

The Collector's World

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I just want to have them. I just want a lot of them.

(Lasse Brogaard, collector of *special collection* Barbie-dolls)

The *thing* that is missing

In Jean de la Bruyère's *Les Caractères ou les Moeurs de ce siècle* from 1688 we meet Diognètes, who collects medals and is in search of just the one that is missing to fill the last empty drawer in his cabinet. He does not really know much about medals, but he will sacrifice almost everything to get the last one. Another of the book's characters, Démocèdes, spends twenty years in order to find the last print of Collot, which will complete his collection. He, too, lacks just one work, and that is exactly this. But the cost of his collector's mania is huge. His daughters have to go badly dressed and starve in bed, and the chance of them getting married is less than small. To be sure, all these problems could be solved, if only Démocèdes wanted to sell the collection, but he will surely not do that (Chang 1996: 95).

Collecting is not about aesthetic beauty, pleasure or even perfectness, but simply about filling the gap. What one does not yet have means far more than what one already has. As Bruyère writes:

Collecting is not a taste of what is good or beautiful, but for what is rare and unique, for what one has and what others lack. It is not an attachment for that which is perfect, but for that which is sought after and in fashion. It is not an amusement, but a passion often so violent that it is no less potent than love or ambition except for the smallness of its object. It is not a passion that one has generally for rare things of value, but only for a certain thing that is rare, and at the same time, in vogue. (Bruyère quoted in Chang 1996: 95)

The collector is absorbed by an intense desire, the hunt for the next object. However, this object does not merely enter into the series as just another of its kind. The new object is that which is to make the collection complete, or at least more complete, thereby adding to its value. A collection is not a simple multiplicity, an accumulation of things. Each collected object has a double value, an intrinsic value and a value in relation to the collection (to which the object also simultaneously adds value just as it increases the value of each of the earlier finds, which are now part of a larger and more distinguished whole).

At the same time, each new acquisition has a dual and contradictory function. On the one hand it is thought of as the one that completes the collection, as what is missing, but each new object

paradoxically pushes the boundary of the collection so that a new and yet to be acquired object gets the role of that which drives desire and thus also the collector forward (Baudrillard 2005: 92). The collection has an object as its focal point that corresponds to this constitutive lack, this eternal 'one more.' What controls the collector's desire, the initiator of the desire itself, is an object of a special kind, which Lacan has termed as the objet petit *a*. Even though it is called an object, however, we may better understand what is at stake if we think of it as a space. Occupying this space, any object can be sublimated. As such, the transcendental object, *a*, is imagined to be the *one* object that, once and for all, can satisfy desire. With this object, it is anticipated, the collection will be completed. Yet, this feeling is over as soon as the object is added to the collection. In other words, *a* and *a* are not the same.

The worst thing that can happen, though, is that the collection is completed (Baudrillard 1996: 99). Approaching completion will change the rules for the structure and the content of the collection. At this point, the collector might throw his or her love on a new item, things in a new colour, or on a new supplement to the collection. For some collectors, this problem solves itself as the collection is defined as an open series. At any rate, to collect is to be on the move. The collector is not motivated by the collection, but by what is missing in it, by the objet petit *a*. Herein lies the reason why one cannot just buy a collection. It is the chase itself and especially the memories attached to the chase – all collectors know exactly where and how they got a specific thing – that drives and defines collectors (Baekeland 1994: 209). Collecting, in other words, is not about what you collect. It is about the process of collecting itself. With a term borrowed from the military strategy, the acquired objects are a form of collateral damage, an accumulation of things that is merely a by-product of the desire to collect.

Desire and enjoyment

One might think that collectors must be some of the most dissatisfied people imaginable. But then one misses something absolutely central, the desire to collect. The term collector mania seeks to capture this desire grounded in conquering and failing simultaneously. Collecting is a loss of control, an obsession. One is no longer an initiating subject, but merely a supplement to the collection. The collection requires...

