

## CHAPTER TWO

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLLECTING



### ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Not every assemblage of rare and valuable objects constitutes a collection. For instance, during the Middle Ages in Europe, many treasure hoards acted as stores of wealth and were melted down, broken up, or sold as the need arose (Alsop 1982; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Wittlin 1970). Neither shall I be particularly concerned with royal or temple collections during periods when general poverty and the flow of treasured objects from the people to the crown or the church effectively precluded the people from collecting. The first widespread collecting outside of these contexts appears to have been in ancient Greece. In a pattern typical elsewhere as well, Athenian sumptuary laws were a harbinger of both consumer culture and popular collecting. Only after Greek unification by the Macedonian Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC and the subsequent introduction of foreign objects and influences did collecting become a popular habit in Greece. Rigby and Rigby's (1944) thorough research suggests that along with "far more luxurious" living, Hellenistic Greeks' collecting enthusiasm changed the form of Greek art from the public frescos and symbolic statues of gods, typical of earlier eras, to secular paintings (on wood) suitable for the home. Realism also came into fashion in both painting and sculptures and portraiture became common. Artists who formerly toiled as mere craftsmen or laborers became celebrities:

Fashion held the reins, and – ah, familiar bone of contention! – a work of art signed with a famous name could command a higher price than an anonymous piece of equal quality. The minor arts also were increasing in popularity. People now began to collect engraved gems, fine pottery and embroidered textiles; and when a new hobby was born – collecting or copying the letters of famous men – we find our first Greek autograph hound.

(Rigby and Rigby 1944, p. 118)

Also newly in vogue as collectibles in Hellenistic Greece were rediscovered early Greek statuary and newly imported luxuries from the East, especially Persia (Taylor 1948). Oriental carpets, wall hangings, and sumptuous furniture joined paintings and statues in private homes. The city of Sicyon

became the central location for artists and art dealers. All of this was made possible by the new wealth of the era:

the amount of gold and silver that poured into Greece was phenomenal. No comparable influx of precious metals has ever been seen except in the sixteenth century when American and Indian gold poured into Spain. The adventurers brought home with them large fortunes and the traders and purveyors of the army increased their own already considerable wealth.

(Taylor 1948, p. 15)

It was the newly wealthy traders who were most prominent among the new collectors.

In ancient Rome, as in ancient Greece, sumptuary laws were a precursor to the rise of popular collecting. Roman plunder from Greece and elsewhere began to flow into Rome when Marcellus brought cartloads of cult images, temple dedications, and other artwork from the Second Punic War with Syracuse in 212 BC (Alsop 1982). He gave all except an astronomical globe to the Temples of Honor and Virtue on the Appian Way. Since the Romans worshipped the same gods as the Greeks this protection of the sacred was even guaranteed in advance by Roman generals (Taylor 1948). But such religiously oriented public collecting eventually gave way, first to treatment of temple plunder as public wealth and then to private collecting. Rigby and Rigby (1944) place the critical juncture in 133 BC when Attalus III willed his art-rich kingdom of Pergamum to the Romans. As Romans began migrating there, they acquired an appreciation of Greek art, just as the Greeks had been stimulated earlier by the novelty of Asiatic art. Roman rulers were the first collectors, but by the middle eighties BC Sulla is credited with becoming the first great private collector (Rigby and Rigby 1944). By the time of the start of the Roman empire (27 BC), Rigby and Rigby (1944) observe, "everyone who could possibly manage to do so was collecting something" (p. 128). Various concentrations of dealers emerged in Rome to capitalize on this collecting frenzy, with the most famous being the art dealers, booksellers, and antique dealers of the Villa Publica. So too did forgery emerge and the tendency to sign minor objects with a famous name like Praxiteles (Rheims 1961). The artist's signature is the equivalent of a consumer-product's brand name, and forged artwork is equivalent to the counterfeit product or currency; within a system based on the object's aura and authenticity it is less than the real thing – a false idol. Sicyon became a center for defrauding the gullible as Roman visitors were shown the clothing of Odysseus there and were likely to return to Rome with silver cups that had belonged to Achilles (von Holst 1967). It was an era of luxury, extravagance, snobbery, envy, and vanity, which lasted until the fourth century AD.

Among the objects collected, in addition to sculptures and paintings,



were Corinthian bronze statues and vessels, bronze tripod tables, silverware, ceramics, carpets, tapestries, embroideries, books, jewelry, gems, and fine furniture. Those who could not afford to collect original art collected copies as well as coins, fossils, and natural curiosities such as insects trapped in amber (Rigby and Rigby 1944). Fads and fashions in collecting came and went, as did unscrupulous collector-thieves like Gaius Verres and boastful nouveau-riche collectors like Trimalchio in Petronius's *Satyricon*. Petronius himself was a collector of bowls and drinking cups. Both Verres and Petronius reportedly met their deaths because of their collections and died in a similar manner. When Verres was asked by Mark Antony to give him some of his Corinthian bronzes, he refused despite knowing the penalty. Poison was soon sent to him in Antony's most valuable murrhine cup. Verres drank the poison and promptly smashed the cup to bits (Taylor 1948). Similarly, when Nero wanted Petronius's valuable murrhine bowl, Petronius drank the hemlock Nero sent from the murrhine and similarly dashed it on the floor (Rigby and Rigby 1944). The passions elicited by these objects suggest that collecting can stimulate extreme degrees of acquisitiveness, covetousness, and possessiveness. Both the character and timing of Roman collecting affirm a clear link to consuming tendencies in the several senses of this term.

## EDO JAPAN AND MING CHINA

While the spread of collecting in Japan and China tends to coincide with periods of economic growth by either internal or international trade and roughly parallels the spread of collecting in Europe, many of the objects collected lack parallels in ancient Greece and Rome or in the collections of Europe and North America. Unique objects include tea sets, funerary bronzes used in ancestor ceremonies, incense burners, calligraphy (which shares more in common with Islam where representational paintings were banned as sacrilege), zithers, ink stones, lacquer furniture, textiles, rare woods, kosodes (predecessors of kimonos – see Dalby 1993), scroll paintings, landscape rocks, and “amateur” (unpaid patronage) paintings, which were all prized by collectors. Some collectibles were similar to those of the West, however, including other kinds of paintings, books, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, weapons, armor, and decorative objects of rare metals and precious stones.

As Rigby and Rigby (1944, pp. 145–146) specify, royal collecting spread from China to Japan as early as the first century AD, but it was not until the rise of a wealthy bourgeoisie under the Tokugawa Shogunate in the Edo era (1603–1868) that collecting spread beyond royalty, aristocrats, and the temples. Chinese objects as well as some Korean objects were also popular in Japan (e.g., Hayashiya and Trubner 1977). Not only art objects, but also

social traditions were influenced by China during this period, and all educated men were expected to paint, do calligraphy, perform music, and write poetry (Guth 1989), paralleling the literati tradition in China. The artwork, ceramics, utensils, and etiquette of the tea ceremony were also matters of great social importance, and those who could afford it had a tea master to help them learn the ceremony and select the proper art and implements. So valued were the proper works of art for the ceremony that they could be used as rewards, tributes, and even as collateral for loans should crops fail (Guth 1989). Chinese paintings from the Song and Yuan dynasties, especially those with a celebrated provenance, were especially prized. Certain tea masters also encouraged the use of amateur paintings made by Japanese Zen monks and scrolls with calligraphy rather than painting. Tea masters also helped popularize the collection of certain painting themes and certain poetry verses and themes (Guth 1989). Although members of the merchant class were theoretically beneath members of the artisan, farmer, and warrior classes, newly wealthy merchants became prominent patrons of lacquerers who produced the lacquer furnishings so important in signaling wealth and power. Although owning such works was proscribed by sumptuary laws, enforcement of these laws was impractical and would have involved constant inspections of every household (Yonemura 1989). Wearable art in the form of kosodes, especially for women, became another significant collection used in displaying wealth. For a time both males and females would change clothing several times during a day-long kabuki performance in order to display their collections to maximum advantage (Gluckman and Taked 1992). These garments replaced the European dress, including velvet hats and crucifixes, that had been adopted by all classes of Japanese men after contact with Europeans just prior to the Edo period (Gluckman 1992). In Europe clothing would not be treated as collectible, but in Japan it is clear that the status of kosodes as valuable wearable art and calligraphy placed them in a special category of collectibles. Relatively ineffective sumptuary laws still applied to such garments, but the Edo period was nevertheless one of unrestrained luxury and indulgence. Besides collecting tendencies, this luxury was also evident in the many entertainments of theater, travel (relying on published travel guides), and legal brothels in Tokugawa Japan. Plays of the day addressed these luxurious changes and often dealt with themes such as the delights and dangers of hedonistic pleasures and the conflict between desires and traditional obligations (Hauser 1992).

In China the comparable period of economic boom and the spread of collections was the late Ming period of roughly 1550 to 1650. There had been some earlier short-lived expansions of collecting, as with the growth of luxury and ostentatious consumption during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220; Powers 1986), when merchants and pilgrims brought back relics from India during the T'ang dynasty (618–907; Rigby and Rigby 1944), and during the economic growth and amateur archeological unearthing of ancient



bronzes and other antiquities during the Song dynasty (960–1279; Rawson 1993). But it was during the late Ming that the democratization of collecting (through the open meritocracy applied to government positions as well as through rising merchant wealth) became most widespread and most similar to European collecting during the same period (Clunas 1991a, 1991b). Sumptuary laws of the period were at least as comprehensive as those in Japan and were equally unenforceable. As is true elsewhere, art connoisseurship was a means to claim status and the nouveaux riches were those who tried hardest to gain such knowledge (Clunas 1991b). As pointed out earlier, in China they were helped by guide books such as the *Treatise on Superfluous Things*. The potential effectiveness of mastering this knowledge is suggested by the important collections of paintings and calligraphy by Xiang Yuangian, an owner of a chain of pawnshops during the sixteenth century, and his subsequent acceptance by traditional landowning aristocrats (Clunas 1991a, pp. 15–16). It was an era of individuality and romanticism that Watt (1987) characterizes as embracing three principles: the need to escape the everyday world, the search for true and unadorned art, and the elevation of the concept of “interesting” as an artistic ideal (pp. 3–4). Further parallels to the principles that Kenseth (1991a) found to underlie the European *Wunderkammer* are seen in some of the elements suggested as desirable in antiquities during the late Ming period: finely printed books, strange rocks, imported spices of a subtle kind, rare and beautiful foreign treasures, rare and delicious food from overseas, and mysterious colored pottery (Li 1987a, pp. 15–16). Wen Zhenheng’s *Treatise on Superfluous Things* also suggested that women who would be social climbers keep parrots “taught short poems and harmonious phrases,” fish, golden pheasants, peacocks, and turkeys (Clunas 1991a, pp. 41–42). With the increased demand for art treasures, authenticity grew to be more of a concern. A poem by Shao Changheng (1637–1704) called “Bogus Antiques” describes some of the methods of faking various collectibles found in the antique stores:

Previously, fakes were mixed with the genuine;  
Now it has become cleverer in recent years . . .  
Calligraphy by Su [shi] and Huang [Tingjian] were copied by filling  
out the shapes delineated with double outlines (kuotian).  
Tang and Song stelae are ground and cleaned.  
Sutra papers are made to look old by smoking,  
Xuanhe collection is documented by “imperial seals.”  
The bigger the name, the easier the sale . . .  
People in high places are so proud of their connoisseurship,  
They will keep on buying with all the money they have.  
How many authentic antiques can there be?  
No wonder the market is filled with forgeries.

(quoted in Ho 1987, p. 31)

Clunas (1991b) notes that forgers put very little effort into producing good imitations of artwork and much effort and skill into producing good seals and inscriptions, since these were precisely the sorts of reassurances sought by *nouveau-riche* purchasers. The existence of these seals and inscriptions from prior owners and the artist is almost totally absent in Europe with the exception of books. By the late Ming period most works of art were signed by the artist, but these too were frequently forged. Fakes were so common according to one late sixteenth-century estimate that only one of ten paintings owned by collectors was genuine (Clunas 1991a, p. 114). Because the life of the *litterati* was based on producing art to present as gifts and was not focused on material gain, they might seem to have been above the clamor for collectibles. This was not the case however. As Li (1987b) points out, the *litterati* required considerable wealth to pursue the simple life, in order to create their collections of books, paintings, calligraphy, and the other objects that filled their studios. As a result, many of these scholars' collections were more impressive than those of the *nouveaux riches*.

