# IMMATERIAL MATERIALITY: COLLECTING IN LIVE-ACTION FILM, ANIMATION, AND DIGITAL GAMES

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2009

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

ARTS AND SCIENCES

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October 26, 2009

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**IMMATERIAL MATERIALITY: COLLECTING IN LIVE-ACTION FILM,**

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This dissertation analyzes depictions of collecting and collectors in visual media, arguing that cultural conceptions which have long been reinforced by live-action film and animation are now being challenged by digital video games. The older notion of collectors as people dissociated from present-day society and unhealthily obsessed with either the past or the minutiae of inanimate objects are giving way to a new conception of the collector as an active manipulator of information in the present moment. The dissertation argues that this shift is partly influenced by the ontology of each media form. It focuses primarily on the rise of digital technology from the mid-1980s to the present, 1985 being the year the Nintendo Entertainment System was first introduced in the United States, reviving the flagging video game industry and posing a threat to the dominance of the cinema in visual entertainment media. Beginning with an overview of collecting in the Western hemisphere, it argues that popular stereotypes of collecting are out of step with the actuality of the practice. Analysis of the ontology of film links the tendency to portray the figure of the collector as a socially inept male, while the museum is a source of monsters and mystery. The animated film aligns itself with change and transformation and

thus rejects the stasis implied by traditional notions of collection. The interactive nature of digital games embraces colleting as a game activity, making the player a collector of digital objects, and the game collection a positive indicator of progress in the game.

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# PREFACE

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of many people. I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Lucy Fischer, Marcia Landy, Adam Lowenstein, Keiko McDonald, and Randall Halle, for their support and mentorship. All of them were generous with their time and provided insightful and challenging comments on my work. Additionally, in the early stages of the project they encouraged me to pursue an idea I thought was impossible at the time, and in doing so they ensured that the final project was uniquely my own. Additionally, I must acknowledge the contributions of my professors at Northeastern University for shaping my early interest in film studies: Inez Hedges, Kathy Howlett, and Michael Ryan.

Regrettably, two people were not present to see me complete this dissertation even though they were both instrumental to my intellectual career. I would therefore like to dedicate this dissertation to Keiko I. McDonald and Kathy M. Howlett. They are both missed.

Numerous colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh and elsewhere provided a fruitful intellectual environment, and to them also I owe a debt of gratitude. For reading drafts and putting up with my early struggles, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation reading group: Amy Borden, Christine Feldman, Brenda Glascott, Amanda Ann Klein, Tara Lockhart, and Kirsten Strayer. For their participation in the very small, but immensely productive, summer reading group on digital media, I would like to thank Tanine Allison and Ryan Pierson. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support of Mark Lynn Anderson, Christine Baker, David Bartholomae, Anustup Basu, Manisha Basu, Jamie Bono, Troy Boone, Jane Feuer, Nancy

# 1.0    INTRODUCTION


In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey argues that "While technology never simply determines, it cannot but affect the context in which ideas are formed" (Mulvey 9), and this is the founding premise of *Immaterial Materiality: Collecting in Live-Action Film, Animation, and Digital Games* as well. Mulvey's book, like many others, addresses the effect of digital technology on he cinema. Even before the crisis of the digital image arose, Siegfried Kracauer was similarly concerned with the nature of the photographic medium in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. His study, as mine, "rests upon the assumption that each medium has a specific nature which invites certain kinds of communications while obstructing others" (Kracauer 3). That is to say, various media are most aesthetically pleasing when they engage the dynamics of their ontological properties, either to affirm or contest them.

This project seeks to address this issue from a new direction by exploring the cinematic portrayal of a particular and important cultural activity--collecting. By examining this practice, the people who engage in it, and how both are positioned in visual entertainment media, my study reveals how each media form, live-action film, animation, and digital gaming, shapes the representation of the material world. My project seeks not to establish the most aesthetically pleasing use of visual entertainment media, but rather to analyze cinema at a pivotal moment in time when cultural conceptions which have long been reinforced by live-action film and animation are now being challenged by digital video games. Also challenged are older notions of

collectors as people dissociated from present-day society and unhealthily obsessed with either the past or the minutiae of inanimate objects. These now are giving way to a new conception of the collector as an active manipulator of information in the present moment.

Chapter 1, "Sinister Souvenirs and the Tears of Things: Private and Public Collecting in the Western World," argues that visual entertainment media shape popular understanding of the practice of collecting. Collecting is a popular hobby and the collection is the backbone of the public museum. Although approximately 30% of the population of Western cultures engages in some form of collecting at any given time, the entertainment media's representation of collecting portrays a very different picture than the documented reality of the practice. The stereotypical depiction of a collector is a socially inept male loner who uses his collected objects as a substitute for human interaction. Yet as Susan M. Pearce has demonstrated, collectors are more often female than male, and they are typically well adjusted with active social and family lives. In fact, the lives of collectors do not differ demographically from the lives of non-collectors to any significant extent.

Beginning with an overview of the evolution of collecting, Chapter 1 examines both the causes and effects of the popular misconception of the collector as deviant and traces the history of public and private collecting in the Western world. From a private practice of aristocratic families, to a status symbol for the nation-state, to a kitschy pastime, collecting has become a powerful force for organizing and understanding the material world. The chapter further analyzes the intervention of digital media into collecting practices, examining the different conceptions of the virtual museum and the changing role of the museum in our digital society. Whereas previously, collected objects emphasized materiality and ownership, digital objects have

questionable ownership status, and when there are multiple identical copies and no original, the role of ownership is downplayed.

On the presumption that digital games are interfering in a long-standing tendency of film to depict private collecting as a deviant activity while nevertheless upholding the idea of the public museum as a valuable tool for education and historical preservation, the examples chosen for Chapter 2, "'It Belongs in a Museum:' Collecting in Live-Action Film," are drawn from post-1980 films. Roman Polanski's *The Ninth Gate* (1999) exhibits fears about the obsessive nature of collectors in a neo-noir story about a satanic book collector. *Everything is Illuminated* (Liev Schreiber, 2005) presents a portrait of a socially awkward youth who collects mementoes of family history. Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* series (1989 - 2008) takes a different tactic, centering on the tomb raider extraordinaire (despite Jones' assertions to the contrary) who is not himself a collector, merely an "obtainer" of rare objects for museums. Stephen Frears' *High Fidelity* (2000) updates the figure of a collector by focusing on a modern-day fanboy, but his collecting is still linked to stunted social growth. Finally, the two *Night at the Museum* movies (Shawn Levy, 2006 and 2009) showcase the museum as the source of supernatural forces and adventure. Ultimately, live-action film employs in a contradictory manner the stereotype of the socially deviant private *collector*, but at the same time valorizes the public *collection* (e.g., the museum). Theories of cinematic ontology are reflected in the representation of museums and collecting. According to the traditional understanding of the "indexical" nature of the photographic image, there is a direct relationship between the photographic image and the object (or subject) photographed. Furthermore, both cinema and museum have been seen to "preserve" the past. The cinema has aligned itself with popular conceptions in regarding public museums as venerable conservators of the past and private collectors as abnormal and anti-social.

Although animated films are usually considered part of the cinema, Chapter 3, "'Toys Don't Last Forever:' Collecting in Animated Films" considers them separately from live-action film in order to investigate how the two media forms provoke differing representations of collecting. Conventional animation, though still indexical in the sense that the artist's drawings or models are photographed, takes a different philosophical stance in its relation to physical reality. Many digital media scholars have proposed that what is new about digital media is its shift from fixity to flux, from indexicality to interactivity, but this definition ignores the fact that animation has embraced these characteristics all along. All that digital technology is doing is to extend principles that previously existed in animation. In this context, I investigate animation's seeming disdain for the static nature of traditional collecting seen in several post-1980s animated feature films. In *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989), Ariel's collection acts as a substitute for her object of desire. The only way she can achieve her goal, however, is by giving up her collection to set out in search of the real thing. In *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter and Ash Brannon, 1999), the tale is told from the perspective of the potentially collected objects, vintage toys. They ultimately reject being part of a collection in favor of being loved, even though love in this case leads to inevitable death and abandonment. Collecting once against substitutes for love and companionship in *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), and is once again abandoned when those goals are achieved. *Curious George* (Matthew O'Callaghan, 2006) focuses on museum exhibits over collectors, upholding imperialist looting practices and interactive kid-friendly museums at the same time.

All four animated films come down in favor of objects in constant use and transformation. This tendency arises from the very principles of animation, which construct it as a highly flexible and experimental form, one that emphasizes transformation, change, and the

fleeting moment, rather than preservation and history. Animated objects are therefore antithetical to collecting since collections attempt to pin objects down and prevent them from changing. Furthermore, anthropomorphized objects in the film take on subjectivity, which makes the idea of collecting them more distasteful. Animation is thus counterposed to both preservation and collecting. The narrative premise of *Toy Story 2*, for example, is that it is better for toys to be loved, worn out and abandoned by their owners than to be preserved forever in a Japanese toy museum.