The desire we have for things is a socially mediated desire. Desire is a desire for the other's desire (Lacan 1998: 235). Most collectors are socially oriented, they want what others want, and they want to be the object of the other's desire. To be sure, some are very private, but still they compare themselves to others, at the very least through the price of collected items. The price is interesting as it signals how rare and in demand something is, as Bruyère also emphasizes above. Further, in the world of the collector, one often hears criticisms of other collections: they have no sense of aesthetic value; they merely collect according to fashion; they buy too cheap items, without investing in museum-quality works... The collector is embarrassingly conscious about what the others have and how they enjoy the status that a collection can give.

Against this background, we can also understand the widespread practice of showing one's latest findings on social media. Others can then admire one's latest conquests and, more generally, one's taste and style, the scale of the collection, or the rarity of things. The response comes immediately in the form of likes and comments, and in the second instance in the form of new followers or 'friends'. But for whom are these images uploaded? Lacan calls this imaginary body, which is to ratify our desires, the big Other. What 'man' thinks is good taste certainly varies from one collector

community to another, while this 'man' is also influenced by advertisements, lifestyle magazines and so on. The key, however, is that the notion of 'man' functions, for the collector, as a reference for orientation. One collects for the pleasure of the Other.

The useless

The collector's mode of action is systematic. In the collection, each new object has a meaning and a strategic location. Thus, it is illuminating to compare the collector to the compulsive hoarder. Whereas the hoarder lacks a criterion for choosing between the important and the peripheral, for choosing in general (Frost & Hartl 1996), the collector is in minute control. Everything makes sense in a collection only in relation to an overall plan. You cannot hunt everything. If the object becomes too easy or too difficult to acquire, motivation dissipates. The rules of the collection must strike a balance between the too easy and the too difficult. Therefore, it often happens that the set of rules changes as one's finances are improved or deteriorated as the collection grows, or simply because what one collects stops being available. Then the collector might turn to something new, start collecting something else.

The collector differs from the hoarder in another, more crucial sense. No matter how peculiar it sounds, the hoarder is one who orients himself to the use value of things. He or she stores objects because they may turn out to be useful later. For the collector, in contrast, it is essential that the objects of the collection are, strictly speaking, useless. Indeed, any collection calls for the juxtaposition of the useless to 'proper,' instrumental use. What is at stake here is the duality of use, the conflict between instrumental use understood as technical, practical and goal-oriented efficiency and free use which is its own purpose, without an expectation of a return in the form of efficiency, profit or productivity. In this context, the defense of free use often wears the mask of defending the 'use of uselessness' (see Ordine 2017). A world that denies the useless a space can only be put at a distance by the useless. For the collector, the real catastrophe is therefore not uselessness but a world dominated by the useful alone. Collecting always entails a possibility of profanation, of putting things into different uses, even taking them out of circulation, challenging, therefore, the consensus on the definitions of 'proper' use. As such, it constitutes a paradigmatic case of contemplation, where potentiality (of the collected items) ceases to be put into proper use (see Agamben 2015: 58). Collecting is an inoperative praxis that precludes the disappearance of potential into the act, a praxis, which allows the collector habitually to extract objects from the domain of instrumental use and to contemplate them as if on 'the final day of history' (Agamben 1993: 72).

'Collection value'

A collector does not collect items because they are useful but because they fit into the collection as aesthetic objects to be contemplated. Their value is not 'use value' but 'collection value'. In this respect, collecting is like being a believer; just as miracles appear only to the believers, the collection value is visible only to the collectors. Imagine a collector who owns five thousand pieces of unused erasers. Such a person incarnates the idea of collecting in its purest form. The collected object is not an object defined in relation to its function. A collected vase is not just a vase. It has something singular about it. At the same, however, the collected object first finds its value in relation to a system, partly the collection and partly the market. Thus, the objects of the collections

are singular and express a common set at once. There is no collection without this tension, without the double determination as particular and universal.