## MEDIEVAL EUROPE

During the Middle Ages in Europe, collecting outside of royal treasure chambers was largely confined to the Church. As Braudel (1973) describes it, even a well-off European peasant's material belongings before the eighteenth century consisted of little more than cooking equipment, a few work tools, simple bedding, a few old clothes, and perhaps a bench, stool, table, and chest. And "A nobleman who possessed three leathern garments qualified as a rich man. A bed was a luxury. How then could one bother with such pleasant *divertissements* as books or antiques?" (Rigby and Rigby 1944, p. 137). The one active area of collecting was the pursuit of relics – bits and bones of saints and holy artifacts – by churches (Mackay 1932; Sumption 1975). Not only was the possession of relics a source of prestige and power for local churches that came to own them, they provided a source of hope in miracles for the masses. Through contagious magic such relics, even though they might consist only of a toenail, a piece of wood from the true cross, or a drop of martyr's blood, were believed to have the power of a saint – someone who was a special friend of God (Geary 1986). Since each church needed relics for its altar, the demand for relics soon outstripped supply. As a result a lucrative market in fraudulent relics arose as well as a practice of theft of relics from other locales (Burns 1982; Muensterberger 1994). Mackay (1932, p. 696) notes that the number of pieces of the true cross in circulation could have built a cathedral. The ultimate theft, notes Geary (1986), was the pillage of Constantinople's relics during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. But although a few relics found their way into private hands, the Middle Ages saw little of either consumer



culture or private collecting. All this changed dramatically with the waning of the Middle Ages.

Important collectors during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance included Duke Jean de Berry and the Medici. De Berry was the son of the King Jean le Bon of France who died in 1364 when the younger Jean was 24. As with many prominent collectors the death of his father (and later of his own sons) seems to have been an impetus to the collecting of Jean and his brothers. Jean de Berry is a significant figure in the history of collecting because he was among the first to collect many of the types of objects that became common in Europe in *Wunderkammern* and related curio cabinets two centuries later (Muensterberger 1994). We know this because his collection is well inventoried. Besides paintings and sculptures, among the objects that de Berry collected were precious stones, objects made of precious metals, illuminated manuscripts, cameos, coins, medals, games, perfumes, animals, vases, tapestries, wall hangings, embroideries, religious relics, crucifixes, and footwarmers (Bazin 1967; Meiss 1969). His collection is significant also because it marks the transition from the medieval treasury to objects collected solely for their own sake with no thought to their acting as a store of value. The Duke's passion for collecting was contagious and a number of other nobles of late-fourteenth-century France also became collectors as the fashion spread (Chastel 1963).

Another prominent part in the transition from medieval treasure chambers was played by the Florentine commercial family of the Medici. They were the first of the "princes of commerce" thanks to the banking empire developed by Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464). The Medici were not alone in collecting in Italy during the time of Cosimo, but they were the clear leaders, imitated to varying degrees by other princes of commerce as well as popes. The oldest remaining inventories of the Medici collections were drawn up by Cosimo's son Piero in 1456 and 1463. These inventories omit the paintings and sculptures commissioned by Cosimo because they were considered part of the impressive decor of the Medici palace rather than a collection. The inventories instead listed silver and gold medals, cameos, musical instruments, Cordovan leathers, Byzantine icons, and Flemish tapestries. Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo de' Medici was not a patron of living artists but dealt exclusively in historical paintings (Materer 1988). This was an important step toward making art a commodity, even though there was not yet an art dealer in Florence. By the time Lorenzo ("the Magnificent") died in 1492, the Medici collection had grown considerably and the inventory conducted listed paintings and sculptures, sometimes noting the artist. But the paintings were still considered less significant than the jewels, gems, books, intaglios, and such oddities as a "unicorn" horn (Bazin 1967). Two years later much of this collection was dispersed as the Medici fled from the advancing French army. While it is not a new pattern in the history of collecting, the Medici, and Piero in particular, made clear that the fascina-

tion of the objects collected included their acting as emblems of power and status, providing magical protection in the case of certain objects, and providing sensual delight (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Notably, the medieval justification of collections as being testimony to the glory of God was diminishing in favor of a more secular ethos of pleasure.

The examples of Jean de Berry and the Medici should not imply that collecting in this period was the sole province of the nobility, the Church, and merchant princes. The bourgeoisie were also becoming collectors. An illustration is the collection of the Frenchman Jacques Duchie in about 1430. In one room of his town house in Paris were paintings as well as instructive scriptures on the walls. One room contained musical instruments while another contained a collection of games. Rare furs were stored in another room, while yet other rooms contained fabrics, rugs, metalwork, weapons and suits of armor (Bazin 1967). While the concept of cabinets of curiosity did not yet exist, Duchie's collections, like those of Jean de Berry, are a part of the growing interest in what Mullaney (1983) called "strange things, gross terms, [and] curious customs." In the case of high art, the demise of the Medici not only put much of their collections onto the market, it also robbed the patronage system of some of its greatest patrons and provided artists with a new incentive to produce "ready-made" art for the market of newly rich collectors (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). A number of art dealers, antiquarians, and auction houses sprang up also determined to seize the resulting opportunity and speculators began to buy for investment purposes (Bazin 1967). Another impetus to collecting was the unearthing of ancient Rome between 1450 and 1550 (Hogden 1964). One collector in 1507 observed, "The moment an object is dug up, a host of buyers miraculously appears. They give eight or ten ducats for rusty medallions which they resell later for twenty-five or thirty" (quoted in Bazin 1967, p. 52). An art market had existed for some time in Italy and Flanders with workshops producing small inventories of standardized works such as Virgins and Child and Crucifixions for amateurs and other chance customers (Chastel 1963). But in the period that followed the Medici, artists gained a new independence and patronage was replaced by the rise of art as a commodity. In addition a new type of collector consisting of professionals including doctors, lawyers, and scholars emerged. The result was a huge swell of collecting activity in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, an age of collecting and an age of curiosity (Pomian 1990).

### SIXTEENTH- AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE: COLLECTING THE WORLD

The Renaissance interest in amassing the world in a cabinet of curiosity was spurred as well by discoveries of foreign lands, European population growth following the plague, new inventions such as the clock and the



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printing press, and the rise of capitalism (Major 1970). It was a period of substantial economic growth and rising consumer expectations. Mullaney (1983) cites a cabinet established in Vienna in 1550 as the first, but there were clearly forerunners. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the primary periods in which the thousands of European wonder cabinets emerged, most commonly referred to with the German conjunctions for cabinets of wonder and art, *Wunderkammern* and *Kunstkammern*. The excitement of finding new things in the world during the age of discovery in Europe produced not only explosions of consumer culture and fashions, but explosions of interest in collecting and displaying wondrous objects (Mason 1994). As Pomian (1990, p. 53) insightfully interprets them, these collections made visible the growing desire or passion for things. Based on the evidence of the things acquired for *Wunderkammern*, this desire was imaginative and nearly boundless. For instance a visitor detailed the partial contents of the cabinet of the London gentleman and adventurer Walter Cope at the end of the sixteenth century as including:

an African charm made of teeth, a felt cloak from Arabia, and shoes from many strange lands. An Indian stone axe, "like a thunderbolt." A Stringed instrument with but one string. The twisted horn of a bull seal. An embalmed child or *Mumia*. The bauble and bells of Henry VIII's fool. A unicorn's tail. Inscribed paper made of bark, and an artful Chinese box. A flying rhinoceros (unremarked), a remora (explicated at some length), and flies of a kind that "glow at night in Virginia instead of lights, since there is often no day there for over a month." There are the Queen of England's seal, a number of crowns made of claws, a Madonna made of Indian feathers, an Indian charm made of monkey teeth. A mirror, which "both reflects and multiplies objects," A sea-halcyon's nest. A sea mouse (*mus marinus*), reed pipes like those played by Pan, a long narrow Indian canoe, with oars and siding planks, hanging from the ceiling.

(Mullaney 1983, p. 40)

As Schnapper (1986) notes, there was no time-lag between the construction of cabinets by sovereigns and by the bourgeoisie. Besides individual collections, apothecaries and medical men sometimes developed cabinets to attract a curious public (George 1985). Romeo describes one such apothecary collection in *Romeo and Juliet*:

I do remember an apothecary,  
And hereabouts he dwells, which late I noted . . .  
And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,  
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins  
Of ill-fitted fishes; and about his shelves  
A beggarly account of empty boxes,

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Green earthen pots, bladders, and musty seeds,  
Remnants of packthread, and old cakes of roses,  
Were thinly scatter'd to make up a show.

(Act V, Scene 1)

Like the *trompe-l'oeil* paintings popular in the same period, the cabinets of curiosities emphasized the marvel and wonder of objects. Renaissance humanists, who prompted the initial interest in cabinets of curiosities, also began to pursue fantasy in gardens, architecture, art, and literature (Kaufmann 1993). It was an age of wonder. Were an image to be selected to illustrate Stevenson's short poem which opened Chapter One, it would be difficult to find anything more appropriate than one of the *trompe-l'oeil* paintings or one of the etchings, engravings, or woodcuts depicting the marvels of the wonder cabinet. They are all concerned with "wonderful things." What is more, the cabinets sometimes sought to surprise the viewer even more by arranging the objects in such a way as to heighten the contrasts between them:

Early collectors arranged their objects so as to create surprising or striking contrasts. Thus, in this room [the reconstructed *Wunderkammer* of the catalogue quoted], very large items are juxtaposed with the very small – an ostrich egg and the egg of a hummingbird is one instance, a "giant's" (dinosaur's) bone and the bone of a bat is another.

(Kenseth 1991b, p. 249)

Similarly in the masquerades that soon became popular in France and England, there was an attempt to produce surprise through wearing costumes that contrasted as sharply as possible with the wearer's normal identity:

Dukes did not disguise themselves as marquises, or footmen as apprentices. At the moment of unmasking (if and when it came), one's disguise, seen in relation to one's real identity was to excite the onlooker by its absolute impropriety. The conceptual gap separating true and false was ideally an abyss.

(Castle 1986, p. 75)

Further, improbable pairings among masked couples were highly regarded in the masquerades: a "nun" and a "heathen god," a "lion" and a "Shepherdess," or "Devil" and a "Quaker." As with the *Wunderkammern*, the intent in such surprises was to produce a pleasurable state of amusement and delight through the exaggerated contrast. Zoos, botanical gardens, extravagant fountains of dancing waters, exotic pets, "monsters," dwarfs, and midgets were other sources of delight exploited in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe (George 1985; Hunt 1985; Tuan 1984; see also Connell 1974; Davies 1991; Foucault 1988). These fascinations anticipate the



world's fairs of a subsequent era. There are also conspicuous collections (Mukerji 1993). In each case, the main sources of pleasure were the wonder produced by the Other in contrast to the ascendent European self.

This sense of marvelous contrast and broad eclecticism was greatest in the earlier *Wunderkammern*. While novelty was the impetus to early Renaissance collecting and the stimulation of marvel was its goal, collecting can also be a method of systematically assembling, ordering, and symbolically controlling the chaos that novelty threatens to create. The exhilarating sense of discovery and encyclopedic knowledge gave way first to greater classification and specialization in these cabinets. While Mullaney (1983) maintains that "No system determines the organization of objects on display or separates one variety of the marvelous from another" (p. 42), this was not true of even the earliest cabinets. Eye-pleasing symmetry of display and distinctions between broad categories of collectibles were present from the start (Hodgen 1964; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Laurencich-Minelli 1985; Olmi 1985). The earliest and most basic classification was in assembling both *naturalia*, such as minerals, stuffed animals, plants, ethnographic artifacts, and fossils, and *artificialia*, with a special fondness for paintings, weapons, scientific instruments, and mechanical marvels such as clocks and automata. Religious objects and relics were often a third type of marvelous object included in the cabinets. Similarly, paintings of marvels as in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) often acted as *memento mori* or vanity paintings by including emblems of life's brevity such as the elongated skull in the foreground of this painting (Berger *et al.* 1972). The religious hold on life did not immediately disappear with the turn to secular marvels. Later collections of *naturalia* and *artificialia* came to be displayed separately in rooms or showcases of their own. Eventually classifications became more detailed and the more specialized cabinets emerged. Ethnographic collections, art collections, natural history collections, geological collections, and others also became separate specialties, paralleling the disciplinary divisions of the arts and sciences. The full impact of this new classification of the world came in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which is when Foucault (1970) places the shift from attempting to view the world as an interrelated whole to attempting to view the world in terms of classifications and discriminations. This new world view he labels the Classical episteme:

The Classical age gives history a quite different meaning: that of undertaking a meticulous examination of things themselves for the first time, and then transcribing what it has gathered in smooth, neutralized, and faithful words. It is understandable that the first form of history constituted in this period of "purification" should have been the history of nature. For its construction requires only words applied without intermediary, to things themselves. The documents of this

new history are not other words, texts or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens; the locus of this history is a non-temporal rectangle in which, stripped of all commentary, of all enveloping language, creatures present themselves one beside another, their surfaces volatile, grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analyzed, and bearers of nothing but their own individual names. It is often said that the establishment of botanical gardens and zoological collections expressed a new curiosity about exotic plants and animals. In fact, these had already claimed men's attention for a long while. What had changed was the space in which it was possible to see them and from which it was possible to describe them. To the Renaissance, the strangeness of animals was a spectacle: it was featured in fairs, in tournaments, in fictitious or real combats, in reconstitutions of legends in which the bestiary displayed its ageless fables. The natural history room and the garden, as created in the Classical period, replace the circular procession of the "show" with the arrangement of things in a "table". What came surreptitiously into being between the age of the theater and that of the catalogue was not the desire for knowledge, but a new way of connecting things both to the eye and to discourse. A new way of making history.