The advent of digital gaming changed the paradigm of collecting in visual entertainment media. Though old stereotypes make an occasional appearance (such as the stuffy academic museum curator Blathers in *Animal Crossing* [2002]), for the most part game museums and collectors break with tradition. The player is asked to be a collector by the very structure of the games, and the in-game museums serve as a log of the players' progress through a particular game. Through an analysis of such digital games as *Zork 1: The Great Underground Empire* (Infocom, 1980); *Animal Crossing* (Nintendo, 2002)*; Kingdom of Loathing* (Asymmetric Publications, 2003); *Katamari Damacy* (Namco 2004); and *Pikmin 2* (Nintendo, 2004) the final chapter, "Jeweled Eggs and Mario Trophies: Collecting in Digital Games," investigates the way in which digital entertainment media are inverting the established stereotypes of collecting in visual media. While museums and collectors do not appear frequently as characters or locations in digital game scenarios, collecting frequently substitutes for the act of "killing" as the primary goal in many non-violent games such as *Katamari Damacy* and *Animal Crossing*. Like killing, collecting represents power and control over the game environment. Thus, collecting is an all-important activity in video games in a way it is not in live-action film and animation, due, in part to a game's interactive nature.

Further, this chapter analyzes the intercultural exchange between Japan and the United States as a result of Japan's continued dominance in the video game industry. Because "foreign video game" is not a conceptual category for most gamers in the way that "foreign film" is for film viewers, Japanese games continue to do well in the US market even though they are not designed with US consumers in mind. This means that North American players of these games are presented Japanese ideas about material culture and collecting, but often do not recognize the ideas as specifically Japanese.

Why study film and video games through the lens of collecting? It stems from a broader interest in cinematic objects in general as an important element of mise-en-scène that gradually narrowed to an interest in the caretakers and resting places of highly treasured objects. Combined with my observation that there seemed to be much collecting going on in video games and my perception of a flurry of news reports and scholarly work on the uncertain status of digital objects being bought, sold, and even stolen on websites (with significant monetary repercussions to the parties involved), it seemed clear that work was needed to come to terms with the status of unreal things. Collecting is just one entry point, but a useful one.

To take just one example, The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), has made numerous appearances, not only in films and video games, but in novels and television shows as well. These include: *An American Tale: The Treasure of Manhattan Island* (Larry Latham, 1998), in which characters consult an AMNH museum expert for help deciphering a treasure map; several novels by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child, including *Relic*, *Reliquary*, and *Cabinet of Curiosities*;[1] *Parasite Eve* (Square Electronic Arts, 1998), a survival horror RPG

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[1] Preston was manager of publications at the American Museum of Natural History for a time. The film version of *Relic* was renamed *The Relic* (Peter Hyams, 1997) and moved from the AMNH in New York to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

game in which the protagonist Aya Brea is an New York Police Department rookie who uses the expertise of AMNH museum employee Dr. Klamp; *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar North, 2008) the fourth incarnation of the infamous video game set in "Liberty City," features The Liberty State Natural History Museum, clearly based on the AMNH; *Night at the Museum* and *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, in which a hapless nigh guard at the AMNH discovers that the exhibits come to life at night; *The Nanny Diaries* (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, 2007) in which a nanny charged with forming upper class tastes in her young ward rebelliously takes him to the AMNH instead; and more. As one of the nation's most well known museums, it is not surprising that the AMNH captures the imagination of many writers, animators, directors and game designers.

Shared locations are only one area of media overlap, however. There is much to be said about the stylistic influences traded back and forth between digital games, live-action film, and animation. Not only are there adaptations of games into films and films into games, but there is much debate over the use of "cut scenes" or "cinematics" in digital games. These refer to the technique of putting the interactive portion of a game on hold for a short period during which the player can do nothing but watch some narrative information unfold. And then there are reviewers like Jack Witzig of The Cold Spot who occasionally choose to read live-action films through their experience of digital games. Witzig comments that *The Ninth Gate*'s ponderous atmosphere, for example, has an immersive effect that is not unlike certain digital games:

> At some point during the film, I realized what, strangely enough, the plot reminded me of--a video game. Or, to be more precise, a full-motion video computer game, like Phantasmagoria or, more to the point, Gabriel Knight: The

Beast Within. In such games, you play a protagonist who must travel from location to location, looking for clues to solve a mystery, all the while encountering various mysterious and supernatural events. Frequently, the tasks are mundane: finding a key to open a door, saying the right thing to the right person, or perhaps the mere act of reading a book. In the way Johnny Depp's character revisits locations or tries to solve a problem using a different tack after failing before, The Ninth Gate is revealed to be structured in a similar way. (The Cold Spot)

By considering how materiality in the form of collections is affected by the technology used to represent it as well as how collectors and the act of collecting are portrayed, this study contributes to the overall picture of the cinema in a digital age.

## 2.0  SINISTER SOUVENEIRS AND THE "TEARS OF THINGS": PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COLLECTING IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Approximately thirty percent of the population in the Western world engages in some form of collecting at any given time. In *Museums, Objects and Collections*, Susan M. Pearce claims that there is a "collecting mania which has gathered momentum across society through the course of this century, and now achieves the dimensions of a major social force" (Pearce *Museums* 75), and she estimates that one in three Americans is a collector of something. Collecting is therefore an important area of study, and representations of collectors and collecting in visual entertainment media are bound to both reflect and shape popular understanding of the practice. In "Collections and Collecting," Pearce provides a preliminary report on her sociological study of collecting in Britain (published fully in *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*), noting that "Its results bore out the findings in North America, and the supposition for Britain, that in the Western world…between a quarter and a third of the population, now collect something. Whatever else collecting is, it is a major social phenomenon" (Collections 19).

Most historians trace the origin of collecting as a popular pastime to the curiosity cabinets that began to appear in the sixteenth century. These cabinets varied widely in content and could include such things as items connected to local history, rare or exotic artifacts, or heirlooms. Prior to the sixteenth century collecting was more limited, and the public museum had not yet been established (the Great Library of Alexandria, associated with the Alexandria Museum,

founded around the third century BC, is a rare early example, though it was not a public institution in today's sense since access was limited to scholars and philosophers and there was little contact between these intellectuals and craftsmen).[2] In any case, it was not until "about 1650 or a little sooner, [that] collecting had become the widespread mania which remains its characteristic up to the present day" (*Museums* 92).

Private collections were first linked to affluence and aristocratic status, and the costly and rare items assembled demonstrated the wealth and power of the owner (usually male). In the eighteenth century, public museums gradually emerged as manifestations of Enlightenment era developments in rational thinking and the need to define identity in the nation-state, many founded on private or royal collections. The public museum was thus originally an extension of the private aristocratic collection and access to exhibits was limited mainly to upper class men. Museums were also intended to help socialize the uncouth masses by exposing them to culture and imposing civilized behavior on them through museum conduct rules. The immense cost of a large museum was justified by the nation building it did as it displayed the cultural wealth and prestige of the state. As Pearce explains,

> The public art museum makes the nation a visible reality, and the visiting public
> are addressed as citizens who have a share in the nation. The museum displays
> spiritual wealth that is owned by the state and shared by all who belong to the
> state. The political abstraction is given symbolic form in the shape of tangible

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[2] In antiquity, the word "museum" referred to "a meeting-place where the scholars of the earth should forgather to fix the canons of letters and to extend the scientific horizons of man" (Parsons 135). It has also been understood to refer to the scholars themselves rather than the location in which they gathered (Lee 385). However, it was the library that contained all the documents and objects, and its focus was thus on bringing together the contemporary resources of the world for use, reproduction and dissemination as much as for preservation. The Alexandria library remains a potent symbol of wisdom and knowledge. In Steve Berry's *The Alexandria Link*, for example, it is supposed to be the long-lost location of ancient religious secrets which would rock the current political landscape if they could be rediscovered.

"masterpieces", which exhibit humanity at its best and highest, so identifying the state with these spiritual values and sharing them with all comers. The museum is the place where, in exchange for his share in the state's spiritual holdings, the individual affirms his attachment to the state. (*Museums* 100)

The construct of the national museum endured without much variation until the 1960s, when a combination of falling attendance and widespread concerns about equal representation and inclusiveness of race, class, and gender spurred many museums to shift their emphasis from objects to experiences, and from Western hegemonic culture to multicultural special interests. The museum is still a storehouse for the best artifacts history and culture have to offer, but it is now also a place to feel and explore new things – or old things from a different point of view.