‘Absolute art is the absolute commodity,’ Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970: 39; our translation). It is precisely the absence of use value that makes the work of art an absolute, or, if one prefers, perfect commodity. The artwork is a pure product of demand, of the collectors’ desire for it. Therefore, the price of the items in a collection can fluctuate sharply. Their production conditions also play a decisive role in this context. If they are produced merely to stimulate collectors’ interest, their value rarely holds.

One can often see collectors, on social media for instance, asking for an assessment of their collection or a collected item. Not because they want to sell, but because they seek recognition through assessment. This focus on economic value, however, does not diminish the opportunity to enjoy the objects aesthetically. On the contrary, the more financially valuable, the prettier. For many collectors, the price is a proxy for aesthetic quality. Apropos of Marx’s distinction between use value and exchange value, one can say that the market adds something extra to a collection, a surplus value that is not objectively given. Hence, one can agree with Adorno that art is the absolute commodity since it has no intrinsic (use) value. But the sign value and the exchange value of a collected object are not only central to the works of art but to everything that is part of a collection. The collection value may be precisely the synthesis of the object’s value in relation to the collection (its sign value) and in relation to other collectors (its exchange value). In this respect, a collection of erasers can function in the same way, according to the same logic, as a collection of expensive paintings.

The collector’s psychopathology

In Japanese, there is a word for buying books you do not read, *Tsundoku*. One could say that a pottery collection, for instance, in contrast to a book collection, is actually used, e.g. enjoyed for its aesthetic qualities. But then again, many collectors have far more than can be put on display. The collection is often stored in cupboards and boxes. In such cases, the value lies in the idea of having things. Yet, even when hidden away in boxes or standing in a remote store, the collection generates enjoyment. Robert Pfaller’s (2017) concept ‘interpassivity’ is helpful to understand such enjoyment. In contrast to interactivity, which signifies the active participation of a subject in a reciprocal process, interpassivity describes a movement through which the burden of activity is lifted from the subject’s shoulders. The chorus in the Greek tragedies, which cries for the audience, or canned laughter, which enables the spectators to avoid the ‘burden’ of laughing as the TV tells jokes, are classical examples. Similarly, the CD collection, the record collection, the video collection, or, yes, the book collection, do listening, watching or reading for us, instead of us. It is the same with collections. The collection relieves me of a burden. But which burden, precisely? A possible answer is the burden of aesthetic creation. Through the collection, I can think of myself as a form of artist. The collection becomes a work that bears the collector’s signature. The collector is not just an accumulator of things, but he or she thinks of the collection as his or her work of art.

It is not unusual for the collector to understand herself as someone who gives things new life. Therefore, Benjamin (1992) describes in his text on collecting books how he saved them from oblivion. He found them on his travels, preferably in stores tucked away in dust and mist. He bought them and brought them to life through his fragments. Similarly, the ceramic collector can find forgotten treasures in flea markets, for instance, and give them honor and dignity by placing

them in the collection, that is, in a larger esthetic whole. Likewise, the stamp collector can wash stamps of letters and put them into a collection, after which the stamps become part of a history, gaining, at the same time, value by having a place in the collection.