(Foucault 1970, p. 131)

Thus the demise of interest in the encyclopedic collecting in *Wunderkammern* at the end of the seventeenth century is related to a new way of viewing the world. There is no place for marvels in the Classical episteme.

The tremendous popularity of *Wunderkammern* and related cabinets during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does not mean that all collectors subscribed to the principles of encyclopedic collecting of the entire world, whether *naturalia*, *artificialia*, or supernatural. The cabinets were largely a Protestant Reformation phenomena, emphasizing as they did the secular wonders of the world, albeit initially tempered with reminders of religious miracles as well. In the Roman Catholic world the opposite emphasis predominated. Olmi (1985) notes that in Rome encyclopedic collections were in the minority. Of 150 Roman collections inventoried in 1664, over 90 percent excluded *naturalia*, preferring to restrict themselves to such *objets d'art* as paintings, antiques, medals, and cameos. Other collectors who could not afford such artwork, restricted their collections to such objects as peacock feathers, insects, and pressed flowers and plants (Kaufmann 1993). Religious pilgrims satisfied the collecting fervor of the times with souvenir pilgrimage badges, rubbings, and mementos of the pilgrimage sites including dirt, holy water, holy oils, stones, plants, and small pieces of shrines. As with the miraculous relics present in many *Wunderkammern*, contagious magic had not entirely disappeared, even



though by the seventeenth century it was on the wane as science came to the fore through the phenomenon Max Weber called *die Entzauberung der Welt* or the disenchantment of the world (Berman 1981, p. 57). The intense desire and passion that prompted collections gave way to a more distanced cognitive perspective. As one critic, Bernard Lamy, noted in 1684, "When reason is not in control, and when one is carried away by curiosity, in other words a mad desire for knowledge, it is impossible to study in an orderly fashion" (quoted in Pomian 1990, p. 63).

The fashion for *Wunderkammern* declined with the rise of Cartesian science and the divorce of science from art. The cabinets were part of a liminal period (Turner 1969), betwixt and between the former control of passion by religion and its subsequent control by science (Pomian 1990, p. 77) as well as exploitation by commerce. However, the human fascination with marvel and fantasy and with marvelous and fantastic objects has not disappeared. Kenseth concludes:

By the end of the seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities and *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* had lost much of their attractiveness, but they never fell out of favor completely. They continued far into the eighteenth century, especially in the Nordic countries and Russia, and had a revival as places of study in the early college and university museums of America. Today, however the encyclopedic museum is a rarity, a relic of the past reflecting a world view and an approach to learning that no longer exist. But this is not to say that the collecting of *mervaviglie* [marvels] therefore has vanished. People the world over still collect exceptional things. They marvel at these possessions, learn from them, and like the collectors of the past, display them with pride.

(Kenseth 1991c, p. 98)

As continues to happen with collections and collecting, fads and fashions may shape the content of collections and the rules governing what constitutes accepted collecting practice. But the same acquisitive and possessive motivations and the same feelings of delight with objects that are, for the collector and others of like mind, fantastic, remain. Not only as collectors, but as consumers we continue to delight in the miniature and the gigantic, the fantastic, and the spectacular. It is not so true that magic disappeared with *die Entzauberung der Welt*, as it is that the locus of this magic changed, even if our theories fail to recognize it:

Existing theory in economics, economic psychology, and social psychology blinds us to the mystery, beauty, and power of our possessions. In order to understand what our possessions mean, it is necessary to recognize, reestablish, and reclaim this magic. We more often than not wear magic clothes, jewels, and perfumes. We drive magic

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cars. We reside in magic places and make pilgrimages to even more magical places. We eat magic foods, own magic pets, and envelop ourselves in the magic of films, television, and books. We court magic in a plethora of material loci that cumulatively compel us to conclude that the rational possessor is a myth that can no longer be sustained. It fails because it denies the inescapable and essential mysteriousness of our existence.

(Belk 1991a, pp. 17–18)

The continued popularity of collecting an increasingly varied array of things since the *Wunderkammern* offers strong support for this thesis.

## EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES: COLLECTING MANIA

### The Netherlands

While the *Wunderkammern* represent an expansion of collecting from nobility to the bourgeoisie, the number of owners of cabinets was certainly no more than a few thousand. Other collectors of less attention-getting materials were more numerous, but still limited. When Belgian engraver and collector Hubert Goltzius toured Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and France seeking other collectors of antiquities, he found 968 such collectors between 1584 and 1586 (Pomian 1990, p. 35). They included royalty, clergy, doctors, lawyers, scholars, poets, officers, and artists. Merchants were not mentioned, but were prominent collectors of art in seventeenth-century Netherlands (Alpers 1983). This was the “Golden Age” of the Netherlands. Still largely excluded from collecting were the middle classes which emerged with the growth of the European economy and the spread of education (Pomian 1990, p. 41). An exception to the lack of middle-class collectors was also found in the Netherlands where collecting tulip bulbs in the early seventeenth century affected a broad range of people. Whether it is called a case of “the collecting bug” (Muensterberger 1994), “tulipomania” (Mackay 1932; Posthumous 1929), or “an addiction” (Schama 1987), the passion for possessing rare tulip varieties brought from Turkey affected everyone from shopkeepers to aristocrats. Prices escalated to fantastic heights and fortunes were made and lost in tulips. One farmer traded for a single bulb: “two *last* of wheat and four of rye, four fat oxen, eight pigs, a dozen sheep, two oxheads of wine, four tons of butter, a thousand pounds of cheese, a bed, some clothing, and a silver beaker” (Schama 1987, p. 358). In 1637 the state intervened to control prices and the craze subsided, but the several years of intense collecting of this humble consumer good demonstrates that avid collecting is a shared passion and that it transcends utilitarian concerns.



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Another Dutch collecting passion that reached the middle-class masses in the seventeenth century was the collecting of engravings, etchings, and even oil paintings (Mukerji 1983). Foreign travelers were surprised by this and the Englishman John Evelyn commented in 1641 that “pictures are very common here, there being scarce an ordinary tradesman whose house is not decorated with them” (quoted in Schama 1987, p. 318). Books were another broadly collected consumer good in the late-seventeenth-century Netherlands (Mukerji 1983). As Muensterberger observes, these trends were very much a part of the consumer culture developing among the Dutch at this time:

There is little question that the material success achieved by the Dutch during this dynamic period had placed an undue emphasis on both possessions and possessiveness. After years of deprivation and chronic anxiety, a new mood had arisen out of the echoes of the past and the empirical evidence of plenty.

(Muensterberger 1994, p. 223)

It is no accident that during the Netherlands’ Golden Age, the Dutch economy, art scene, consumerism, and collecting all escalated together. Rembrandt, for example, was not only a celebrated artist in seventeenth-century Holland, but also an avid collector (Muensterberger 1994) and a man caught up in the “notorious living” of indulgent consumption (Schama 1987). Since the Netherlands was the economic center of Europe in the seventeenth century, it was the first country to experience socially broadening collecting trends that affected other European countries more slowly.

### France

The Netherlands’ dominance of the economic as well as fine-art worlds is symbolized by Amsterdam’s remaining the main auction center of Europe until the early eighteenth century when the Parisian auction houses of Hôtel Bullion and Hôtel d’Alligre and the townhouse of the artist-dealer Lebrun began to dominate. This dominance was lost for half a century when French economic conditions and the French Revolution caused the art-auction scene to shift to England with the opening of Sotheby’s, Christie’s, and Phillips (Bazin 1967). By the mid-nineteenth century France again became the center of the art world with the opening of Hôtel Drouot (Learmount 1985; Pomian 1990). Tellingly, the location of the art dealers in Paris was adjacent to the Bourse, the stockmarket/banking district, near glamorous cafés, theaters, entertainments, and the shopping arcades (Green 1989). This is the same area in which the Bon Marché opened in 1852. The link between economic conditions and collecting has several threads. A growing economy puts money in the hands of consumers, fuels consumption and consumer desire, stimulates prices of collectibles, and provides money for speculation

in the collectibles market. A booming art market in the eighteenth century also meant a market that attracted forgers, unscrupulous dealers, and disreputable auction houses that colluded and conspired to raise prices. All of these features were found in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century France (Bazin 1967). Since collecting is an extreme and passionate form of acquisitiveness, a growing interest in collecting offers temptations to those who would take advantage of such an emotional condition. At the same time, collector “treasure” stories of fantastic buys and finds combine with the competitive fervor of the auction to stimulate pride, desire, and greed. Nor were some avaricious collectors above theft to acquire a treasure they coveted. Such greed is depicted in Balzac’s *Cousin Pons*, in which Pons’s collection of antiques is avidly coveted by his otherwise disdainful nouveau-riche cousin Madame Camusot, the concierge Madame Cibot, and the lawyer Fraisier. Pons himself is a sadly heroic character having sacrificed his life and savings for the sake of the collection which is the story’s heroine. Like Balzac’s *Le Curé de Tours*, the antiques and *objets de vertu* take on an anthropomorphic life and significance to Pons that is quite like the romantic affections of a lover for his beloved (Tintner 1972). Balzac himself was an avid collector and there is thought to be much of him in Pons (Muensterberger 1994). His own obsession as well as the collecting spirit of early-nineteenth-century Paris make Balzac’s stories a telling mix of consumption, collecting, and what Freud would later characterize as sublimated sexual desire focused upon material objects.

Eighteenth-century France also provides examples of the changing fads and fashions of collecting. From an analysis of 723 eighteenth-century French collections (other than book collections) Pomian (1990) found that during the first two decades of the century the rage was for collecting ancient medals with little interest in natural-history materials. But during the last half of the century these preferences had completely changed and collections of shells, minerals, plants, and anatomical specimens were paramount. Even though the century saw a democratization of collecting in which a growing proportion of collectors was middle-class, it was instead the elite of scholars, lawyers, doctors, clerics, and antiquarians who first embraced natural-history collectibles. Pomian (1990) demonstrates that this development was a reaction to the growth of the Enlightenment ideal of an erudite study of collectibles to advance science. While there were historic issues that might be studied with medals, numismatists found themselves unable to synthesize the growing accumulation of medals and the facts surrounding them into anything like a meaningful whole – a problem also faced by Flaubert’s *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. Natural-history material, on the other hand, became more socially acceptable as somehow involving important scientific issues of the day. Similarly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century German Old Masters were not yet acknowledged as art and Baroque paintings were just beginning to be accepted by collectors (Grasskamp 1983).



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And the insistence in eighteenth-century Paris for small-size paintings resulted in a buyer's market for Flemish and Italian paintings, which quickly left the country (von Holst 1967, p. 190). Nationalism also affected preferences for collecting art of the collector's home country during this period in France and England (Haskell 1976). Such shifts in popular collecting domains are telling illustrations of the fact that, while the cycles may be longer, collecting is every bit as susceptible to fashion change as clothing.

The value of potentially collectible objects thus was, and remains, determined by social valuation and not by any intrinsic properties of the objects themselves. Rarity and scarcity are other non-intrinsic properties that affect the social valuation and collectibility of objects. Crabbe (1990) suggests that these properties pertain only to certain forms of art, noting that "If 'Mona Lisa' was a famous novel then few would argue that it was better to read the original manuscript in a museum than a printed reproduction" (p. 208). Yet book collectors would insist that it is infinitely better to have a first edition, or better still the original manuscript, than a paperback copy. Consider the fork. Originally forks were luxury objects crafted with gold and precious stones. But Rheims notes,

Snobbery, elegance and finally function assured their widespread use with the result that, from being a luxury article only to be found in a few royal palaces in the sixteenth century, in the eighteenth century every bourgeois table had forks, and in the nineteenth century forks were a humdrum detail of life, sold by every ironmonger.

