in Dilworth have followed this approach in their studies of Edward Ayer's North American Indian collection and Christian Sanderson's collection of historical relics. Collections are built on individual histories; histories that mediate the self and its specific historical and cultural milieu, imputing existence meaning at the same time as the self gains self awareness. The collector's zeal, nurtured by unrequited desire, whether stimulated by new or existent markets, is fundamentally an affirmation of a particular self. It mediates particular social, cultural and historical situations, but even when stretching to en-

compass the exotic, it affirms the conditions of the social values, tastes and associations to which it aspires. The implications of Benjamin's contention that collections are "... but a disorder to which habit has accumulated itself to such an extent it can be seen as an order", are profound for the study of material culture, the fashioning of selfhood, and the very conceptualization of collections themselves whose definition must be redrawn not only to include the tangible but the intangible which lies at their core.

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