However, the collection allows interpassivity at a more fundamental level. According to psychoanalysis, the collector is a (compulsive) neurotic and collecting is a way to avoid confronting the primordial lack, the contingency of life. Collecting, at its most radical, is a way to bracket death, to avoid seeing it in the eye. Thus, there is more at stake in collecting than aesthetic pleasure. Consider children. Almost all children collect; most actively, when they are between seven and twelve years old (Baudrillard 2005: 93). The urge to collect can be seen here as a way to free oneself from the mother. Psychoanalysis claims that at some point the child experiences a form of symbolic castration. It must admit that there is something between it and the mother: the father, who, as the child discovers, also desires the mother. Following this discovery, the symbiotic relation to the desired object, to the mother, is replaced by another blocked relation, by the father's No. The child copes with this loss by collecting. The collected objects of desire become substitutes for the lost object, the mother. Moreover, this process is not merely about investing libido in ersatz objects; it also involves experimentation with mastering the absence and the lack. The postponement of the confrontation with the lack itself becomes a form of mastery. As Danet and Katriel put it, 'Collections are like pets: objects of affection: they are also objects of domination and control' (1994: 228).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1976) describes a scene where his eighteen-month old grandson plays with a yarn. The child throws it out, says 'fort' and takes it back, saying 'da'. 'Away' and 'here'. What the child is practicing is, according to Freud, to master the mother's absence. The collector does the same. Contingency and necessity coincide in the collector's strategy. Contingency becomes a necessity. Collecting becomes a way of managing time. Time turns into the intervals between the conquests, that is, is domesticated and gets a direction. A collector, in this sense, always knows what to do. There is never nothing to do.

Between the world's irreversible evolution and ourselves, objects interpose a discontinuous, classifiable, reversible screen which can be reconstituted at will, a segment of the world which belongs to us, responding to our hands and minds and delivering us from anxiety. Objects do not merely help us to master the world by virtue of their integration into instrumental series, they also help us, by virtue of their integration into mental series, to master time, rendering it discontinuous and classifying it, after the fashion of habits, and subjecting it to the same associational constraints as those which govern the arrangement of things in space. (Baudrillard 2005: 100-101)

The collector is defined as much by the collection as the collection is by him. There is indeed a perfect symmetry here. The seriality (building the collection) is at the same time a constant and controlled sequentialization of time. Through the collection, one can organize time in the form of continuous sequences (fort – da), and ease one's existential anxiety. So the constitutive lack in the being becomes tolerable as it is re-articulated as the lack of a serially determined object. By the same token, the contingent (and in the extreme case death, which is the contingency par excellence) is put at a distance, pacified, and controlled.

It is here that the collector's mania appears to be (compulsively) neurotic (Subkowski 2017: 386ff). The neurotic circulates around a lack. While in psychosis this lack breaks down the self, in the neurotic it is internalized and projected onto an object of libidinal investment. The neurotic has a

‘project’ and knows how to hold together one’s self. Everybody has such ‘projects’, which is why Freud also talked about a normal neurotic individual. The collector throws frenetic energy into collecting, but this energy also allows the collector to avoid dealing with a lack, which is not a lack of things but a fundamental lack in the being.

History of collections

The psychoanalytic explanation is ahistorical. A lack of being is cultivated through collecting: fort–da. However, this cultivation can take place in multiple ways, which are historically determined, and represent different positions in the social field. Further, they are expressions of individual collecting strategies. In this prism, there are three eras in the history of collections.

The first we can call the period of sovereignty. Here collecting is to gather something that is reserved for the few who want to stand out. It could be the monarchs, the scientists, the business owners or artists. In this regard, the collection is an expression of a sovereign and useless consumption. Through the collection, one shows that he is not one of the crowd, distinguishing oneself through taste, knowledge and/or financial ability. Recall Getty, Wallraff and Guggenheim, American corporate magnates who owned big collections. Likewise, several scientists had large collections based on their ability to travel. One can also mention here Freud, who had a collection of three thousand antique objects even though he reflected only sporadically on the collector’s mania. Further, the collector’s mania is also widespread in artistic circles. Honoré de Balzac and Walter Benjamin had large book collections. Umberto Eco’s drive to collect is also well-known, and so on.