(Rheims 1961, p. 63)

As will be seen, however, industrial mass production does not in itself destroy collectibility.

The eighteenth century has been called the age of the dilettante in Europe (Rigby and Rigby 1944; Taylor 1948). The label is, in contemporary use (Simpson and Weiner 1989), an indictment of the pursuit of collecting as an amusing and fashionable hobby pursued without either the dedication or the knowledge of collectors in the less democratic collecting era preceding the rise of consumer culture. More to the point, it was a century of increasingly specialized and nuanced categories of collecting as speculation became an alternative motive for acquiring collectibles and as the range of collectibles grew more extensive and the number of collectors multiplied. The category of connoisseurship stood at the other end of the continuum from dilettantism. While Pons was portrayed by Balzac as a connoisseur of moderate means but considerable discrimination, later in the nineteenth century Flaubert portrayed Bouvard and Pécuchet as his opposite — men of some means who were utterly lacking in discrimination. Like Pons, Bouvard and Pécuchet begin as petit-bourgeois clerks. But when Bouvard inherits a small fortune, the two friends retire to educate themselves through instructional books, collecting, and an eventual reversion to a clerk-like inclina-

tion to record and classify. Products of the Age of Enlightenment, they seek to understand the world through passionless reason. They seek wisdom through their bumbling attempts to collect antiques, geological specimens, anthropological specimens, ceramics, books, and documents for their personal museum as well as for their encyclopedic book project. Finding contradictions in the sources they consult they are reduced to a state of confusion:

They had no longer, on the men and deeds of the epoch, a single decided idea. To judge it impartially, it would be necessary to read all the histories, all the memoirs, all the newspapers and all the documents in manuscript, since from the least omission an error may ensue which will lead on to others *ad infinitum*. They renounced the undertaking. But the taste for history had come to them, the need for truth on its own account. Perhaps it is easier to find in bygone epochs? Authors, being far from the events, should speak of them without passion.

(Flaubert 1954b, pp. 138–139)

Flaubert uses Bouvard and Pécuchet to mock the pretensions of the era. The passionless objective accumulation of facts is shown as foolishness. A related pretension that their failures exemplify is the inability of mere taxonomy and classification to produce coherent meaning. As Donato summarizes their plight:

The set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe. The fiction is that a repeated metonymic displacement of fragments for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels, can still produce a representation which is somehow adequate to a nonlinguistic universe. Such a fiction is the result of an uncritical belief in the notion that ordering and classifying, that is to say, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments, can produce a representational understanding of the world. Should the fiction disappear, there is nothing left of the *Museum* but “bric-a-brac,” a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments of objects which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for the original objects or metaphorically for their representations.

(Donato 1979, p. 223)

This fiction, a critical part of Michel Foucault’s (1970) Classical episteme, remains an important part of collecting today as do further distinctions between, and sometimes transformations of, art versus craft, or artifact versus curio.

The first nineteenth-century collectors of French Impressionist art were a diverse group including financiers, department-store owners, bankers,



singers, doctors, a count, a customs inspector, painters, industrialists, small art dealers, and the proprietor of a pastry shop and restaurant (Moulin 1987). While nineteenth-century France saw a great democratic expansion of collecting, it also saw a surge in elitist collecting by dandies. Beau Brummell, for example, had a fine collection of snuffboxes; Comte d'Orsay was a passionate collector of *objets d'art*, and brothers Jules and Edmund de Goncourt helped set the fashions for antiquities, Japanese art, and eighteenth-century French art (Williams 1982, pp. 123–125). Although the dandies were a part of nineteenth-century romanticism, Brookner (1971) calls the Goncourts' activities a "sick Romanticism" and contrasts them with Zola's "healthy Romanticism." This judgment is based upon their non-productive reliance on their inheritances, their elitist class biases, and their romantic belief that the past is superior to the present. However, unlike the failed mechanistic approach to romantic collecting of Bouvard and Pécuchet, the Goncourts' collecting was passionate. Edmond explained:

Yes, this passion which has become universal, this solitary pleasure in which almost an entire nation indulges, owes its wide following to an emotional emptiness and ennui; but also it must be recognized, to the dreariness of the present day, to the uncertainty of tomorrow, to the labours of giving birth to a premature new society, and to worries and anxieties which, as on the brink of a deluge, drive desire and envy to seek immediate satisfaction in everything charming, appetizing and seductive: to forget the present moment in aesthetic satiety. These are the causes . . . together with what is undeniably a completely new emotion, namely the nearly human affection for objects, which at the present day make collectors of practically everyone and of me, in particular, the most passionate of all collectors.

(translated by Brookner 1971, pp. 142–143)

While romanticism needed no defense, the indulgence of a private accumulation of collectibles did and continues to require justification. In the preface to the catalogue for an 1880 show of a portion of the Goncourts' art collections, Edmund offered a further defense by referring to the period's mania for bibelots as a disease which he labeled "bricobracomania" (Saisselin 1984, p. xiv). For if collecting is a disease, the collector is a victim rather than a villain (this defense remains a common one among contemporary collectors). Nevertheless criticisms of the indulgence of collecting superficial luxuries continued. As one critic charged:

The present rage for collecting, the piling up, in dwellings, of aimless bric-à-brac, which does not become any more useful or beautiful by being fondly called *bibelots*, appear to us in a completely new light when we know that Magnan [a French doctor] has established the existence of an irresistible desire among the degenerate to accumulate

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useless trifles. It is so firmly imprinted and so peculiar that Magnan declares it to be a stigma of degeneration, and has invented for it the name "oniomania," or "buying craze." . . . He is simply unable to pass by any lumber without feeling an impulse to acquire it

(Nordau 1896, p. 27)

The criticism here is not one centering on elitism, lack of productivity, or misplaced nostalgia. It is instead clearly directed at consumerism. Acquisitiveness, possessiveness, and indulgent lack of restraint were the charges. The use of the term bric-a-brac rather than *objet d'art* or a similar honorific makes it apparent that the objects of such collector consumerism are insignificant trifles and thus delegitimizes the collector's pursuit as one of indulgent pleasure rather than scientific or artistic merit. For bric-a-brac is stuff found in the new department stores rather than galleries and museums. Thus there was a class distinction implied in these discriminations: anyone could buy bric-a-brac; not everyone could discern and acquire *objets d'art*. The latter objects were those sought by the bourgeois as "marker goods" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) with which to make status claims. There was also, once again, a sexist bias implied in these distinctions, as Saisselin explains:

By 1880 in France women were perceived as mere buyers of bibelots, which they bought as they did clothing, in their daily bargain hunting. Men of course collected too, but their collecting was perceived as serious and creative. Women were consumers of objects; men were collectors. Women bought to decorate and for sheer joy of buying, but men had a vision for their collections, a view of the collection as an ensemble, with a philosophy behind it. Or so the argument went. But by the 1890s the distinction between feminine accumulation and real collecting tended, in the bourgeois interior and even the American millionaire "home," to be blurred, and the bibelot seemed to have triumphed, along with a certain view of what constituted "Art."

(Saisselin 1984, p. 68)

There was one further distinction made concerning collectors and that was between the passionate collector like Cousin Pons or the Goncourts and the speculative collector whose passion was for financial gain rather than for the objects themselves (Green 1989). Both the growth in the number of collectors and the growth in wealth led to rising prices for art objects throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bazin 1967), attracting an increasing number of speculative buyers. The issue here is one of speculative capitalism and commoditization of art versus a love of art and other objects for their own sakes. Such speculation is a counterforce to the romanticism of the bohemians and dandies (Campbell 1987). It is closer to the dealer side of marketplace exchanges than to the consumer side. While



motives may sometimes be mixed, widespread speculation in collecting commoditizes the market in a way that other collectors greatly disdain.

### England

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also a period of great growth in English collecting. However, one collection of the seventeenth century which deserves further comment is that of the Tradescants. The rage for marvels died later in England than on the continent (Breckenridge 1989) and one remnant of this trend was the "Ark" of John Tradescant and his son, also John. In addition to natural-history objects, weapons, medals, garments, books, household utensils and "endless miniature objects," their collection included such curiosities as a piece of stone from John the Baptist's tomb, "Pohatan, King of Virginia's habit all embroidered with shells or Roanoke," carved plum stones, "a little Box with 12 Apostles in it," sculptures by Hans Holbein, "Jupiter, Io and Mercury wrought in Tent-stitch," a desk made of a single piece of wood, and "Halfe a Hasle-nut with 70 pieces of household-stuffe in it" (Rigby and Rigby 1944, pp. 233–235). There was also "A bracelet made out of the thighs of Indian flies, a cherry stone carved with the likeness of 88 emperors' faces on one side and St. George and the Dragon on the other; blood that rained on the Isle of Wight; and a coat made out of the entrails of fishes" (Lambton 1987, p. 10). After running the Ark as a tourist attraction, in the years following the younger John's death in 1662 the collection became the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, generally acknowledged as the first museum in the modern world. Similarly, Dr. Hans Sloane's less marvel-laden collection became the foundation for the British Museum in 1753. During the eighteenth century collecting was so popular in England that how-to-do-it guides were published for amateurs, still clinging to the *artificialia* and *naturalia* distinctions of the *Wunderkammern* (Bazin 1967, p. 115). Near the middle of the eighteenth century Learmount's (1985) analysis of auction catalogues shows that the Great Exhibition of 1851 caused a rage for both natural-history specimens and the sale of live animals including at least one tiger. The fascination with marvels died a slow death and as late as the start of the nineteenth century an auction of the estate of one collector included:

ARTICLES, comprising Minerals, Shells, and Insects; several Mathematical Instruments, a Cabinet, containing about 400 Roman, Greek, and English, Silver and Copper Coins; old China; a curious carved Ivory Cup and Cover; Mahogany Cabinet, with sliding glass drawers, filled with Insects, &c. from China, many of them rare, an Indian Gun, inlaid with Gold &c.

(Learmount 1985, p. 58)

Throughout the eighteenth century the English aristocratic, professional, and merchant classes steadily moved artworks from the continent to

England (von Holst 1967). While the collecting fad in England was a generation behind that of France, it was equally enthusiastic and widespread (Taylor 1948). When the royal collections of France were dismantled in the wake of the French Revolution, British collectors were quick to expatriate the treasures of Versailles to England. The sale of 17,182 treasures from Versailles in 1793 is labeled a "wholly disastrous mistake" by Rheims (1961, p. 113), a judgment concurred in by others. However, the acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles by Lord Elgin from the Ottomans early in the eighteenth century proved a more controversial expatriation, still strongly contested by Greece. They were controversial from the start. After acquiring the Marbles, Elgin was imprisoned by the French for three years and returned to England in 1806, fully expecting a grateful England to reimburse him for his expenses in acquiring 250 feet of the Parthenon frieze and transporting it to London. Instead the respected Dilettanti Society (still an honorable term at the time) expressed moral misgivings about such vandalism as well as doubts that the marbles were authentic (Holt 1979). Their authenticity was questioned because they looked too perfect and were thought to be casts of human figures. But finally in 1816 they were judged authentic and purchased by Parliament. The purchase was effective in stoking the British passion for collecting antiquities.