However, the entertainment media's representation of collecting constructs a very different picture of what it is and who engages in it than the reality of the practice. The most common figuration of a collector is of a socially inept male loner who uses the assembled objects as a substitute for human interaction. In live-action film, *Silence of the Lambs*' (Jonathan Demme, 1991) Jame "Buffalo Bill" Gumb (Ted Levine) is a serial killer who collects newspaper clippings about his crimes and body parts from his victims. In *Everything is Illuminated* (Liev Schreiber, 2005), Jonathan Safran Foer (Elijah Wood) is an awkward tourist and socially inept twenty-something virgin who collects seemingly worthless objects. In *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter and Ash Brannon, 1999) the obsessive toy collector Al McWiggin is devious and ruthless in his attempts to obtain a complete set of Woody's Roundup toys. This handful of examples represents a strong trend in film and animation to portray the collector as eccentric, megalomaniacal, or even dangerous. But Pearce's study makes clear that the anti-social male bachelor collector is the exception rather than the rule. In fact, collectors are more often female than male (of those

surveyed and self-identifying as a collector, forty-two percent are male and fifty-eight percent female) and frequently well-integrated into other aspects of society. The information about family and employment situations indicates that:

> collectors are living personal lives which do not differ from those of non-collectors, and which are 'normal' in terms of human sexual and familiar relationships…The point is an extremely important one, because the stereotype of the collector is of a dispirited, anorak-clad loner who is unable to form personal relationships, especially with the opposite sex, and who uses collecting as a substitute for personal emotional satisfaction. This image recurs in the media and in cartoons, and forms part of the mind-set of most non-collectors. (Pearce *Collecting* 27)

Museologists will instinctually recognize Pearce's claim about the media representation of collectors to be true, but there is very little documentation and analysis of this trend.[3] This study intends to redress that void by bringing to light and analyzing specific instances of the representation of collectors in visual culture to determine if there is any basis for the general impression the public has of collectors, and to explore the effects of such depictions. Not only are these representations at odds with reality, but they are at odds with themselves. That is, the depiction of collecting in live-action films differs from the representation in animated films, which differs again from the portrayal in video games.

Thus, this dissertation is organized by media forms: live-action film, animation, and finally digital games. The nature of the photographic image sets live-action film into a

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[3] The negative stereotyping is also not limited to visual entertainment media, however. In Susan Sontag's novel *The Volcano Lover: A Romance*, for example, the Cavalier (a character based on real-life Sir William Hamilton) is portrayed as a collector who cares more for his objects than for the people around him. He "like so many obsessive collectors was a natural bachelor" (Sontag 19) – even though the Cavalier has a wife, as did Hamilton.

preservationist relationship to the material world (though specific films and filmmakers may resist this). A film has similarities with a museum exhibit in the way it can record and display information about the past. Animation, on the other hand, seems to bear a less direct relation to the material world since the only objects photographed are the drawings, paintings or other material used to create the animated images (with the exception of stop-motion animation using photographic images), and as a result the guiding principles of animation have emphasized transformation and abstraction, both antithetical to the tenets of stasis and preservation of collecting. Though digital games might at first seem to fall under the same principles as animation because of their predominant use of non-photographic imagery, their representation of the material world is distinctly different. Digital games valorize collecting as a player activity that functions as part of the interactive nature of the medium.

## 2.1    THE COLLECTOR STEREOTYPE

Collecting refers to a number of practices taking place in both public and private spaces. It includes the highly sanctioned, researched and organized displays of objects in museums as well as private collections that may be haphazardly organized, ephemeral, and intensely personal. Pearce asserts that "the best definition of a collection is simply that a collection exists if the owner thinks it does" (*Collecting* 3). Although I am inclined to agree, I find it necessary to further pin down the term for the purposes of this project. I propose that a collection is a group of items connected in some way, though the connection may be only in the owner or user's head. A collection is distinct from a hoard because the items in it are valued individually rather than as a

stockpile of duplicates. While a collection's objects may be monetarily valuable, they must be prized for something more than that.

Some argue that collected objects must also be removed from their usual use and exchange value contexts. In "Unpacking My Library," for instance, Walter Benjamin argues that the collector is tied "to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness" (Benjamin 487). Yet consider the typical museum collection. Though the items are no longer used for their original purposes and are primarily valued for cultural or historical reasons, they are most likely insured and may be sold for a considerable sum if the museum chooses to deaccession them. Further, Colonial American housewares in a display case are no longer being used as originally intended, but are still esteemed for the use value they once had (they provide historical evidence of the way early Americans lived their day-to-day lives). Many private collectors do use the items in their collection (e.g., a car collector who drives the vehicles, or a record collector who enjoys listening to the records). Pearce's study reveals that thirty-nine percent of collectors use some or all of the items in their collection (Collecting 56). In the case of decorative items, this "use" may be no more than displaying items in the living room, but in other cases use also includes wearing collected jewelry in public, reading collected books, or firing collected guns (Pearce, Collecting 57). Though Pearce does not mention it, a collection may also be used as a status symbol, and, as such, any display draws upon this function. There are additionally very active markets in most collectible goods. Thus, in practice, a collection is not simply a group of objects removed from use or from the economy.

Walter N. Durost provides a useful definition: objects form a collection "[i]f the *predominant* value is representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued

chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection" (Durost 10). This definition allows for the value of a collection to be defined broadly by the collector (how the objects relate, what kind of objects are eligible for inclusion, etc.), yet still distinguishes a collection from just any store inventory or group of objects.

Collections can be either public (that is, created by institutions, whether open to the public or not) or private (created by individuals for personal benefit). There are different conventions and implications for each. The only restrictions on private collectors are money and imagination. One can collect anything one likes, for any reason. One can collect pieces of asphalt from different locations, which costs nothing, or one can collect fine art and spend large sums on new acquisitions. Where the museum collection is often viewed as a construction of national or even global identity, private collections are often viewed as extensions of the self. The kinds of items amassed are thought to characterize the collector, so that, say, collecting sports memorabilia is strongly correlated with being a fan of a particular sport or team. The private collection also often serves as a promise of immortality, and many collectors intend to hand down their collection to their descendants or to a museum as a legacy. (Though such bequests are not always appreciated by the new owners.)

Pearce identifies three modes of collecting: souvenir collecting, fetish object collecting and systematic collecting (*Museums* 69). Souvenir collection objects are related less to each other than they are to the collector (and his/her experiences) and are thus closely aligned with the private individual. A souvenir collection might consist of items obtained by a particular family on vacation, for instance, or items connected to important events in a person's life (weddings,

graduations, birthdays, etc.). Thus, souvenir collections are inextricably bound up with memory and history. As Pearce explains:

> Souvenirs speak of events that are not repeatable but are reportable; they serve to authenticate the narrative in which the actor talks about the event. As a part of this they help to reduce a large and complex experience like the Somme or the Western Desert, to a smaller and simpler scale of which one human can make some sense. They make public events private, and move history into the personal sphere, giving each person a purchase on what would otherwise be impersonal and bewildering experiences (Steward 1984: 132-50). Souvenirs, then, are lost youth, lost friends, lost past happiness; they are the tears of things. (*Museums* 72)

Pearce's metaphor is apt: the best way to determine if particular sets of objects are souvenirs or not is to locate their collector's emotional relationship to them. A tear is a physical manifestation of an immaterial memory or sensation. It thus bears a similar relation to the past as historical museum objects do: the museum artifact is a material trace of an event or culture that has otherwise disappeared into the past. If the collection is an attempt to preserve past moments of happiness or excitement from inevitable decay and oblivion, then, like tears, the objects are the last physical manifestation of events that have receded into the past. *The Long, Long Trailer* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954) serves as a typical filmic representation of souvenir collecting. In it, newlyweds Tacy and Nicky spend their honeymoon driving cross-country in their mobile home. Tacy collects rocks from each of the places they have stopped as souvenirs of this once-in-a-lifetime event. She explains, "When we get to Colorado we'll put them all around the patio and whenever we look at them we think of all the wonderful times we've had. Every one a memory, you know." On the surface this seems like a quaint (and economical) way for Tacy to preserve

the memory of her honeymoon, though since the film is a comedy, the rocks are oversized and wreak havoc later on when the couple attempt to drive the trailer on a steep overpass.

Pearce describes fetish collections as often comprising those undertaken by men of wealth who collect fine art or unusual curiosities, though fetishistic collecting has spread to lower economic classes as of late. What differentiates the fetishistic from the souvenir collector is an obsession with the assembled objects, some excess of emotional attachment to the collection above all else. If "the slightly touched and essentially absurd collector can be mocked for his naïve oblivion to all but his possessions" (*Museums* 75), then he is a fetishistic collector. For Pearce, "The fetishistic nature lies in the relationship between the objects and their collector, in which the collection plays the crucial role in defining the personality of the collector, who maintains a possessive but worshipful attitude towards his objects" (*Museums* 84). It is the slightly (or more than slightly) "touched" collector most often seen in entertainment media representations.

