

Introducing the collector
Some person / Any person

This text is constructed after a small investigation on the 'living collection', the 'true collector' and my own tactics of collecting. While doing so I created the need to distinct the collector in two different parts.

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On the one hand I see the rational collector; a collector who is in favor of a bigger system, which allows him to enlarge his collection. Not only the additions to the content are then ruled by this system, but also its archive, categorization and – when all of this becomes visible – the display of the collection. The 'rational collector' knows there is an end to his practice, although this end might not yet be clear. He is trying to complete his collection; he is, so to say, aiming for the 'complete collection'.

On the other hand I see the intuitive collector; who, I presume, is always in need for more. He is in need for growing his [own] collection; he is greedy but fastidious, and acts out of instinct. His collection will grow spontaneous and irrationally; the rules of his 'unsystematic system' are purely ruled by the feeling and taste of the moment. Therefor the display of his collection and the relationships between the parts of its content is rather personal and probably for an outside public hard to understand or even incomprehensible. Like Walter Benjamin describes in his essay 'Unpacking my Library', memory might create the chaotic 'system' of intelligible relationships between the collected objects. This would mean no categorization is more suitable than the collectors own memory attached to the beloved objects of its collection.

I have in mind that the 'rational collector' for instance would collect different species of plants for his botanical garden. Species shown in cubes created for their 'natural habitat'; or either categorized in a systematic garden - a garden that shows the genetic relationship between plants in its formal order of display. So this collection is grown for a given purpose, it is mediated and lectured to the audience.

The 'intuitive collector' not at all is occupied with lecturing the whole. He is rather interested in showing one specific part to one specific person. Sharing an anecdote, showing one detail, reading one paragraph of his private book collection.

But what if those two different collectors mentioned above are Some person, Any person, one and the same person? What if the collector is constituting himself to a hierarchical system but within his rational collection he: feels and tastes, is greedy but fastidious, and is in need of growing his [own] collection?

Something like this will happen:

"Sitting on a bench, he passively watched how Bendico ruined the flower beds. Once in a while the dog turned his eyes to him as if asking for a compliment for the accomplished job; fourteen carnations snapped, half a hedgerow uprooted, a trench obstructed. 'Good Bendico, come here'. And the animal ran up to him, put his sandy nostrils on his hand; full of desire to show him that he was forgiven for the foolish interruption of the beautiful, accomplished work." 1

The highly structured botanical garden is ruined by joy and the systematic garden becomes the playground for an even more important game; a game with a future instead of a game from the past. The collector is both dog; praising the moment and both man; considering the action taking place. The 'rational collection' becomes a functional space; meaning it is used as a set for something unexpected to happen. The moment of creating the memory - that can later on be attached to the object, or in this case the 'accomplished work' - has started. The collection becomes alive.

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"Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order? ... And indeed, if there is a counterpart to the confusion of a library, it is the order of its catalogue." 2

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"Thus there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order. Naturally, his existence is tied to many other things as well: to a very mysterious relationship to ownership ... also, to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value - that is, their usefulness - but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate." 3

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"Only in extinction is the true collector comprehended" 4

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"... but the pleading look of the dog obliged him to go to the garden. Bendico had superb memories of yesterday evenings beautiful work and wanted to finish it, according to the artistic rules. The garden smelled even more than yesterday and the gold of the Mimosa decolorized less." 5

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- 1 Sicilian novel "Il Gattopardo" ('The Tigercat') Giuseppe Tomasi Di Lampedusa, 1951, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, Milano, own translation
- 2 essay 'Unpacking my Library' in 'Illuminations: Essays and Reflections' Walter Benjamin, 1955, schocken books, New York
- 3 idem.
- 4 idem.
- 5 Sicilian novel "Il Gattopardo" ('The Tigercat') Giuseppe Tomasi Di Lampedusa, 1951, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, Milano, own translation