Much a part of earlier British collecting was the ideal of the English gentleman's country house. Since the Middle Ages this ideal involved being able to claim an established lineage documented with established paintings, heirlooms, manor house, and possessions. Wainwright (1989) shows that most collectors added to the collections of their ancestors installed at their country seat. But as McCracken (1988) discerns, the "patina" system of status with its "five generation rule" for deriving status from such a house and collected treasures was replaced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a wholly new system of status in which novelty and fashion supplanted this conservative principle. "Novelty became an irresistible drug" (McKendrick *et al.* 1982, p. 10). In the longing for novelty it is evident once again that the fascination with the curious marvel did not die with the *Wunderkammer*. It was only the organizing principles of collecting that changed. As Susan Stewart (1984) specifies, a dramatic change from normal scale to miniaturization or gigantism is one sure way to achieve novelty and have something transcend the realm of the ordinary and become collectible. Another sure novelty is something totally different from the ordinary: the "freak" of nature for example (Bogdan 1988; Fiedler 1978). Peter the Great kept the bones of his footman Bourgeois who had been over 7 feet tall, kept a hermaphrodite for a time, and treasured Foma who had only two digits per hand and foot, and who after his death was stuffed and exhibited by Peter (Purcell and Gould 1992). Each of these sources of novelty was represented in eighteenth-century English collections, and each is also reflected in Swift's satire, *Gulliver's Travels* (1729). When Gulliver



returns from the miniature land of Lilliput he brings with him miniature sheep and cattle which he subsequently raises and exhibits for profit to “many Persons of Quality, and others” (Swift 1980, p. 109). Similarly when he returns from Brobdingnag, land of the giants, he astounds his rescuer with a collection including a comb made from the Brobdingnagian king’s beard hair, a collection of pins and needles ranging from a foot to half a yard in length, giant wasp stingers, a gold ring large enough to fit over his head (from the queen of Brobdingnag), and a tooth a foot long and 4 inches in diameter. As Smith (1990) points out, such objects provide an apt satire on the Royal Society’s collection of curiosities in its Gresham College repositories at the time (see Hunter 1985). As the sole representative of his size in these lands, Gulliver is himself a freak of outlandish proportions and is greatly admired as a novelty. Through his status as a caged amusement in Brobdingnag and through later inversions of human dominance over animals, Swift challenges whether collecting animals for our entertainment is quite so amusing when the keeper becomes the kept (see also Ritvo 1987; Tuan 1984). The rise of zoos as well as African game trophy-hunting, decorative status-enhancing pet-keeping, and animal entertainments such as bear-bating, bull-bating, and dog fights in nineteenth-century England partake of the same novelty-seeking and colonialist dominion as does British collecting during this era. Even the mental hospital of Bedlam was opened up for tours for public amusement (Ellenberger 1974). In light of such practices as well as the occasional inclusion of human beings in collections (Boesky 1991), the later exhibition of native villages in European and American world’s fairs is less of a departure than it might otherwise seem.

Another eighteenth-century English literary work, Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock”, has Belinda’s maid at her dressing table reveal some of the luxury objects found attractive by English collectors of the period:

Unnumber’d treasures ope at once, and here  
The various offerings of the world appear;  
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
And decks the goddess with the glitt’ring spoil.  
This casket India’s glowing gems unlocks,  
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
The tortoise here and elephant untie,  
Transform’d to combs, the speckled and the white.  
Here flies of pins extend their shining rows,  
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux.

(Canto I, lines 129–138)

As Landa (1980) observes, Pope’s contemporaries would have recognized that the gems from India, perfume from Arabia, and ivory from Africa were an appeal to the reader’s geographical imagination and the romantic image

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of England as the mercantile center of the world. In England the mercantile period began in 1688 when the Stuarts were deposed and the English economy became the focus of national attentions (Bunn 1980). For England and other colonial European powers the mercantile era ended in 1763 with the peace conference in Paris after the Seven Years' War. After that the colonies were no longer viewed primarily as suppliers of raw materials, but as consumers of exported goods. The mercantile period between these years was one of exploitative and protectionist policies on the part of England against which Swift's satire was also directed. But while Swift criticized the anti-mercantile fashion for foreign luxuries, Pope celebrated it, making Belinda his heroine. The mercantile era was also a period in which exotic imports fueled the taste for collections of objects which, as in France, were disparaged as bric-a-brac (Bunn 1980). Soft porcelain Chinaware, curios, Greek and Roman statues, coins, books, paintings, prints, furniture, and other imported luxuries were the stuff of which period collections were made. Even love poets, Boesky (1991) observes, were prone to make their poems a collection, "stuffing it with *stuff* – compasses, magnets, coins, maps, and pictures" (p. 313). Paralleling the bricoleur as the prototypical French consumer of the time (Lévi-Strauss 1966), the English collector of the day was eclectic. But as Bunn (1980) distinguishes, the bricoleur accumulates potentially useful things, whereas the collector acquires things without use; "bric-a-brac is excess, caused by aesthetic distance" (p. 313). In this charge, the familiar French charge of dilettantism is plainly heard. An example is found in the diary of bibliophile Samuel Pepys who agonized repeatedly at booksellers over the color of book bindings and decided to classify his library according to the size of each volume (Boesky 1991). Rigby and Rigby (1944) add to this portrait: "Although he bought paintings, miniatures, engravings and objects of *virtu* as well as books, in no sense of the word could Pepys have been called a connoisseur" (p. 239).

If Pepys was no connoisseur, it is worth considering what does constitute connoisseurship. Since the Enlightenment, being a connoisseur has meant specialized knowledge about an area of collecting and the corresponding abilities to classify collectibles according to acceptable taxonomies, to possess and exercise taste and judgment, and to assess authenticity and value. In other words, the amateur collector is a passionate subjective consumer, while the connoisseur is a rational objective expert. This is not to say that these categories never intermingle, but they are sufficiently distinct that Danet and Katriel (1989) separate collectors into the taxonomic "type A" collector and the aesthetic "type B" collector. As Herrmann (1972) also stipulates, the passionate amateur type B collector is self indulgent and acquisition and ownership are driving concerns. It is in this respect that the non-connoisseur collector is a perfect exemplar of consumer culture.

By the Victorian period in England, the passionate amateur came from



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the broad ranks of society and included collectors of postage stamps, match-boxes, Staffordshire figures, postcards, biscuit tins, "railroadiana," military medals, sports memorabilia, thimbles, coins, fossils, and samplers (Briggs 1989). The emphasis of the day was on plentitude and abundance in all things, as Praz observes:

It seems as if the pleasure of inventorying and mustering a universality of things is behind both the accumulation of furnishings . . . and the cumulative representation of a whole family in painting, as well as the minute – and often superfluous and cumbersome – descriptions of milieux in novels.

(Praz 1971, p. 23)

Briggs (1989) traces the greatly expanded agenda of collectibles in Victorian England and concludes that "The term 'art' was interpreted in radically different ways even by big dealers and . . . even small collectors of 'trivial objects' could make large claims" (p. 44). While coins had been collected for some time, the number of manufactured objects in Victorian collections suggests a legitimization of mass-produced objects as collectibles. Far from the encyclopedic collections of the *Wunderkammern*, Victorian collections were highly specialized. For instance, with the production of postage stamps by a number of countries beginning in the 1840s and 1850s, collectors began to specialize not only in stamps, but in stamps from certain areas and periods (Gelber 1992). The self-generated Victorian labels of *timbromanie* or stamp mania attest to its popularity (Briggs 1989). Stamps also became a prototypical area for type A collecting, since the taxonomic categories and possible acquisitions are fixed, if growing, and readily classified by area, period, type, face value, cancellation type, and so forth. The traits or appearance of orderliness, scientific precision, and completeness are readily pursued with such a collection. As Breckenridge (1989) observes, following the Great Exhibition, British collecting and British culture both became internationalized and institutionalized. Collecting, especially of the classifying sort epitomized by stamp collecting, offered a means to seem to gain control of the world and of the past. Kendrick (1987) finds that the taxonomic inclination even struck collectors of pornography in Victorian England. While theirs was a private and publicly forbidden arena of collecting, their habits were otherwise indistinguishable from those of other bibliophiles of the day.

### America

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries then, English collecting became more diverse, more specialized, more popular, and more taxonomic. These same tendencies occurred in America, but at a later date and with some notable variations. Early Americans may have had collections of Indian

arrowheads and hunting trophies, but such imported luxuries as books were too expensive for most people to collect, even if they had the time to devote to such an indulgence (Rigby and Rigby 1944). Instead the Colonies were more a source of exotic materials for European cabinets. By the late seventeenth century one notable exception was Cotton Mather (1663–1728) whose book collection was sufficient to justify several visits by the London bookseller John Dunton. The collection was continued by Cotton Mather's son Samuel and grew to an unprecedented seven or eight thousand books plus additional manuscripts by the eighteenth century (Rigby and Rigby 1944). Thomas Jefferson was another famous early American book collector and in 1814, when the Library of Congress burned, he sold his collection to the government as a replacement. Statesmen, clergymen, doctors, lawyers, writers, architects, and artists were prominent among American collectors of the eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries. Besides Mather, another clergyman collector was the Reverend William Bentley (1759–1819), who collected portraits, prints, books, manuscripts, furniture, decorative arts, coins, and specimens from natural history, ethnology, and archeology (Stillinger 1980). The most significant artist collector, Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1827), was at least as diverse in his collecting activity. His personal collection began with portraits of famous Americans he had painted and installed in a small personal museum opened in his Philadelphia home in 1784. In 1785 he began collecting natural-history specimens and in 1801 he helped uncover a complete mastodon skeleton (Rigby and Rigby 1944). The following year he opened Peale's Museum in Philadelphia on the second floor of Independence Hall and included besides the mastodon and famous Americans, fossils, seashells, wax figures of North American Indians in appropriate costume and weaponry, and models of the latest machines (Bazin 1967). By 1822, when he painted *The Artist in His Museum*, showing him in the Long Room of his museum, he had collected and displayed in appropriate taxonomic order various preserved predators, birds, minerals, insects, fossils, and in the highest places of honor, portraits and busts of heroes of the American Revolution. But Peale received no state funding and knew that he must attract the public to support the museum. To that end, he set out to show the wonders of divine creation, assembling and displaying a number of curiosities including a cow with 5 legs, 6 feet, and 2 tails, a petrified nest, a devilfish, *trompe-l'oeil* paintings, a speaking tube installed in a lion's head, tattooed human heads, monkeys dressed as various artisans, and "experiments in light, sound, and clockwork motion, offering his visitors views of nature, technology, naval battle, and scenes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (Kulik 1989, p. 5). When Peale died in 1827, the museum, which had become a joint-stock company, turned to live animal shows, dwarves, "giants," and Siamese twins to generate profits. By mid-century when the Smithsonian Institution was established, Phineas T. Barnum had purchased Peale's collections and moved



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them to his own American Museum in New York. Peale's educational vision for the collections was soon lost as Barnum stressed elements of the carnival, circus, zoo, and sideshow in his museum,

including three serpents fed noonday meals before the public, two whales that swam in a tank of salt water, a white elephant, hippos, bears, wolves, a herd of American buffalo, waxwork figures, midgets, dwarfs, giants, bearded ladies, fat boys, rope dancers, jugglers, performing American Indians, a tattooed man, gypsy girls, albinos, and a group of "industrious fleas."

(Ames 1986, p. 14)

If Barnum gave the public freaks and oddities, James Herring gave them gambling in his art lottery. His New York gallery charged \$5 for a print and a chance at winning paintings by American artists in an annual draw. This venture became the Apollo Association in 1838 and the American Art Union in 1844, when it distributed 92 paintings in its lottery (Lynes 1955). Four years later the number of paintings distributed had grown to more than 450 per year. It was both the speculative and the egalitarian nature of the art lottery that accounted for its popularity. The lottery concept faltered on legal shoals in 1853, but it was influential in awakening fledgling American tastes for art (Rigby and Rigby 1944). As a result of the Art Union, a few committed collectors, and the emergence of dealers, galleries, and auction houses, for a time there emerged a fashionable American interest in buying art: "It became a fad to buy pictures – good pictures, bad pictures, new pictures or old ones (so long as they weren't 'primitives'), American pictures or European ones" (Lynes 1955, p. 44). Still, this interest was limited to the relatively affluent. It was not until after the American Civil War that a substantial number of Americans collected (Grampp 1989). After the Civil War and before the depression of the early 1870s there was a boom of interest in artwork by the American masses, this time fueled by the cheap prints of Currier and Ives. Echoing the Dutch fascination with prints during the Netherlands' Golden Age, these prints were found in a vast number of American homes. Prices were mostly in the 15 to 25 cent range, and popular subjects, deprecated by more affluent collectors as sentimental kitsch, included idyllic country scenes, the American Indian as noble savage, kittens and puppies, scenes of domestic bliss, patriotic motifs, children playing, dramatic boxing or big-game hunting-scenes, and panoramic landscapes (Lynes 1955, p. 69).