People have always collected. Some of the earliest cultures were the so-called hunter-gatherers. Yet, here what was collected was defined in terms of use value. In the era of sovereignty, though, the collection became a symbol of consumption as is the case with the potlatch described by Mauss, Levi-Strauss and Bataille. The potlatch was a religious ritual in which tribes competed about giving the greatest possible gifts and destroying their possessions. The further one was willing to go, the greater the status. These ritualized destructions were a reserve of the richest and the most powerful in society. Similarly, the sovereign collection is a form of potlatch. It is not directly a destruction, but a destruction of the circulating, working capital. Thus, the rich can show their surplus by purchasing large collections of art. Private museums can be set up to house these collections. Recall, for example, Henry Clay Frick’s (1849-1919) in Manhattan, who, like other American collectors, mimicked the European kings, who had long collected almost whatever.

Royal Acquisition and display of possessions luxurious and rare beyond the imagination of even the nobility helped establish and reinforce the theoretically boundless power of the king. An essential purpose of royal goods was to demonstrate the creative and economic strength of the monarch and the loyalty of his court against both domestic and foreign challenges. Or so it was put in a complaint to Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), controleur general de finances, concerning bourgeois emulation of the court, ‘the court of sovereign princes is the principal place where is manifested the magnificence from the splendor or obscurity of which foreign princes or their ambassadors make inferences about the strength of the kingdom.’ (Auslander 1996: 35)

Unsurprisingly, the collections changed character with the transition to industrial society. In the industrial mass society, the collections are no longer the privilege of the elite, but they start to look

like one another. The new precondition to collect is not economic surplus but a surplus of time. Sociality is no longer grounded in boasting and envy but in exchange. The collector's desire becomes systematized and organized, and the collection item turns into a purely collectible object. Whereas what was collected before was, as a rule, related to the useless and the superfluous, the objects of the collection in the industrial era are often worthless in themselves (such as used stamps, postcards, erasers, pens...).

However, the massifying collections of industrial modernity slowly but surely became unpopular. There are not many stamp collectors left today. What we have now is a kind of hybrid between the sovereign and the mass collectors. People still collect, but in order to individualize themselves. Concomitantly, what is collected is no longer standard items, but, ideally, something unique. One could claim that the collector's mania of our time is given by a nostalgic longing for something lost in the Fordist era of mass production and mass consumption. For example, collecting Scandinavian Design items can be taken as a sign of longing for handcraft. There is a joy and a pleasure in seeing and knowing that things have been through human hands, that they are individual, or at least have an individual character, precisely because this is what we are losing in our culture (Sennett 2008). The unique objects enable one to (re)create oneself through the collection. Herein, too, we can grasp why the collection is a work of art. The collection is a project of self-formation. The collector immortalizes himself through the collection in the same way as the artist immortalizes himself through his work.

If there is anything that can annoy collectors, it is reproduction. If you are a collector, you must have the original, the object from 'that time', even though the newly re-produced ones seem to be identical to the original. There are surely, always, small minimal signs of difference that reveal a difference between the original and the production, and recognizing these minimal signs is the characteristic mark of the collector.

Collecting as a field

We have so far described the field of collecting diachronically. The way of collecting, who collects, how many, and what is collected change. However, one can also make use of a synchronous perspective and try to capture how different collectors collect and especially how they position themselves in relation to each other. In this regard, Bourdieu's concept of 'field' is useful (1989, 1993). A field emerges when a group fights about the same thing, a field-specific capital, thanks to a shared *illusio*, the self-referential belief that the game is worth playing (Bourdieu 1994 151f). This means that involvement with collecting is never merely theoretical. For a collector, collecting is a form of practice that involves libidinal involvement. As such, the *illusio* of collecting, the collector's self-referential belief in the value of collecting a certain item, is what grounds the sense of the field, which, of course, makes no sense to an outsider who does not share the same *illusio*.