There seems to be an unspoken distinction made by the public between the everyday collector who takes up and leaves off this practice regularly and the dedicated collector who defines him or herself through the collection. The former is someone who *collects*, but only the latter is a *collector*. Examples of fictional fetishistic collectors in the cinema include Jonathan Safran Foer in *Everything is Illuminated* and Rob Gordon (John Cusack) in *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000). Jonathan collects objects related to his family members and pins them on a wall in his room underneath their photographs. He embarks on a journey to Ukraine in order to fill the gap in his collection concerning his grandfather (to whom his identity is explicitly linked, as the two are the spitting image of each other). When his guide Alex mistakenly suggests that Jonathan is a writer, Jonathan demurs, saying "I'm more of a collector" and states that he collects

because he is afraid of forgetting. Rob Gordon, on the other hand, categorizes and defines his life experiences through music, and his record collection is a tool for rethinking his personal life. He is an inveterate list-maker, constantly ranking not only the records in his collection ("top five records to play on a Monday morning"), but also spending hours reorganizing his records in different ways, including, at one point, autobiographically. "[I]f I want to find the song 'Landslide,' by Fleetwood Mac," he says, "I have to remember that I bought it for someone in the fall of 1983…but didn't give it to them for personal reasons." Rob's records represent far more than the music he enjoys – they are worshipped objects to which he devotes more attention than he does to his girlfriend. The time and place he purchases his records is as important as the music they contain.

Finally, systematic collecting is connected to the natural sciences. This method seeks to display representative examples of a type, such as particular species of butterfly, where the goal is to have one representative of each type in the category. It is primarily seen in museums and institutions of higher learning, although the private collector may be systematic on a smaller scale. This type of collecting "works not by the accumulation of samples, as fetishistic collecting does, but by the selection of examples intended to stand for all the others of their kind and to complete a set" (Pearce 87). As the least personal form of collecting, the systematic variety tends to appear only briefly in films, with two notable exceptions. In *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938) David Huxley (Cary Grant) is a paleontologist working to complete his museum's Brontosaurus skeleton, and in *The Collector* (William Wyler, 1965) Freddie Clegg (Terrence Stamp) is a meticulous butterfly collector. Both characters still receive the stereotypical treatment: David is a bumbling nerd with no social graces and Clegg is a burgeoning serial killer.

In *Introduction to Museum Work*, C. Ellis Burcaw provides an expanded categorization of the types of collecting possible.  He sees six basic types of collections in all: economic hoard collections, social prestige collections, magic collections (that is, collections of objects with some spiritual or supernatural power), group loyalty collections (trophies associated with a particular institution), collections instigating or recalling emotional experiences, and collections related to intellectual curiosity or education (Burcaw 25). Some of Burcaw's categories may be seen as subcategories in Pearce's system, however the distinction between an economic hoard collector, magic collector and intellectual curiosity collector are worth noting. It is possible to collect mainly as a form or symbol of wealth and prestige (as Charles Foster Kane does in *Citizen Kane* [Orson Welles, 1941]), and the intellectual curiosity collector Burcaw describes need not be concerned with completing a set in quite the same way as Pearce's systematic collector. Both Pearce and Burcaw fail to mention one of the more sensational forms of collecting, however, one which informs the public consciousness to a great extent: the serial killer collector or "murderous collector."

In television, film, and fiction, popular imagination is fascinated with the serial or mass killer, and it is well-known that such killers sometimes collect souvenirs from their victims. But how strong is the connection between serial killers and collecting? In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Agent Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) tells Dr. Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins) that "Most serial killers keep some sort of trophy from their victims," noting further that Lector is unique because he did not (he ate his victims instead).[4] This is an exaggeration of the truth, however. As James Alan Fox and Jack Levin note in "Multiple Homicide: Patterns of Serial and Mass Murder," *Silence of the Lambs*, *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) (in which Norman Bates

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[4] It is not clear whether mass killers who cannibalize their victims should not also be considered a kind of collector, one who internalizes his souvenirs in order to keep them close, or to merge or identify with his victim.

[Anthony Perkins] kills then stuff both birds and his mother) and other films "were loosely based on the actual, but highly atypical, case of Edward Gein" (Fox and Levin 419). Gein both ate his victims and decorated his house and person with their skin and bones, but even among the already exceptional category of mass killers he is an exception to the rule, and his behavior does not necessarily represent the norm.

Nevertheless, "many serial killers [do] collect memorabilia of souvenirs—not just news clips, but diaries, clothing, photos, even body parts belonging to their victims" (Fox and Levin 418). In their study of twenty sexually sadistic serial murderers, Janet Warren, Robert R. Hazelwood and Park Dietz found that fifteen of them had "violent theme collections" (Warren, et al, 82). Though their sample was relatively small, the authors' numbers suggest that about 75% of serial killers are collectors,[5] whereas according to Pearce, in the general public about 30% of people are collectors. Warren, Hazelwood and Dietz found that "[t]he nature of these collections and the sexual interests of these murderers cannot help but bring to mind Freud's assertions regarding the dynamic association between anal eroticism, sadistic behavior and obsessive patterns of behavior" (Warren, et al 84). However, they conclude that the collecting activity in murderers is most useful in prosecution after the fact rather than in predicting anti-social behavior beforehand. Collecting in general is not a risk factor for criminal behavior.

The reasons serial killers collect may not differ much from the reasons why non-killers collect. It is first of all important to acknowledge that "most serial killers do not suffer from a profound mental disorder" (Fox and Levin 419). They are most often stable individuals who choose to kill repeatedly, fully aware that their actions are considered wrong. Many serial killers exhibit strong social attachments to their family and friends, and some are even married. Fox and

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[5]It should be noted that their study is only concerned with collections associated with the victims or the act of killing. Whether these killers also collected china patterns, for example, was not revealed in the study.

Levin speculate that the trophies these killers collect represent the things that the killer has done to distinguish himself, and looking over them serves as a reminder of the "good times" he had with the victims (Fox and Levin 419). Thus, the serial killer appears to be motivated by the same impulses as the souvenir collector, seeking to remember and recount important experiences in their lives. But because popular film and television focuses on the most sensational examples, "lay people often assume that anyone who kills for the thrill, pleasure, or power must be [clinically] 'crazy'" (Fox and Levin 419), tarnishing the everyday act of collecting by association. This may partially explain the negative stereotype collectors have in film, but only if one believes audiences are passive victims of the media.

In addition to the sensationalized accounts of serial killer collectors, there is a wide array of television and film crime stories involving theft or murder in pursuit of a collection object. The fictional private collector who becomes obsessed with obtaining a particular artifact often steals it, sometimes committing murder as well. To give only a few examples, two episodes of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* feature collectors who break the law: "Chinoiserie" (2002) and "Collective" (2005). In *The Simpsons*' Halloween special "*Treehouse of Horror X*" (1999) one of the subplots involves Comic Book Guy becoming a villain known as "The Collector," who is so obsessed with his collection of comic book figurines that he tries to kidnap Lucy Lawless (the actress who plays the title role in *Xena: Warrior Princess* [1995]) and seal her in Mylar. In the "Trash" (2003) episode of Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan Fillion) and his crew embark on a heist to steal a valuable earth artifact from a private collector.

## 2.2    PUBLIC MUSEUM COLLECTING

The biggest difference between public and private collections is the amount of control the collector is able to exercise over the objects. The public museum serves not individuals, but its patrons (conceived of in various ways). The curator in charge of a particular exhibit is restricted since he or she must create a display with a broad appeal, something that can be justified by more than personal taste and remain relevant for a long period of time. Curators also must meet the approval of a museum head or board of directors. The patrons, for their part, are rarely allowed to touch the items on display, and almost never have any input into the collecting process itself (aside from indirectly through donation). Private collecting, on the other hand, provides absolute control over the collection items, and many scholars have linked collecting with innate desires to exhibit dominance and control over the world. As Pearce puts it, "[w]e can control our own collection in a way in which we can control little else in the world" (*Museums* 56).

Public and private collecting are not mutually exclusive, however. Museums routinely accept gifts or loans of display items from private collectors, though this practice is fraught with difficulty since a museum may wish to sell off parts of a collection while the original collector may feel strongly that it should stay together. Additionally, the museum may wish to accept a donation for occasional display, while the collector may desire a permanent exhibition. Once accepted into a museum, objects will typically undergo a thorough research process few private collectors bother with. As Pearce explains,

> Collected objects have a second life, into which they carry the accumulated meanings of their original lives, but in which they are treated quite differently. While they are still in private hands they come and go from one owner to another

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like any other piece of valuable (or at least valued) moveable property, and sometimes drop out of sight and out of mind in obscure resting places. Even if they have been formally accessioned into a museum collection, their original associations may have become lost or confused. Reconstructing the pedigree of objects and tracing pieces back to their original provenances is, therefore, an important part of museum work. (*Museums* 134)

Pearce is here considering the tracing of "original associations" of objects as an informational task. Though some museum objects have aesthetic or functional value that can be divorced from their historical context, the majority are valued for the information they either represent or provide on the past. An object's life may extend beyond this second life as well.