At the higher end of the social-class spectrum, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia helped make American antiques a status symbol for certain nouveaux riches with aspirations to upper-class status (Stillinger 1980). But for the most visible art-collecting tycoons of the latter half of the nineteenth century it was not American antiques and art that captured the imagination. Rigby and Rigby explain:

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It is obvious that mimicry of the old European aristocracy was largely responsible for the fact that extensive collecting now became fashionable also among American merchant princes. . . . Certainly some form of personal ambition was most often responsible for the apparently incongruous phenomenon of men turning from the collecting of mines, of railroads, of corporations, to the gathering of books and paintings, of porcelains and tapestries and French furniture; for though money became, at this time, power in the truest sense, even so it could not satisfy all a man's desires, nor achieve for him the complete and unqualified recognition of many of his fellows . . . most of these wealthy collectors were tarred with the same black spirit of ruthless acquisitiveness, with that fierce will-to-power, which were characteristics of the new industrial age in which they lived; and by Europeans even the best of them were accused of being "people of enormous wealth and little taste who accumulate masterpieces of art without appreciating them."

(Rigby and Rigby 1944, pp. 280–281)

These acquisitive American robber barons are portrayed in Dreiser's trilogy about Frank Algernon Cowperwood, *The Financier*, *The Titan*, and *The Stoic* and in the Henry James novels *The American*, *Roderick Hudson*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Outcry*. As a recent American expatriate James may have made himself the model for Christopher Newman in *The American* (Tintner 1986), but it is likely that J. P. Morgan was the model for Rowland Mallet in *Roderick Hudson* (Harris 1987), as well as for Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl* and Breckenridge Bender in *The Outcry* (Auchincloss 1990). The last novel is, as the title suggests, an outcry against the plunder of European art treasures by such upstarts as the Morgans, Rothschilds, and Vanderbilts. But as Chamberlin (1983) and Saisselin (1984) remind us, the conspicuous consumption of the turn-of-the-century robber barons is not the first instance of rampant consumerism or expropriation of art treasures.

J. Pierpont Morgan began his banking career as a boy collecting stamps, coins, and autographs, and, prophetically, pieces of stained glass he found fallen from European cathedrals (Sinclair 1981). As with Sigmund Freud (Belk *et al.* 1991), Jean de Berry (Muensterberger 1994), and a number of other prominent collectors, it was not until his banker father's death that J. P. Morgan's collecting activity began in earnest (Auchincloss 1989). While he neglected American artists, perhaps because he wanted to bring to the country what did not already exist, he collected promiscuously and avariciously from the best of foreign collections, often buying entire collections intact. Provenance was important and he acquired Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, Catherine the Great's snuff box, Shakespeare first folios, a letter from George Washington, and Napoleon's watch (Chernow 1990). The decorative arts were his major focus and paintings only accounted for



5 percent of his collection. In this respect he was like the Medici. However, unlike the Medici he did not commission works of art and instead regarded his acquisition of largely European treasures as a "shopping" expedition (Saarinen 1958). Besides neglecting American art he also neglected the impressionists and anyone who came after them. He was widely regarded as collecting old masters and young mistresses, as his extra-marital affairs were widely known, if seldom publicized. Much of his acquisition was done through the Duveens who also sold art to a number of other wealthy American industrialists. When he died his collection was conservatively valued at \$60 million, making it the most costly collection ever assembled. Like Cowperwood in Dreiser's trilogy, Morgan was not the vulgar and unknowledgable philistine that the robber barons were widely thought to be (Josephson 1934). Both were more complex characters with a love and growing knowledge of art. But like Cowperwood's, it seems clear that Morgan's devotion to art and his involvement with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he eventually became director and to which approximately half of his collection went, arose from a need to "launder" money acquired from the still "dirty" business of banking and investment. No mere conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899), art has the power to redeem and sacralize money (Belk and Wallendorf 1990). The contagious magic of acknowledged masterpieces and collectibles with special provenance, the collector hopes, will ennoble even the most ill-gotten gains. And when the collector is also a benefactor adding to the sparse collections of a young nation, a robber baron can perhaps come to be seen as a captain of industry and patron of the arts. Americans, priding themselves on being a non-aristocratic and supposedly egalitarian society, have long had a love-hate relationship with their rich (Belk 1993a). But in the case of Morgan, his art collecting was regarded as more redeeming than such luxuries as his yacht and automobiles and some national pride was evident when he outbid royalty to bring artwork to America (Harris 1987).

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY COLLECTING

If Morgan's collecting was and is viewed with some pride, the art collecting of William Randolph Hearst during the twentieth century is not. Hearst too started from relative wealth and began his collecting in childhood – in Hearst's case not only with stamps and coins, but also beer steins, porcelain, pictures of actors and actresses, and German comic pictures (Rigby and Rigby 1944). During the twenty-nine years in which Hearst was building his San Simeon, California, mansion, "La Cuesta Encantada", at a cost of \$35 million, he spent another \$50 million on art from the palaces, monasteries, and collections of Europe (Folsom 1963). Paralleling some early royal collectors and the development of institutional zoos, Hearst also maintained

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a private zoo on his large coastal estate. Besides intending no public legacy from his monumental art acquisitions, Hearst's chief sin was seen as a vulgar lack of taste:

With raw insensitivity, exquisite Greek vases, handsome Hispano-Moresque plates, tapestries of unsurpassed quality were joined with fourth-rate paintings of Madonnas, a stuffed owl, a crudely restored façade of a Roman temple and academic sculptures of cast marble as unpleasantly white as a pair of store-bought dentures. On the façade, the teakwood gable of an Oriental pagoda was clutched between pseudo-Spanish-Italian towers. A fourteenth-century confessional served as the elevator, disgorging the castle's owner to a secret door cut into a choir stall.

(Saarinen 1958, p. 75)

According to one of the guides I interviewed at the present-day estate, Hearst used to delight in presenting improbable seating arrangements for his invited dinner guests, such as seating Mae West next to a church official. This seems to partake of the same sense of shock sought in *Wunderkammern* and eighteenth-century European masquerades. The sense of violation of the sacred with the profane was expressed even more sharply by Dorothy Parker, with reference to Hearst's none too secret mistress, Marion Davies:

Upon my honor, I saw a Madonna  
Hanging within a niche,  
Above the door of the private whore  
Of the world's worst son of a bitch.

(quoted in Alsop 1982, p. 94)

And profaning American morals and the canons of the art world do not exhaust this list of Hearst's sins against "good" collecting:

Supreme example of what Lewis Mumford calls the modern "department-store collector," this man succumbed to every one of the pitfalls which may so easily engulf the wealthy would-be connoisseur — personal ambition, lack of discrimination, ostentation, and emphasis on the symbolic values of mere size and quantity. Moneyed American collectors have often, in one way or another, given evidence of one or more of these faults, but the concentration Hearst represents is the *nux vomica* of bad collecting on the grand scale.

(Rigby and Rigby 1944, p. 286)

Nevertheless, the continued ambivalence of Americans toward the shrines of their most financially successful historical figures is expressed in the fact that the remains of the collection at "La Cuesta Encantada" are California's second most popular tourist attraction after Disneyland. And the love-hate



regard for wealthy collectors continues in public attentions to more recent residues of collecting lives, such as those of J. Paul Getty, Andy Warhol, and Malcolm Forbes.

If Hearst is reviled as a collector, consider then what makes a good collector. In 1954 an unknown Parisian dentist, Maurice Girardin, died leaving the city the major part of his magnificent art collection (Cabanne 1963). The collection included numerous works by Rouault, Dufy, Modigliani, Braque, Utrillo, Matisse, and Picasso, and 380 of these canvasses were immediately displayed in the Petit Palais. The collection had cost Girardin no more than a million francs to acquire, but it was estimated that it would require more than 800 million old francs to replace it four years after his death (Rheims 1961). So it appears that Dr. Girardin had acumen, taste, and modesty, all traits evaluated positively by the public whether they pertain to collectors or to consumers in general. Further, he had dedication and passion, and was willing to sacrifice everything to the pursuit of his collection (Cabanne 1963). In leaving his collection to the city, his ultimate generosity is also without question. Inasmuch as these are characteristics revered in heroes generally, it is possible to see Girardin posthumously as a martyr to the worthy cause of art for the French people. While he came from a well-to-do family, Maurice's means were modest. He nevertheless befriended artists he admired, especially Rouault. Nor did he rely on intermediaries and advisors to make his selections and discoveries. He stood behind the artists whose work he admired or on whom he took pity and opened a gallery to help start their careers and sell their works. These too are well-respected traits in collectors (Materer 1988). Cabanne (1963) uses words like "apostle" (for art) in describing Girardin and notes that he launched the art career of the hermit and "chronic and pathetic invalid" Maria Blanchard. The gallery was a financial failure due to the doctor's poor business practices and because he bought a number of the works himself; it eventually closed. And one further admired collector trait was that

Dr Girardin never speculated. The idea did not so much as cross his mind; when he sold pictures from his collection, he always did so in order to buy works of uncertain value by young artists who were unknown or difficult to understand, such as Rouault and Gromaire, or Buffet who was also in this state when the doctor discovered him.

(Cabanne 1963, p. 211)

Speculation and profit-making were, on the other hand, the sole intent of members of the Bearskin Club whose members contributed 250 francs a year for each share of art purchases selected by the Club's buying committee. While they had "losers," they also had a Bonnard, ten Matisses, and a dozen Picassos in their first sale in 1914 at the Hôtel Drouot (Moulin 1987). The sale raised more than 100,000 francs and the club became the model for a number of art-investment clubs that followed. Unlike the Art

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Union whose purpose was to get art into the hands of lucky lottery winners, the Bearskin Club members saw art as a promising commodity. While art had been used for investment purposes previously and art dealers are ostensibly in business for profits, their lack of personal connection to or even personal examination of the art work would cause many to deny the label of collectors to members of the Bearskin Club. A similar criticism was made of U.S. collectors in the New York art scene in the 1960s and 1970s who "approached art with the dispassion of a stockbroker . . . ignored the visual appeal of a work, often selected over the telephone. He was concerned only with the name of the artist who created the work, and his short-term or long-term growth potential in the market" (Naifeh 1976, p. 31).

While tastes and fashions in what is collectible continue to change, the sheer range of what is considered to be collectible has greatly expanded in the twentieth century. Within the scope of fine art, an increasing range of art from American (Berlo 1992), Canadian (Cole 1985), Pacific (Thomas 1991), African (Torgovnick 1990), and Australian (Sutton 1988) aboriginals has come to be considered collectible. Outside of the domain of "fine art," the range of articles considered collectible by different subsets of society also continues to expand and proliferate. Mass production, growing world affluence, and the spread of consumer culture have made it possible for collecting to become a truly mass phenomenon. This is seen routinely in feature-section newspaper accounts of so-and-so's unique collection of such and such. Two of several recent books depicting interesting private collections in the U.S. and Great Britain include collections of: pencils, Winston Churchill memorabilia, maps of Transylvania, farm machinery, canning jars, police batons, Hawaiian shirts, Uncle Scrooge comic books, toy soldiers, sewing machines, dolls, photographs of midgets, advertising posters, automobile license plates, beer cans, lawnmowers, matchbooks, Snoopy merchandise, cigar bands, radios, and anvils (Johnston and Beddow 1986; Land-Weber 1980). Besides the sanction and encouragement given to such collections in newspaper features and books, a number of recent shows of such collections at museums in Europe and North America have provided further acknowledgment and attention (e.g., Belk 1989; Franco 1980; Grasskamp 1983; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Jones 1992; New Yorker 1992; Pearce 1992). Even China has recently had an exhibition of citizens' formerly secret collections, including collections of cameras, watches and clocks, matchboxes, cigarette packages, and other pre-Communist packaging (Liming 1993). Increasingly collectors of objects outside of the sphere of fine arts are also opening museums to display their personal collections (Hughes 1987; Sobol and Sobol 1991). It is not the case that such things have suddenly become art objects, but in terms of Clifford's (1990) Greimassian semiotic square based on the oppositions of masterpiece/artifact and authentic/inauthentic, they have moved from being considered inauthentic artifacts to authentic artifacts. That some of these things are not



only commercially produced commodities, but advertisements for other commodities is not entirely new. Bon Marché passed out advertising cards to children in the 1890s that became collectors' items (Miller 1981, pp. 174–175) and during the 1880s and 1890s collecting advertising trade cards was popular in America (Strasser 1989, pp. 164–165).