The number of fields is not given; there are as many fields as there are struggles for different kinds of capital. One can thus speak of ceramic collecting, stamp collecting, Scandinavian design collecting, and so on, as differentiated fields, each of which can be divided further into subfields: collecting American stamps, German stamps, of stamps with horses, and so on. Moreover, any distinct form of collecting, ceramics for example, is both a production field and a consumption field. Let us take the aspect of production first. To continue with ceramics as an example, potters

position themselves in relation to each other as producers. Who is leading? Who makes art? In this field of production, the *doxa* is the pivotal element of the struggle: What is good and interesting ceramics? Different things can provide capital: education, the ability to determine higher prices for one's pottery, the ability to exhibit in the right places and to participate in the right networks. Consequently, a price is set for the individual potters' works, both in terms of prestige and in terms of market value. This is where the production field relates to a consumption field. The individual works here are capital in the economic sense. The price of the works rises and falls in relation to each other. The prestige related to owning those works follows the same trend. As a result, big collectors position themselves favorably in relation to small collectors; those with the good taste seek to elevate themselves above those with the bad taste; those who have the rare and expensive things attain more status in relation to those who own things that are easy to find, and so on. The potters produce the capital the collectors use in order to position themselves in relation to each other in the field.

Positions are at the same time dispositions. When you have a taste for a kind of ceramics from a certain origin, you also position yourself in relation to others who do not have this taste. In this regard, the emphasis on taste is often a devaluation of the others' stuff: something is mass produced, it has an uninspiring glaze, lacks the craftsmanship, etcetera. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the 'upper class' has an interest in maintaining the taste hierarchy, which reproduces the *doxa* of the field. The heterodox voices often come from the 'underclass' of the collector field. They are those who feel that their taste is devalued. But one's taste for something is also a distaste for something else, even for those who are at the 'bottom' of the field. In this process, inequalities are masked as differences in taste preferences. When Bourdieu talks about the social field, that is, society in general, he claims that there is an economic and a cultural upper class. Some are rich in money, others in knowledge and culture. In the same way, in the field of ceramics, it is not just about purchasing power. It is also about knowledge about the field. Both those who lack economic capital and those who are less knowledgeable recognize the co-existence of both dimensions. The heterodoxy, in this respect, comprises those who challenge the taste hierarchy. And finally, between the two classes, one could speak of a middle class which recognizes the taste of the 'upper class' but cannot afford it, while, at the same time, seeing itself as more educated and more taste-conscious than the lower class. They are the potential achievers of the collector field.

However, it is interesting not only to try to understand positions in the field of ceramics, but also to understand the logics of this field as interwoven with the larger field of art. Whereas in the past ceramics has not been considered to be of much value within the art field, perhaps not even to be art, today it has a more prominent place and enjoys wider recognition. This means at the same time that those who own the pottery have a greater status. The relationship between arts and crafts is especially interesting in this context. Ceramists may think that they are more 'down to earth' than visual artists, and visual artists may view ceramics as crafts more than art (see Bourdieu 1993: 125ff). But as pottery in general has become more skillful, it has also entered the galleries to much greater extent than before. One can thus easily imagine a larger field that includes artists, auction houses, collectors and museum people. They are struggling in the same field to acquire capital, e.g. more works of art, and their value. Further, one can discuss here who creates value in the field: the artists or the gallery owners? The authors or publishers? The museums or collectors? Essentially, of course, here is also the battle between the mainstream and the avant-garde and between great and commercial art (Bourdieu 1993: 74ff).

The typology of the collector

In the field of collecting, everything is measured against one another. What enables this is capital in its different forms: economic capital (providing purchasing power), cultural capital (knowledge of things, signatures, quality, and so on), social capital (collectors' contracts and networks) and symbolic capital (the value of the collection in the eyes of the others, that is, the recognition that comes from being rich in the three aforementioned forms of capital). But this stratification makes us immediately blind to a condition, to the fact that different collectors collect differently. Not only are there different principles behind the collections. They also see the objects differently. Here we must think in a phenomenological prism, and focus on how the objects appear to consciousness. There are at least four different types of collector and four corresponding types of objects in this prism. These four types also have different experiences of collecting.