In Hollywood, certain private collections became public businesses: prop houses are dedicated to providing historical objects to filmmakers on a rental basis. Even prop shops not converted from private collections often refer to their inventory as a collection.[6] These collections have returned to the market economy, but retain traces of their collected status since the objects remain together. While some prop houses specialize in alternately everyday or made-to-order items, companies like History for Hire specialize in historical accuracy and carry both antiques and reproductions. Of course, iconic props from notable films can be transformed into museum objects as well, ending up in such institutions as the Hollywood Heritage Museum, the Hollywood Motion Picture Museum, the Hollywood Entertainment Museum, the Warner Bros. Museum, the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum, and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, all of which have displays of props and costumes from

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[6] See Demented Drek, Inc. (http://www.dementeddrek.com/about/), History for Hire (http://www.historyforhire.com/), Wade's Toto Fun Film Industry Prop House (http://hotslots.ca/about.htm), and Zap Props and Antiques (http://www.gapersblock.com/airbags/archives/vehicle_auctions_props_and_allnighters), also http://www.zapprops.com/).

Hollywood films. As James Naremore notes of the twin falcon props used in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941),

> Contrary to what Walter Benjamin hoped in the 1930s, mechanical reproduction has not destroyed the "aura" of exhibition art; instead, the transitory but highly fetishized images of a bygone movie industry have become collector's items or museum piece…A kitschy statuette originally intended to represent a worthless imitation has been transformed into "the stuff dreams are made of," if only because Humphrey Bogart touched it." (Naremore 255)

It is quite possible that there is or someday will be an object that began as an everyday item, became part of a private collection, returned to the commercial world as a prop for hire, and became once again a museum object after appearing in a film.

The need to document the second life of objects is twofold, however. On the one hand, many objects collected by museums are valued for the information they convey about the past, and tracing their ownership history can reveal new information. On the other hand, a clear provenance is needed to ensure that an object has been acquired legally. Both looting and outright theft remain all too common in the art and antiquities trade today, and disputes over illegal acquisition in the past are ongoing (such as Nazi confiscation of private art collections and the dispute between Britain and Greece over the ownership of the Parthenon/Elgin marbles, first removed from Greece in 1801). Though the full extent of illicit trade and looting is unknown, Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole, and Peter Watson have compiled statistics on what is known: 400 out of 5550 Etruscan tombs have been looted since WWII; an estimated 1,000 pieces of pottery are currently being smuggled from Mexico, Guatemala and Belize each month; and since 1991, over 3,000 objects have been looted from various museums in Iraq (Brodie et al, 21-3).

Regulations demanding a clear provenance and strictly legal acquisition have increased post-World War II in light of the controversy over artworks stolen by Nazis.[7] Though more than fifty years have passed since some works of art were looted from private collections in Europe, issues of restitution and return have not been satisfactorily settled in many cases, and new cases continue to crop up as looters die and works resurface after years of being missing. Historically, pillaging after battle was common, but the practice of restitution is relatively new.[8] It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that concern for national cultural heritage started to overtake the victor's traditional rights to the spoils of war, and at the second conference at The Hague (June 15 to October 18, 1907) an article forbidding the pillaging of cultural objects was enacted (Kurtz 7). However, because the Nazi ideology was that German culture was biologically superior to all other cultures, they believed the art of any other culture to be inferior (and therefore not worthy of preserving). They further believed that "art which expressed the purity of Aryan and Germanic culture, at least as they understood it, was the heritage of the German nation. If such art was currently in other hands, it did not matter. It belonged to the German nation, and the Germans had a right to it" (Kurtz 13-14).

The looting that took place during WWII was not only about personal profit and greed, but part of a concerted and organized effort to destroy the cultural products of reviled races and social groups, and to remove "German" art from the hands of "degenerates" (Kurtz 25). On one level, WWII was about art, about who had the right to own, make, and collect it, and thus, about who were the proper owners of European heritage and Europe itself. The struggle to settle this issue did not end with the war. And it was not only the German Nazis looting art. Kurtz estimates

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[7] Most recently, the Austrian city of Linz has decided to return a painting by Gustav Klimt to the heirs of its original Jewish owner.
[8] Byzantine Emperor Justinian I first developed the concept of restitution of stolen items in his revision to the Roman law, however it was not often enforced (Kurtz 4).

that "Millions of [American] servicemen mailing home mementos of varying quality as well as the active and secretive art market must have meant that many items came to the United States in violation of laws and regulations" (Kurtz 204). Often, these soldiers sought souvenirs of the war as a way to commemorate their experience and the Allied victory, a very common impulse in collectors. Yet their collecting occupies an uncomfortable space between nostalgia and exploitation. In a memorable scene from Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948), the young boy Edmund (Edmund Moeschke) plays a record of Hitler's speeches in the rubble of Berlin to two American soldiers who want a demonstration before they buy it. It is a chilling moment in the film as everyone in earshot stops in their tracks as Hitler's voice rings out. The soldiers do not grasp the significance of their amusing souvenir. By making it a souvenir, the soldiers are perpetuating Hitler's influence and destructive powers though they fought against his regime.

At the conclusion of the war it was clear that existing international laws were insufficient to address complex restoration and restitution claims. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established strict guidelines concerning the exchange of cultural artifacts between countries. Such regulations were enacted to address concerns that European archeologists and museums routinely removed artifacts from undeveloped countries without approval from local governments. UNESCO policies further dictated that museums could not accept donations of objects without clear provenance that demonstrated that the items were originally obtained lawfully. These policies have opened the door for claims that existing museum objects should be returned to their sites of origin, as in the case of sacred American Indian cultural items which the tribes feel are desecrated in a museum setting. Though UNESCO's interest arose from wartime property issues, it has led to

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increasingly stringent regulations regarding the excavation, sale and transport of cultural property at any time (Watson and Todeschini 29).[9] In spite of government efforts to locate and return looted items, the complexity of the issue means these efforts are still incomplete and ongoing.

Although intended to protect cultural objects from destruction and theft, recent international restrictions on seeking and collecting such items may in fact stifle the collecting activities of museums. The laws requires that public museums only purchase objects which can be proven *not* to have been stolen or looted, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to prove the negative: an object can be proven to have been stolen much more easily than it can be proven not to have been stolen. Without the ability to add new material, the museum stagnates. Certain journals will no longer even publish articles written about objects which do not have a proven clean provenance, censoring scholarship as well as collecting. The restrictions are intended to respect sovereign rights and cultural heritage, but at times they are counterproductive. When the Baghdad Museum was looted by U.S. troops in 2003, word was circulated quickly that under no circumstances were museums and reputable dealers to purchase these pieces, on the grounds that doing so would encourage more looting. The end result, however, is that even those who wished to purchase items in the hope of eventually returning them were prevented from doing so, and many of the missing works have entered private collections or been destroyed, and in neither case is Iraqi culture being protected or preserved.

Thus, a number of museologists and antiquities dealers deplore the UNESCO regulations. George Ortiz argues that the UNESCO Convention "attacks collecting…and fails to consider historical and current realities. It disregards the vital role played by dissemination in the sharing

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[9] See for example The Hague Convention of 1954 and the 1970 UNESCO document "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property."

and safeguarding of the past, by holding that each nation is the best depository of objects originating in its territory, despite the fact that we have witnessed vast destruction by nations of their own patrimony" (Ortiz 15).[10] In the case of certain types of objects, provenance is almost always impossible to ascertain. Coins, for example, are mass-produced items which often circulate widely. Thus, it is entirely possible to find Viking-era Arabic coins in Sweden.[11] When found by licensed archeologists this presents no problem, but in many areas finds are made by amateurs who have no way of proving when and where they made their acquisition. Overly strict rules prevent museums from acquiring such pieces, and may open the door to repatriotization claims: do the coins belong in Sweden because that is where the Vikings took them hundreds of years ago, or do they belong in Iraq because that is where they were minted? As a result of this increased regulation of collecting and looting, museums have more restrictions on how and what they may acquire even though they generally have more resources than private collectors for the building and maintenance of collections.

Not only do the objects within museums undergo intense scrutiny and regulation, but the function of the museum as an institution is debated as well. Because public museums must justify their usefulness (and often tremendous cost) to the state, much ink has been spilled attempting to define the purpose of museums. Broadly speaking, they can have a mix of six different functions, as outlined by Edward P. Alexander in *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums:* the museum as collection, conservation (or

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[10] It is important to note, however, that in *The Medici Conspiracy: The Illicit Journey of Looted Antiquities from Italy's Tomb Raiders to the World's Greatest Museums* Peter Watson and Cecelia Todeschini implicate Ortiz as someone who knowingly received looted antiquities in their exposé of Giacomo Medici's extensive and elaborate looting operations.
[11] Just such a find was made on April 1, 2008 near Arlanda airport. ("Swedes Find Viking-era Arab Coins" BBC 4 April 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7330540.stm)

preservation), research, exhibition, interpretation, and cultural center and social instrument. Perhaps the two most commonly accepted purposes are conservation and exhibition.