At the start of the twentieth century while robber barons like J. P. Morgan were assembling their collections of European paintings and decorative arts, American children were avid collectors of more humble objects. Burk (1900) surveyed American grade-school children and found that each child averaged three to four active collections, with the peak years of collecting interest between ages 8 and 11. A study by G. Stanley Hall (1907) based on over 1,200 grade-school children in California found similar results and listed more than 300 items collected. The most popular objects collected were, for boys, cigar bands, stamps, birds' eggs, marbles, seashells, buttons, rocks, and advertising cards. Girls were most likely to collect stamps, seashells, advertising cards, cigar bands, buttons, marbles, pieces of cloth, paper dolls, and other dolls. In a 1927 study Lehman and Witty found a lower frequency of collecting and pronounced that the collecting fad was declining. However, a 1929 study using different questions reported an even higher incidence of collecting than that found by Burk at the turn of the century (Whitley 1929). Additional studies after the start of the Great Depression found interest in collections continuing to increase and peaking at a somewhat older age (Witty and Lehman 1930, 1931). A survey by Durost (1932) found that boys' collecting peaked at age 10 with an average of 12.7 collections, while girls' collecting peaked a year later and averaged 12.1 collections at the time. A recent study in Israel found that over the first six grades 93 percent of children reported collecting something, with the figure dropping below 50 percent in grade eight (Danet and Katriel 1988). The teenage years thus appear to be the period during which faddish collectors drop their collecting activity, while those with long-term collecting interests continue (Katriel 1988/89). In England Newson and Newson (1968) found that even at age 4, some 80 percent of boys and 66 percent of girls collected something. A 1988 study on the American East Coast found that children's collecting activity was highest between the ages 9 and 10 with an average of three active collections (McGreevy 1990). The study reports that a higher (but unspecified) proportion of children collect nothing than was the case in the turn-of-the-century studies and that, compared to the earlier studies, a much greater proportion of the objects collected were now bought rather than found. Rocks, stamps, marbles, dolls, seashells, and picture cards (now of baseball players) were still collected, as well as miniature vehicles, coins, foreign currency, He-man figures, GI Joe, books, posters, stickers, and stuffed animals. Danet and Katriel (1988) report a somewhat different set of manufactured objects collected by children in Israel, including collector cards of rabbis.

Estimates of the incidence of adult collecting vary. One study estimated that one of every three Americans has at least one active collection (O'Brien 1981). Another American study found that over 60 percent of households reported at least one collection with an average of 2.6 collections per household (Schiffer *et al.* 1981). Nearly 10 percent of American men report collecting coins and about 4 percent of both men and women currently collect stamps (Crispell 1988). It appears that the number of active collectors was even greater during the Great Depression (Gelber 1991). A new kind of ethos that has been ascendent throughout the twentieth century was codified in the 1930s: the hobby as "serious leisure" (Stebbins 1979, 1982). Three factors since the Industrial Revolution have supported a gradual legitimization of hobbies: fewer work hours, greater alienation from work activities, and increased affluence (Ackerman 1990; Gelber 1991; McKibbin 1983). We may have lost contact with the product of our labor in the workplace, but in collecting we are in total control of our time and totally in possession of the collection we create. Because hobbies are often seen as being closer to work than leisure, they provide a guilt-free activity that supports the work ethic and offers more self-control and reward than a corporate or factory career. In Gelber's assessment, hobbies offer "the promise not of eternal leisure but of eternal work" (1991, p. 743). In Menninger's (1942) depiction, collecting is a "constructive leisure time activity." This became especially important during the Depression when many jobs were lost and those that remained were often tenuous. Exhibits of ordinary collectors became common in the United States at this time, and dignity was further enhanced by playing up the generally false potential for profits through collecting (Gelber 1991). Youth organizations like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Campfire Girls have also systematically encouraged collecting during the twentieth century (Aristides 1988; Gelber 1991; Mechling 1989). Adults have seen collecting as an activity that inculcates desirable habits in children. We have accordingly encouraged and nurtured such activity.

Gelber (1992) offers an explanation for this social sanction for collecting. While the central premise of this chapter is that collecting arose with consumer culture and that the objects that comprise collections are luxury consumer goods, collecting is an act of production as well as consumption. Collectors create, combine, classify, and curate the objects they acquire in such a way that a new product, the collection, emerges. In the process they also produce meanings. More precisely, they participate in the process of socially reconstructing shared meanings for the objects they collect. Moreover, in the process of collecting collectors rehearse and imitate the market-based economy in which we are increasingly embedded. These processes are articulated more clearly in certain collecting arenas, with stamp collecting being a prime example, as Gelber effectively demonstrates. Arising as it did in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Gelber sees



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stamp collecting as “recapitulating many of the fundamental structures and relations of Gilded Age capitalism” (1992, p. 743). Among these structures and relations are competition, commodity trading, and buying, accumulating, and later selling at an anticipated profit. While recognizing that not all stamp collectors pursue their hobby from this perspective, Gelber outlines three models employed by those who do. The first is the merchant model, which he characterizes as dominant in the nineteenth century, especially among children. Operating from this model, collectors act as small-scale merchants constantly buying, selling, and trading their stamps and seeking to add to their own collections and make a little on each transaction; they act as stock-exchange brokers in the stamp market. Still there is much love of the stamps themselves among such merchants. A second model, the investor, views stamps as more of a life insurance or annuity policy, constantly increasing in value and eventually to be cashed in, typically in old age. In the mean time, the collector can enjoy the leisure activity of collecting. The third model Gelber outlines is that of the speculator who buys low and sells high simply to make a profit. Unlike the other collector groups, the speculator has little interest in completing a collection and is much like the members of the Bearskin Club or those buyers in the 1960s and 1970s New York art market who needed never see the works they had acquired. As one of the latter “collectors” said, “You wouldn’t go to see a stock certificate” (Naifeh 1976, p. 31).

Not only has there been commoditization of stamp collecting from within stamp-collector ranks, there has also been commoditization from without. Gelber (1992) notes that starting in the 1860s a number of open-air stamp markets opened in European countries and were referred to as bourses, after the French stock market. A number of these open-air stamp markets still continue. The number of stamp dealers in Europe was estimated as 2,000 in 1864 (Briggs 1989), so the number of collectors of stamps is likely to have been in the hundreds of thousands. A similar commoditization took place in model-airplane collecting as kits became commercially produced and dealers replaced amateurs (Butsch 1984). However, until the 1890s post offices refused to cooperate with stamp collectors and those in the United States and Canada even made it illegal to buy and sell uncanceled stamps at more than their face value (Gelber 1992). Now of course governments have come full swing, marketing numerous stamps they hope will never be used as well as continually offering new albums, commemorative stamps, and first-day covers solely to attract collectors. An unsuccessful experiment in marketing colorful stamps for Central and South American nations was attempted by N. F. Seebeck in 1893, but in 1894 the republic of San Marino profitably began to market stamps intended for collectors rather than postage (Bryant 1989). In 1994 the U.S. government planned over 100 special stamps, including issues commemorating sports heroes, TV news commentator Edward R. Murrow, black educator Allison Davis,

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silent-screen stars, Buffalo Soldiers, World Cup soccer, World War II, Norman Rockwell, and Elvis Presley (U.S. Postal Service 1993). Bryant (1989) estimates that 40 percent of U.S. stamps currently sold are bought by collectors and dealers and never circulate. With post offices reinforcing the educational and investment potential of stamp collecting it is increasingly easy for collectors to believe they are participating in a productive activity rather than a leisure consumption activity. Like the loss of work during the Depression, retirement often leads to an increase in collecting activity, allowing a sense of continued work in retirement (Christ 1965; Unruh 1983). There are, however, certain problems with Gelber's stamp-collector types if they are applied to stamp collectors as a whole. One problem is that the more mercenary collectors of the speculator variety, in particular, may not be regarded as true collectors by other stamp collectors. During several days spent interviewing stamp collectors at the Collector's Club in New York City, I found these collectors more often labeled "dealers" by other members, even though most had no fixed retail location. A second problem is that despite the market metaphor, most stamp collections, especially of the sorts of stamps promoted by the U.S. postal service, fail to recover their costs once they are sold, much less make a profit. And a third problem is that for a number of stamp collectors the actions of buying and socializing with other collectors may be more important than the economic aspects of their collections (Christ 1965). Consistent with this, rather than *caveat emptor* and taking advantage of fledgling collectors, among child collectors of popular thematic cards in Israel, there tend to be sharing coalitions and protection of naïve collectors (Katriel 1988/89). Inasmuch as friendship plays an important role in business relations (Granovetter 1985; Silver 1993), it would be surprising if it were not also a part of collector relations. But despite its problems, Gelber's (1992) observation that stamp collecting is a model of production and business is an important one. In the next chapter more will be made of the pervasive investment and market metaphor found in many areas of collecting.

Not only may some collectors adopt a business vocabulary in pursuing and describing their collecting activity, many twentieth-century businesses have found that adopting a collecting vocabulary and product line is profitable. A conservative estimate of the annual sales volume of new baseball cards (which began as cards included with cigarettes in the 1880s) in the American market is \$500 million (Rogoli 1991). The sale of Elvis Presley records and collectibles is greater today than when he died (Gregory and Gregory 1980). Members of the Coca-Cola Collectors Club International meet annually to buy, sell, and trade Coke collectibles (Pendergrast 1993), while the Coca-Cola Company caters to them with stores on 5th Avenue in New York, in the Atlanta airport, and in the company's museum in downtown Atlanta. A fairly recent entrant into the business of marketing to collectors is the instant collectibles company (Roberts 1990). The



February 20, 1994 issue of the U.S. national newspaper supplement *Parade* contained seven full-page advertisements for these firms:

- 1 Franklin Mint offered a 1:24 scale model of the 1955 Ford Fairlane Crown Victoria. It is "assembled by hand from 177 separate parts" and "is *hand painted, hand polished, hand finished* and handsomely priced at just \$120, payable in monthly installments." Since middle-aged men often long for the dream cars of their youth (Belk *et al.* 1991), the choice of year is well timed.
- 2 The Hamilton Collection advertised a plate depicting the Denver & Rio Grand's "High Line" steam locomotive as it passes beside a river gorge on its way from Durango to Silverton Colorado. The plate, "Above the Canyon" is a "limited-edition by Ted Xaras," "limited to a total of 14 firing days," and limited to "one plate per collector." The reader must respond by April 4, 1994 and "on acceptance" will be billed \$29.50 for the 8 $\frac{1}{4}$  inch diameter plate.
- 3 Lenox Collections presented "the Enchanted Swans" of "Lenox Full-Lead Crystal," "a remarkable value at \$39." They are "individually crafted" and "not currently available through art galleries or even fine collectible stores." "So to acquire this imported Lenox® work of crystal art, be sure to return the Reservation Form promptly."
- 4 The Bradford Exchange offered a snowy northern scene plate, "Two By the Night, Two By the Light' In full color on fine porcelain." The firm, which also runs a service buying and selling plates (Berman and Sullivan 1992), provides a number which "certifies that your plate is officially listed for trading on The Bradford Exchange." It lists the following advantages of the Bradford Exchange:
  - A hand-numbered limited-edition plate with a correspondingly hand-numbered Certificate of Authenticity
  - A complete plate story introducing you to the artist and detailing the significance of this recommendation
  - The potential for appreciation – like 1989's "The Jaguar," which last traded on The Bradford Exchange at \$84.00 281% of its \$29.90 issue price
  - The BRADEX® number fired on the back of your plate means it is listed for trading on The Bradford Exchange

Finally, it notes that "Some exceptional plates appreciate in value; some plates go down, and many remain at or near issue price. But the edition of this plate is strictly limited to a maximum of 95 firing days, and demand is expected to be strong. So if you wish to obtain this plate at the \$29.90 issue price, the time to act is now."

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- 5 Timeless Creations, The Collectibles/Specialty Doll Division of Matel, Inc. advertised “Royal Splendor Barbie” from “The Presidential Porcelain Barbie Collection.” The design of the embroidery on the doll’s gown “was created by master artist Francois Lesage – the most renowned high fashion embroiderer in the world. Founded in 1924, the House of Lesage creates 90 percent of the beading and embroidery that decorates French high fashion.” It features “Handsewn sequins and beads” and “genuine Swarovski® crystal earrings,” is “In every way, a work of art,” and “can only be purchased by direct subscription for a first issue price of \$189.”
- 6 The Danbury Mint promoted the “Fantasy of the Crystal Chess Set” featuring “the power of the crystal” through “A sparkling crystal [which] adorns each playing piece!” The pieces themselves are “Remarkably detailed pewter sculptures; magnificent chessboard included at no extra charge!” when the purchaser buys all 32 pieces at \$19.95 each plus shipping and handling. On the “reservation application” is a space for the “Name to print on Certificate of Registration.”
- 7 The final such ad in this week’s supplement was for the Franklin Mint’s “Limited Edition Collector Plate,” “The Pause That Refreshes” authorized by the Coca-Cola Company and showing one of Haddon Sundblom’s illustrations done for Coca-Cola Christmas season advertising. “In the tradition of the most prized collectibles, this imported heirloom collector plate is crafted of fine porcelain and lavished with breathtaking color. And it is hand-numbered and bordered in 24 karat gold.” At “just \$29.95, this Limited Edition will be *closed forever* after just 45 firing days” and is “Available *exclusively* from The Franklin Mint.”