The first type is the 'aesthete'. The aesthete buys what he or she believes has sublime aesthetic value. For this type, the works must be neat and well executed. In fact, you only collect the best and leave a work if it is not so good. The aesthete collects *works of art*, the sublime and that which transcends both the artist and the zeitgeist. The objects must be 'unique' in the dual sense of the word: they must be understood in their own right, and they must be supreme.

Second, there is the 'serial collector' bent on collecting something specific. It may be unique things or mass produced things (often the latter), but the idea is that you have to have it all. You can collect things by a certain potter, certain types of things, things from a certain period, from a certain area etcetera. The difference to the aesthete is that the serial collector buys everything, even if it is of little aesthetic value. What is bought is not regarded as a unique work of art but as an element that fits into a larger whole, in relation to a series.

Third, there is the historically orientated collector. He or she is interested in history, in the history of art, the history of furniture, the history of architecture, in the history of ceramics... Things are interesting because they can be positioned in periods related to an artist's work or art. The historically orientated collector recognizes that the individuality of each piece, but at the same time draws pleasure from being able to place it with respect to a whole, from being able to see that art deco is an intermediate form between Art Nouveau and functionalism, and functionalism between Art Deco and Modernism. Each item thus becomes part of a larger picture, of a longer story. What matters here is being able to see the continuities and discontinuities, the connections and the breaks, and the ways in which the old is brought forward in the new, being transformed or preserved through it. Concomitantly, what are collected are primarily objects that can say something about their epoch, their conditions of production and the people related to them.

The fourth type of collector is the treasure hunter. Central here is the pleasure of finding the remarkable things which others are stupid or ignorant enough to bypass or just too slow to catch. But what is collected is not necessarily 'big' items. For the hunter, it is not the object but finding it that is primary.

Then there is a fifth type, which is not really a collector: the merchant, who buys simply to resell. With this type, collecting is simply reduced to the *chrematistikē*, to the art of making money for the sake of making money. Consequently, money defines both the beginning and the end of the process of collecting: Money–Commodity/Collection–Money (see Marx 1976: 252). Thus, we meet in this type the absolute opposite of the aesthete. The collection items are bought not because they are aesthetically pleasing but because one can make money out of them. Along the same lines, the collection becomes an interest-bearing investment. You invest there where the

starting money-capital gives the greatest return, and it does not matter whether it is paintings or ceramics, as long as money begets money.

The four (or five) types are ideal types. Some live out a type in pure form, while others combine them. In general, the four types will tend to see each other's purchases as incomprehensible. However, they will often agree on one thing, that the merchants get in their way. The merchant type is a constant reminder that the collected items do not only represent an aesthetic value but are also commodities.

Cynicism

To be sure, collecting is about enjoyment, about enjoying the aesthetic value of what is collected or the 'collection value,' the surplus added to the object when it becomes part of a collection. Importantly, the precondition for such enjoyment is that all other considerations are bracketed. That is, the 'more,' the fetish character of the object, must appear as an attribute of the object itself. When collecting art, for instance, artworks must appear to be more than merely an effect of a production process. The artwork must seem to be exceeding its artist and the social network of causal relations that necessitate it. In the same way, an object of the collection must be more than a commodity: it must appear to have an intrinsic value.

Dewey is right in claiming that 'the typical collector is the typical capitalist' (1987: 12). However, the collector must always be more than that, since such a recognition kills the aesthetic experience and enjoyment of things. The collector is one who must live with this divide. One can argue with Sloterdijk (1988) that we are cynics who relate ironically to ideas, which we are effectively ruled by. Or, as Žižek claims, we suffer from 'enlightened false consciousness' (1989: 28). We might know that what is at stake is desire, that the collection is marked by the interference of others, by the market for example, that value is plastic, and so on, but nevertheless we can enjoy the collection and experience its objects as pure. For there is an enjoyment at stake. Perhaps that is the most magical aspect of collecting: being able to decode the game but still being seduced by it.

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