The large, public museum collection is often housed in a monumental, imposing, tomb-like structure, leading many to associate museum collections with death and imprisonment. This perception eventually became so widespread that the meaning of the term "museum piece" shifted to reflect it, a term that has persisted even as newer museum buildings and renovations have become modern and even glitzy. Theodore L. Low notes, "It must never be forgotten how dead museum objects are to the general public and that the common connotation for the term 'museum piece' does not suggest something fine and beautiful but something to be relegated to a safe and obscure place" (Low 55).

Another conflict in museum philosophy is the entertainment/education divide. One argument is that the museum's primary function should be educating the masses, whether about history, culture or science. However, patrons often visit museums seeking entertainment rather than an intellectual workout, creating a potential conflict between the aims of the collectors and the aims of the viewers. As Burcaw states, "The big problem the museum faces, in designing good exhibits, is in reconciling the statements '*If you're not in show business, you're not in business*' and '*The business of a museum is education, not entertainment*'" (Burcaw 145, emphasis original). While in 1942, Low could argue that "the purpose and the only purpose of museums is education in all its varied aspects from the most scholarly research to the simple arousing of curiosity" (Low 21), beginning in the 1960s museums began to make an "experiential turn," in which the goal of museum exhibits was to evoke sensations in the patrons. Proponents of experiential museums saw them as a way to be inclusive of minority groups and construct a multicultural society by allowing museum patrons to feel what it was like to be part

of a certain culture or group. By breaking away from the stodgy and elitist model of displaying dusty objects comprehensible only to those with the right education, the experiential approach was not only able to represent more interest groups, but attract a more diverse group of people as well, thus increasing overall attendance. Experiential museums promised sensation, which while not always fun per se,[12] generally provided thrills and excitement. It should be noted, however, that the experiential approach to museums can be conservative as well as progressive. The new Creation Museum, for example, attempts to discredit evolution through an experiential approach to creationism. According to a widely circulated press release, their displays are "[a] fully engaging, sensory experience for guests" (CincinatiUSA.com), emphasizing experience over historical objects, in part because the authority of fossil evidence of evolution in other museums is disputed by the creationists.

As a result of these changing conceptions of museum function over the last sixty years, exhibits now run the gamut now between "living museums" such as Colonial Williamsburg, children's museums focused on providing hands-on activities, and shows such as "The People's Show," in which private collectors loaned their materials to the Walsall Museum and Art Gallery for display (Pearce 65). "The showing of objects has been the museum's historic mission," writes Hilde S. Hein in *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*: "Exhibition traditionally put objects 'on view,' inviting visitors to inspect and contemplate them, guided by the epistemically privileged museum authority. But what is observed in the museum today is not longer unequivocally an object; objects have been reconstituted as sites of experience, and museums increasingly hold themselves accountable for delivering experiences" (Hein 5). This

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[12] The Virginia Holocaust Museum, for example, takes an experiential approach in order to "provide guests with an interactive experience. At the Museum, guests can walk through a ghetto and concentration camp, board the 'St. Louis' ship and take a ride in a cattle car. Plus, guests can crawl through a replica of an actual hiding place where 13 people hid during World War II for nine months" (http://www.va-holocaust.com/learn/default.asp).

shift means that collecting has been deemphasized in museums in favor of building newly minted sets, sounds, images and displays which may be safely handled by visitors. Critics of this turn see it as a cheap Disneyfication of museums rather than a valid educational experience, yet it also opens a space for bringing museums and their patrons into closer contact.

## 2.3    MATERIAL VERSUS IMMATERIAL COLLECTING

Although collecting material items has been privileged over immaterial collecting, the rise of digital technology and its consequent increased valuation of digital information is putting pressure on older, materialistic value systems, necessitating a reconsideration of whether collecting can be an activity without material objects. Though it is not uncommon for people to speak of collecting intangible things such as experiences, words, or data stored in a computer, for many scholars, collecting is inextricably linked to physicality, and public museums teach people the value of material objects, a task that not coincidentally supports industrial economies' needs for consumers. Recall Pearce's observation that collecting has grown to manic proportions in the twentieth-century (*Museums* 75) -- this growth being seen as a direct effect of the spread of consumerism. Collecting preexists the rise of consumerism, however, and the idea that collecting activities must be centered on material objects is likely a misplaced emphasis due to the fact that material collections are most highly valued in a consumer economy, are most easily displayed to the general public, and often survive the ravages of time better than immaterial collections. Thus, it is not surprising that critics like Walter Benjamin, for instance, believe that "[c]ollectors are beings with tactile interests" (*Arcades Project* 206). For Benjamin the tactile (which involves not only touching but also possessing) stands in opposition to the optical (associated with the fleeting

moment). Benjamin is clearly thinking of the private collector when he writes about the opposition between the tactile and the optical, since the museum visitor is rarely allowed to touch collected objects but only to view them. In fact, David Goodman has argued that "the nineteenth-century museum was based on a 'subordination of other senses to sight'" (as qtd. in Witcomb 107), but this form of sight rejected spectacle in favor of rationality. While the visual spectacle remains dominant in most museum exhibits, experiential exhibits are providing more opportunities for spectacles of sound and touch, even smell and taste.

But what about things that cannot be touched or seen? Is only the tangible world collectible? For Pearce, material objects can express a wealth of information that cannot be so easily grasped in the abstract, and she therefore emphasizes objects as receptacles of information and experience. In *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Pearce argues that collections are only composed of material things. "Objects are lumps of the material world" she claims, and their materiality is crucial to our experience with them whether in museums or out in the mundane world (*Museums* 15). She further notes that "objects are independent of words and we must see them and, perhaps, touch them to understand them" (*Museums* 23). Even a collected book is more than the sum of its words – its binding, its cover, and its pages convey information not present in the words they contain. But if touch is only "perhaps" necessary, must objects have a physical existence in order to be part of a collection? Put otherwise, can words, images or ideas be objects? Or are the purely optical and the tactile in opposition to each other as Benjamin believed? Words and images can have physical forms in books and photographs, of course, but in that case is it the paper on which they are printed which is collected? A collection of palindromes might be listed on a single sheet of paper, but the person compiling the list might think of each entry separately from the list as a whole. The difference between a collection and a

mass of data or objects is ultimately an act of mind: if the person bringing the items together regards it as a collection (which entails valuing the objects over and above their monetary or use value), then it is. If not, then it is not (at least until someone else comes along and regards the same objects in a different light).

Implicit in Pearce and Benjamin's conception of a collectible is some notion of ownership, which is seen as being tied to its materiality: "The physical character of objects means that they are capable of being owned, stored, and handed from one person to another, but the reason why these things happen to them, that is their desirability, rests in the value that is ascribed to them by the community concerned" (*Museums* 32). In order to collect something, one must be able to "hold" or possess it in some way; the ascription of meaning is secondary. In her later work, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, Pearce reveals some hesitance in this assertion, however. There she groups records, tapes, CDs, videos, books and photographs in a group together because,

> This kind of material presents an obvious difficulty in a study of collecting. If material of this kind is gathered principally to play or read, in other words the material is valued as *media*, then it represents at least a particular aspect of collecting and may, indeed, not fall into any useful collecting remit at all. If, however, the material is treated as *object*, and collected for its historical value as first edition or memory of a particular performance then it falls into line with more "normal" collecting process. In practice, most collections of recorded and published material fall between the two, just as, for example, collections of sporting material or militaria and firearms do. (*Museums* 32)

Yet in spite of recognizing that material objects such as firearms may also be valued for their use as much as their material status, Pearce does not separate those collections from "normal" collecting practice. Since thirteen percent of the responding collectors engage in media collections (the third most common type of collection in her study after room ornaments and household goods), this kind of collecting which is both material and immaterial (in its performative nature) must be addressed, and the difficulties of immateriality in collections must be confronted head on, rather than sidestepped.

In "Using Collected Material," Pearce notes that thirty-nine percent of collectors say they use their collections. This included the record collectors, but also the collectors of room ornaments, household goods, jewelry, musical instruments, machinery, paintings, and tourist material. The distinction between immaterial and material object collections cannot be made on the basis of use or ownership. Though immaterial collecting is less common (or at least less visible) than material collecting, it is possible to have a collection of items that have no physical existence, such as a collection of unusual names, or even a collection of physical objects which the collector does not him or herself own, such as a graffiti collection. In the latter case, a photograph of the graffiti is likely to serve as a substitute for ownership of the graffitied structures.