Prior to a recent law suit settled out of court, Bradford Exchange’s advertising alluded to the potential for appreciation in more seductive terms, even though only 18 percent of its plates traded at above their original selling price after its 30 percent commission charges, and declines outnumbered advances in plate prices by 475 to 269 (Berman and Sullivan 1992). An analysis of themes on the seventy plates in a 1993 copyright Bradford Exchange catalog suggests a strong parallel with the sentimental themes of Currier and Ives a century ago (Lynes 1955). There are an abundance of kittens, puppies, flowers, birds, angels, exotic jungle animals, horses, nostalgically rendered cottages, heroic baseball greats, cherubic children, cheery Charles Wysocki early American rural scenes, Disney cartoons, American heroic presidents Lincoln and Kennedy, Egyptiana, and Elvis Presley plates. As the advertisements suggest and as Roberts (1990) also reports, these mass-produced pieces are typically tiny miniatures, lovingly crafted by famous artisans in time-honored ways that reek of authenticity



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and promise to lend any would-be collector's home a touch of enviable class. They are produced in limited editions of perhaps 25,000 pieces and the reader will become a serious connoisseur by simply completing a reservation application.

It is all too easy to strike an elitist pose and adopt an attitude of ridicule toward those who would respond to such offerings (Beckham and Brooks 1989), and each social stratum will find its own example of inferior taste, as with the criticism of three art gallery chains "whose shares trade over the counter, use mass merchandising to sell 'signed limited edition' prints and sculptures, usually produced in lots of 300–500" (Schiff 1989). The latter indictment goes on to complain that:

Each work is described as "fine art" – a term that many critics would call a misnomer. And these art objects carry very lofty retail margins. Simply put, the name of the game is selling class to the masses – at least the masses of 30- to 50-year-olds with enough discretionary income to shell out several thousand dollars for objects produced in bulk and which may satisfy some buyers' psychological need to show that they have "arrived."

(Schiff 1989, p. 14)

Still something is going on here that deserves further consideration. Is this any more than the usual elitist criticism of the popular art of a lower social class as kitsch (e.g., Dorfles 1969), or the broader criticism of consumerism and the market in general (Belk 1983)? Yes. The issue is that of what shall constitute and be the fate of "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," to use Walter Benjamin's (1968a) famous and apt delineation of the issue. It is not just that these objects are for sale that is new. As Carpenter (1983) points out, "Michelangelo worked for money without loss of integrity. Yet he never mass-produced debased Christian altar pieces, suitably modified to meet Arab taste, to peddle on the wharfs of Venice" (n.p.n). Commercially, the fact that we are dealing with collectibles is also relevant. Because collectors require constant serial additions to their collections, the sale of durable goods (collectibles) is very much like that of non-durable goods requiring repeated replenishment (Hansen 1966). Coupled with implicit promises of investment potential and snob appeal, it is easy to see why firms like those in the advertisements quoted above are doing well. The Bradford Exchange is estimated to have sales of \$250 million and a pretax income of \$20 million (Berman and Sullivan 1992). Even more profitable is the more upscale limited-edition print firm of Martin Lawrence which is estimated to have earned an after-tax profit of 17 percent, or over \$8 million, on sales of about \$48 million in 1989 (Schiff 1989).

Benjamin's concern was that with the advent of lithography, photography, film, and other mass-reproduction techniques, art is threatened with a loss of authenticity and aura; it becomes a mere commodity. Aura is

a ritualistically instilled magical power that Benjamin argued inhered only in the original. He thus recognized that authenticity is socially constructed and transcends "mere genuineness." "This is particularly apparent," Benjamin says, "in the collector who always retains some traces of the fetishist and who by owning the work of art, shares in its ritual power" (1968a, p. 246). Stated in different terms, Klapp (1991) uses the metaphor of inflation to suggest that the more common a symbol is, the less powerful it becomes. As epitomized by Andy Warhol's silk-screen renderings of mass-produced brands, made in a studio appropriately named "the Factory," Pop artists' appropriations of mass media, mass advertising, mass production, mass brands, and mass taste to produce what the art world sanctions as art, seem to make a mockery of Benjamin's concern. In fact, Warhol print production was geared to demand, so that the most expensive of his prints today are also the most abundant; rarer ones are rarer because they were less well received. By locating power only in the unique (what Kubler (1962) called "prime objects"), Benjamin joined Adorno as a Marxist elitist attempting to defend high culture from the threatened encroachments of the masses. He failed to acknowledge the power and magic that can be generated by mass-produced images (Belk *et al.* 1989). As Warhol, Tom Wesselmann, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, and other Pop artists showed in the 1960s and 1970s (Danto 1992; Kunzle 1984; Mamiya 1992), as Kurt Schwitters, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and other Cubists hinted in the 1910s and 1920s (Varnedde and Gopnik 1990), and as Haim Steinbach, Sylvie Fleury, Jeff Koons, Louise Lawler, and other Neo-Conceptualist, Neo-Geoists, or Simulationists have shown in the 1980s and 1990s (Cotter 1988; Janus 1992; Joselit 1988; Lurie 1986; Smith 1988), there is considerable magical power in consumer goods, advertising, and brands. Tomlinson (1990) reverses Benjamin and calls this the aura of the commodity. Benjamin should have known better. He himself was an inveterate collector of a mass-produced commodity: books (see Benjamin 1968b). If such mass-produced objects as books, even rare editions, lack an aura by themselves, their ardent pursuit, passionate acquisition, and worshipful possession in a collection can provide one. As Benjamin (1968b) recognizes, "The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership – for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object" (p. 60). Besides the aura-generating power of such contagious magic, "It is as if under certain conditions, the experience of possession could be transformed into the possession of experience" (Abbas 1988, p. 230). As Benjamin (1968a) unpacks his books and reflects on each hunt and each acquisition whose result he holds, he re-possesses his collecting experiences. But more than this is involved in investing ordinary objects with an aura through their collection. Kopytoff explains how collecting singularizes a former commodity and turns it into something absolutely unique and verging on the numinous:



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There is clearly a yearning for singularization in complex societies. Much of it is satisfied individually, by private singularization, often on principles as mundane as the one that governs the fate of heirlooms and old slippers alike – the longevity of the relation assimilates them in some sense to the person and makes parting from them unthinkable. Sometimes the yearning assumes the proportions of a collective hunger, apparent in the widespread response to ever-new kinds of singularizations. Old beer cans, matchbooks, and comic books suddenly become worthy of being collected, moved from the sphere of the singularly worthless to that of the expensive singular. And there is a continuing appeal in stamp collecting – where one may note, the stamps are preferably canceled ones so there is no doubt about their worthlessness in the circle of commodities for which they were originally intended.

(Kopytoff 1986, p. 80)

A large part of what makes certain ordinary consumption objects extraordinary to collectors is that they have been selected and saved by the collector, not because of any inherent use value, but precisely for their non-use value. The delight of Benjamin and most other avid book collectors is not in reading these books, but rather in acquiring and possessing them (Brook 1980; Jackson 1989; Wright and Ray 1969). Thus, Abbas (1988) succinctly discerns, “the collector is engaged exactly in a struggle *against* universal commodification” (p. 220). The introduction of investment motivations in collecting is problematic in this regard. Kopytoff notes that this makes advertisements like those quoted above employ a curious line of logic: “The appeal to greed in their advertising is complex: buy this plate now while it is still a commodity, because later it will become a singular ‘collectible’ whose very singularity will make it into a higher-priced commodity” (p. 81). As Kopytoff (1986) also points out, areas of collecting activity must be socially sanctioned rather than absolutely idiosyncratic. This social specification of collecting-area boundaries and the collector’s selection of this area of collecting then create the liminal border across which the empowered (priestly) collector brings special objects into the collection, and in so doing decommunitizes, singularizes, and sacralizes them (Belk *et al.* 1989). This is not to suggest that collecting-area subcultures do not have their own social definitions of authenticity and genuineness, especially – though not solely – in the West. But the phenomenon of singularizing objects through collecting them vividly shows how aura, which has never been inherent in the object, can in the twentieth century attach to mass-produced branded commodities as well as unique works of art.

Two further characteristics of mass-produced objects that make them suitable for collecting are their frequent seriality and abundance. Seriality provides a new type of collector goal, as Johnson (1986) suggests: “Only

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certain kinds of collectibles produced in identical multiples – stamps, coins, beer mats – lend themselves to a pattern of acquisition whereby collectors own an example of every type ever produced” (p. 73). Thus, the type A, ordering, collector produced by the Enlightenment is uniquely catered to in a mass-production economy. But with the principle of abundance, so too is the type B, aesthetic, collector. There is a romantic aesthetic delight in abundance that Walter Benjamin (1978) ascribed to Eduard Fuchs – an avid collector of caricatures, genre pictures, and pornography – thus: “he takes a Rabelaisian delight in quantities” (p. 243). This is the same delight evident in *Kunstkammern*, in the numerous paintings depicting such overstuffed cabinets, studios, and early galleries, and among the vast majority of collectors who delight in the sheer quantity of wonderful objects they have amassed. This delight in profusion was greatly facilitated by mass production and by the corresponding democratization of luxury consumption in general and collecting in particular.

Returning to what we might find objectionable about the “instant collectibles” for which advertisements were summarized above, there is one argument that is most likely to arise from a type B aesthetic collector, but which might also be heard from a type A taxonomic collector. This objection concerns the fact that such collectibles have been pre-selected for the buyer. Grasskamp captures the loss that this may entail:

it is in any case no longer a case of genuine collecting, especially when the final state of the completed collection is already fixed in advance. The aura of dreariness which emanates from those empty stamp albums in which the appropriate space for every stamp is reserved with a clear pre-printed indication as to which stamp is to be stuck in where, is characteristic of many other areas of collecting in which collecting is degraded to the status of a species of time-tabled acquisition by the existence of products which are manufactured for the express purpose of becoming “collector’s items.” The art of collecting demands the element of surprise; the collector should not be allowed to know right from the outset what lies in store when he decides for instance to collect radios, even though it is clear that it is only radios he is going to collect. What those radios are going to look like, how and where the collector is going to ferret them out, how he is going to keep the price down – all these things are an intrinsic part of the ritual of collecting which all boils down to a matter of the *organization of coincidences*. The only objects which can be considered worth collecting are those which are not easy to find but which are likely to be discovered incidentally and unexpectedly; collecting along these lines is an effective life-insurance policy against boredom, it is a game of chance.

(Grasskamp 1983, pp. 139–140)



Most people engaged in “genuine collecting” would no doubt agree with Grasskamp’s diagnosis of what is missing with instant collectibles. His analysis also hints at some of the motives that seem to be involved in twentieth-century mass collecting. These motives are the subject to be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Grasskamp’s analysis also emphasizes that collecting is an ordering, sense-making, modernistic pursuit. For the type B aesthetic collector, there is still a category that defines the collection’s boundaries and the collection still has unity. Although Nicholson’s (1994) novel *Hunters & Gatherers* introduces the possibility of postmodern collections that lack unity, collecting remains firmly rooted in modernism. As we shall see, this seems essential for some of the pleasures sought through the activity of collecting.

#### SUMMARY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTING AND CONSUMER CULTURE

We have seen in the development of collecting a strong coincidence with the development of consumer culture. This coincidence is not entirely due to factors on the supply side of the economy – those of producing more potentially collectible products, lowering their prices, and selling and advertising them in romantically appealing ways. It is also due to factors of demand as the materialistic consumption ethos of a consumer society emerged, as the increasing affluence of time and money made collecting possible for almost everyone, as alienation in the workplace made work-like hobbies an appealing source of dignity, and as the hope for transcendent magic shifted from religion to science to consumption. Museums played more of a role as both a cause and an effect of such changes than has been acknowledged in the treatment thus far, and this will be addressed in Chapter Four. In the final chapter I will also offer a critical assessment of the desirability and consequences of collecting for the individual and for society. Another important missing piece in understanding collecting is the individual phenomenology of collecting that is the subject of the next chapter. What collecting is and why we collect are the key questions that are addressed in Chapter Three.