Consider the case of the Parthenon/Elgin marbles. The fervor concerning international restrictions on the excavation and export of cultural objects is based on the firm belief that the physicality of these objects matter. The New Acropolis Museum in Greece has been designed with a display space for the Parthenon Marbles (also known as the Elgin Marbles), even though the dispute between The British Museum (which now possesses them) and Greece (their country of origin) is ongoing. The display is currently about the *absence* of the objects the Acropolis

Museum believes are rightfully theirs. It is interesting to note that the Greek government contends that current ownership of the marbles (by the British Museum) is a matter of unconcern. They believe the existing ninety-four marbles should be permanently displayed together, in Greece, as part of the history of Greek civilization; but the British Museum may be acknowledged to *own* the marbles as long as they are *displayed* in Greece. In May of 2000, Greek Minister of Culture Theodoros Pangalos stated that "Who owns the sculptures is unimportant, irrelevant and immaterial. What matters is where they are and where they should be. On this point I believe that we have a very strong case, which is the continuity and the integrity of the unique monument known as the Parthenon" (http://www.greece.org/parthenon/marbles/). Clearly, both The British Museum and the Greek government are invested in the material objects as the things that matter, and yet at the same time the Acropolis Museum has constructed a compelling exhibit around the very absence of the desired object.

To take the case for immaterial collecting one step further, one can look at film scholarship. In *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*, Christian Keathley argues for a resurrection of the cinephiliac experience of the cinema, describing the cinephile as a "collector of moments." Cinephilia is marked by ritual and ceremony. It is about the activity of watching a film as much as the film itself (Keathley 6), and the cinephile collects experiences of performances, for which no object exists after the event is over. The cinephile notices the details of a film, and Keathley argues that the way cinephiles focus on and treasure these details can be thought of as collecting experiences, the way one might collect theatre or symphony performances through attending them (perhaps retaining ticket stubs or playbills as a physical manifestation of the experience). Prior to the advent of VHS/DVD, films existed for most people

as "events" (Keathley 21). When a film came to town, there was more urgency to see it while one had the chance. The "moments" cinephiles collected served as a way to quickly recall these events. Keathley argues that this was an aesthetic rather than ideological approach to film. The "cinephiliac moment" can involve a marginal filmic detail that catches the viewer's interest, such as the "color of Cary Grant's socks in the cropduster sequence from *North by Northwest*" (Keathley 31). Roger Cardinal refers to these moments as "collector's items" (Keathley 31). Citing William Pietz, Keathley argues that the fetish object does not *represent* what is powerful, but "reanimates a repressed materiality" (Keathley 53). It contains the powerful in a material form. Taking a Benjaminian approach to history, the collector becomes an alternative historian by freeing objects from their usual relationships and creating in his or her mind "another web of meanings, associations, and values" (Keathley 127). Immaterial collecting is a particular way of thinking, a mental act of breaking ideas out of their traditional context and fitting them into new constellations of meaning. As Benjamin and Keathley demonstrate, the concept of collecting is not limited to tangible items. Collecting is an attitude toward things physical or immaterial, a way of ordering and valuing information embodied by discreet units.

## 2.4    DIGITAL COLLECTIONS AND DATABASES

If cinematic moments can be collected, then why not digital "objects"? Increasingly, important elements of our day to day lives are conducted in digital media, and not only are these experiences important to document and preserve, but digital media is itself a useful tool for documenting and distributing information about material collections. New media scholars have stretched the meaning of "collection" to include any database or repository of information. In

*The Language of New Media*, for instance, Lev Manovich points out that, in computer science, a database is defined as "a structured collection of data" (Manovich 218). While the denotation and usage of the word "collect" differs between the fields of museology and new media, the different meanings collide in virtual museums, necessitating a rethinking of the term. The purpose of a database is to be a flexible way of accessing, organizing, and using information. Manovich argues that the database structure is overtaking more traditional symbolic forms (such as literature or the cinema) and constitutes "a new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world" (Manovich 219). In the database paradigm, "the world appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records," (Manovich 219) which humans seeks to organize and draw meaning from. However, since a collection in Manovich's terms is any arrangement of data in a particular site (on a website, in a particular computer's memory, or on display in a museum), a collection's perceived similarity between items may be lost.

Information in databases has no permanent shape or form since they are constructed to allow for sorting and rearranging. "A site of a major search engine is a collection of numerous links to other sites" (220), Manovich states, suggesting that something as vast as the Internet may constitute a collection. In the database, tangibility and ownership fall by the wayside, taking second place to organization and the creation of meaning. But organization and creation of meaning are key parts of any collection. The meaning of a database is more fluid, but it is arguably still a collection.

Manovich argues that the database is best understood as a collection because "[m]any new media objects do not tell stories; they do not have a beginning an end; in fact, they do not have any development, thematically, formally, or otherwise that would organize their elements

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into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other" (Manovich 218). If a collection is a series of potentially equally important material or immaterial objects, demarcated from the world at large but not otherwise organized in relation to each other, then, as Manovich concludes, the user experiences the collection as something on which to perform actions such as viewing, navigating, or searching. One form of database is the "virtual museum," which in 2001 Manovich defined as a CD-ROM distributed by established museums containing images of their holdings. The CD-ROM creates a very different experience of the museum's content. It allows the user to control the organization of the images to an extent not possible in the physical museum. One can view the holdings "chronologically, by country, or by artist" (Manovich 220), for example, and the size of the images can be manipulated to a certain extent. One may own the CD-ROM of a museum's holdings (or an art book), but still not own the artworks themselves or even the rights to the images contained on the CD-ROM. Thus conceived, the collection conveys power or responsibility to the user -- it demands activity. He argues that "The user's experience of such computerized collections is, therefore, quite distinct from reading a narrative or watching a film or navigating an architectural site. Similarly, a literary or cinematic narrative, an architectural plan, and a database each present a different model of what a world is like" (Manovich 219). The digital collection, while distanced from material reality on the one hand, brings the user closer to it, on the other, through its interactivity. The user of a collection is empowered in a way museum-goers are not.

Bernard Deloche has proposed that the purpose of contemporary museums is to disseminate information, and that information becomes a substitute for objects. Implicit in his formulation is the idea that a photographic reproduction of a collected object may be considered

part of a museum's inventory. Usually, the museum owns the rights to any photographic reproductions of its holdings. Isabelle Rieusset-Lemarié comments on this in "Web Museums and Memory in the Age of Multimedia Networks (Extensions of Walter Benjamin's Insights)":

> If this "intelligent museum" is no longer a mausoleum it resembles the "cybernetic museum" depicted by Bernard Deloche as a dematerialized conception of a Museum based on information (DELOCHE, 1989). The museum is no longer a receptacle for collections. The achievement of the "cybernetic museum" is to substitute information in place of objects that are no longer necessary. Bernard Deloche went so far as to present the inventory as the "pure museum": an ideal form of museum in which artworks are no longer present. That is the extreme consequence of a conception of the museums which emphasize the diffusion of information at the expense of the goal of conservation. (http://www.archimuse.com/mw2000/papers/rieusset/rieusset.html)

The substituted information offered by the cybernetic museum includes not only images of material objects, but supplementary description, interpretation or data. Deloche and Rieusset-Lemarié do not regard projected images or ideas as objects, only tangible items. Information, for them, is not an object, but may be contained in an object.

Susan Sontag also supports the idea that making inventories is an activity closely associated with collecting. In *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* she writes that "collectors are inveterate list-makers, and all people who enjoy making lists are actual or would-be collectors" (Sontag 202). In this novel, the character of the Cavalier is making a list of his current collection so that even if some or all of his collection is destroyed (or sold) he will have some record of it. In the absence of his collection (much of which goes down with the ship meant to remove it to

the safety of England), "[t]he list is itself a collection, a sublimated collection. One does not actually have to own the things. To know is to have (luckily, for those without great means). It is already a claim, a species of possession, to think about them in this form, the form of a list: which is to value them, to rank them, to say they are worth remembering or desiring" (202).

More recent scholarship has had to address the increasingly virtual side of museums, whether it be a virtual tour of the collections on a museum's website, an interactive computer supplement to an exhibit, or an entirely web-based museum, such as the Museum of Web Art (http://www.mowa.org/home.html). Andrea Witcomb argues in *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* that electronic technologies "disrupt the stasis suggested by the metaphor of museums as mausoleums...by breaking the association between objects and institutional authority" (Witcomb 113). Her claim, however, makes little sense since virtual galleries are still run by institutional authorities. Still, there is some disruption since, while museums may retain the legal rights to particular images of their holdings, images circulated on the web are treated as public property, and web users routinely save copies of digital images to their personal computers. In the context of museums, Witcomb argues that electronic technologies and mass media have called into question the ability of objects to speak for themselves *à la* Pearce. Witcomb understands the purpose of museums to be the generation, perpetuation, dissemination, and organization of information. In the context of global media "objects are only important in so far as they contain information," and "there is no difference between an object and a photograph or an oral history tape" (Witcomb 114) in that each form is equally useful in conveying information about a particular topic.

Clearly, proponents of the digital museum deemphasize aesthetics and beauty, particularly since the reproductions they offer are still often considered inferior to original

artworks or artifacts. This notion of objects as information is grounded in the idea that, in contemporary society, information and experience overtake commodities as the source of wealth and social status. Witcomb recognizes that the information age, as manifest today, is not a complete break with the past. Thus, material objects still retain power as indicators of wealth or even as status symbols, even as their worth can be replaced, at times, with information.

Witcomb's definition of a virtual museum is essentially a museum web page, a small part of a museum's holdings made available in digital form on the web rather than a museum that exists in its entirety in digital space. She argues, however, that it is not enough for a museum website to be an unchanging brochure. The site should "interpret the information...[and] become involved in storytelling rather than simply providing lists" (Witcomb 121). The curatorial voice should not be elitist or dominating, but rather the site should encourage visitors to follow links to other places, to facilitate further acquisition of information. Presumably doing so will allow them to construct the museum for their own purposes. In the examples she provides, however, it is clear that Witcomb mainly sees museum websites as ways to provide more information about objects than that which can be provided in the physical museum, and the extra information substitutes for the lack of the presence of those physical objects. Her examples deal with exhibits of existing objects that cannot be displayed together (because they are owned by different museums, for example), but she does not address exhibits involving objects that do not exist, or do not exist anymore. Witcomb labels museums that exist entirely on the internet as "extreme" (Witcomb 125) and finds it puzzling that the "deterritorialized space" (Witcomb 125) of the internet would want to replicate the traditional nineteenth-century museum. This is not surprising, however, in that a collection is, by its very nature, isolated and set apart from the rest of the world, at least to some extent. Witcomb limits her understanding of what a collection is to

physical objects. For someone invested in tangible artifacts from the past, a digital museum

apparently strips information from the collection because it transforms a three-dimensional real

object with texture, depth and facets into a flat, purely visual, image. The problem is that

material and immaterial realities coexist, and privileging one over the other provides an

incomplete view of contemporary collecting practices.

Digital collecting and the inclusion of immaterial objects need not threaten the existence

of museums. In "What is the Object of This Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many

Meanings of Objects in Museums," Elaine Heumann Gurian argues that the museum remains

important as "...*a place* that stores memories and presents and organizes meaning in some

sensory form. It is both the physicality of a place and the memories and stories told therein that

are important" (271). She contends "that the blurring of the distinction between these institutions

of memory and other seemingly separate institutions (like shopping malls and attractions) is a

positive, rather than negative, development" (271). Gurian is not an advocate for completely

virtual museums, however, as she believes also that museum objects, "like props in a brilliant

play, are necessary but alone are not sufficient" (271) to fully express the past.

Museums have often considered the acquisition, care, and display of objects as their

reason for being, however the issue becomes tangled when we acknowledge that the idea of the

"real object" can have more than one meaning in a museum. "It often meant 'one of a kind,' but

it also meant 'an example of'" (Gurian 271), depending particularly on whether the object was an

art or natural history object. Many museums display plaster casts and models of objects rather

than the real item. Particularly with dinosaur bones, the museum may not even own all the bones

modeled, and the complete skeleton may have been assembled from pieces owned by various

institutions and belonging to different specimens. Some bones may only be based on speculation

from existing finds. But the experience of the complete skeleton is more "real" to people, even if parts of it are "unreal."

Thus, although in the past the definition of a collection included only groupings of material objects, it no longer makes sense to restrict collecting to things with a material existence. Though it has been handy to consider material objects "real" and digital objects "virtual" (i.e., "not real"), the actions of digital gamers have put great pressure on this distinction. Video game players may not be able to cut their material fingers on their digital swords, but they can possess them, view them, and ascribe metaphorical meaning to them in the same way as a collector of material swords. Furthermore, objects in digital games now have an existence that spills outside the boundaries of the game world. In "The Buying Game: A Real Market, Overseen by a Real Corporation, Selling Things that Don't Really Exist" Rob Walker's review of Edward Castronova's *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* documents this trend. If a player pays "$500 for a set of Shimmering Star Legplates [for the game *EverQuest II*]," (Walker 28) how can digital objects still be considered unreal or imaginary (as they previously have been, both in popular perception and in the eyes of the law)? And just what is the tax status of such a transaction? Rob Walker argues that paying for the intangible is hardly a new thing:

> The most popular item at Station Exchange...is the Pristine Teak Strong
> Box, useful for hauling around possessions and costing less than $10.
> Back in the real world, you might buy a physical suitcase for $50, or you
> might happily spend 10 times that for a similar one with a luxury brand
> name on it -- how much of that difference is "real" and how much is

essentially in the mind? In other words, paying for the intangible is hardly

exotic; most of us do it all the time. (Walker 28)

Thus, like purchasing items with designer labels, aristocratic titles, or professional services based on specialized knowledge, intangible game object can have real effects on bank accounts and social status (both within the game and, in cases where players who meet in a game choose to meet in real life, outside the game as well). The Pristine Teak Strong Box from *EverQuest II* allows players to transport items in the game world. Buying a new set of kitchen objects for *The Sims 2* from a site like The Sims Resource (http://www.thesimsresource.com) allows players to change the appearance of their sims' houses to suit their personal taste.

The digital marketplace mirrors the real world in exploitation and violence as well. In June 2005, Qui Chengwei was sentenced to life in prison in China for murdering the man who sold his virtual sword for 7,200 Yuan without permission. Qui's attempts to seek justice for what he perceived as the illegal sale of his private property were thwarted since there are currently no laws in China regarding virtual property (BBC). Additionally, since most online games require the player to begin with a weak character and gain power and money through game activities, a "farming" industry has sprung up wherein workers are hired to build up a game character's stats to the point where they can be sold to players for high price.[13] Some of these farming operations are more like sweatshops; James Lee reports that these virtual sweatshops first appeared in 1998 when "[Lee] Caldwell sold...in-game tender online for a handsome real-world profit while only paying his employees pennies on the dollar" (Lee). In this way, gamers can begin playing with

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[13] Farming mainly occurs in online multi-player games that charge a monthly fee for each account. The virtual sweatshop sets up player accounts and has workers perform repetitive game activities that amass in-game currency or items which can then be sold to other gamers who do not want to put in the required hours to earn it in the game.

immediate power and gold. Such transactions may involve only a small minority of gamers at the moment, but, since according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), "75% of American heads of households play computer games," and players spent over $7 billion on games in 2004, the paying of substitute players and the exchange of digital objects for real money seems likely to increase in the future (Hermida).

I have demonstrated above that collecting is a widely practiced but contested activity. Its frequent association with social outcasts (and sometime association with mass killers) may cause some people to downplay or hide their collecting impulse, however it is nonetheless a common practice. Though reigning definitions of collecting emphasize materiality and ownership, the rising information age and increased cultural value of digital technology is calling past definitions into question. The following chapter explores in more depth how film scholarship, popular opinion, and the ontology of the cinematic experience all interact to create specific, but predictable, representations of what kind of people collect and what use may be had from the activity of collecting and the objects collected. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin argues that "Collecting is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge" (Arcades 210). While he certainly is not suggesting that every instance of collecting is an intellectual activity, it is an astute observation that, at base, collecting is a knowledge-gathering activity. If the representations of collecting in film and video games are at odds, then it seems likely that their attitude toward knowledge and study are at odds as well.

## 3.0 "IT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM!" COLLECTING IN LIVE-ACTION FILM


As noted in the previous chapter, collecting can be seen as linked to mass killers since approximately seventy-five percent of them collect items associated with their victims. This characteristic has formed the backbone of many fictional representations of killers in novels, television and live-action film. In his study of the recent public fascination with serial killers, *Psycho Paths,* Philip L. Simpson argues that a whole host of behaviors has been disparaged by their connection (or supposed connection) to serial killers. Certain media or individuals function as "claims-makers" that link information together to malign certain behavior. So, for example, since murder is the ultimate evil, linking it to homosexuality, rape, pornography, or indeed collecting, vilifies those activities, most of which are harmless in and of themselves: "As an 'ultimate evil' that very few people would actually defend, serial murder serves admirably to enhance the undesirability of any behavior…with which it is linked by any claims-maker of any ideological bent" (Simpson XI). Films like *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), *Kiss the Girls* (Gary Fleder, 1997), and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) can thus be seen to act as "claims makers" on the public's imagination, reinforcing the idea that since collecting is sometimes associated with horrific killing, collecting itself is a suspect activity.[14] Though

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[14] An interesting aberration is *The Bone Collector* (1999), in which it is the detective tracking down the serial killer who has a collection of forensic evidence. The title, however, is taken from a book about a serial killer from which the film's antagonist is copying his killing scenarios. The killer does not himself collect bones, however, and so the title is ambiguous. Does the bone collector refer only to the fictional book appearing briefly in the denouement? Or

claims-making certainly operates in the discourse surrounding killing and collecting, it does not sufficiently explain the way media forms influence broader representations of collecting, nor does it account for negative portrayals of collectors that predate the surge in fascination with serial killers that Simpson documents.

This chapter will focus on films that fall outside the serial killer genre, arguing that live-action film's long-established conventions of character and narrative account for its tendency to depict collectors as sinister while paradoxically upholding the museum (the location of many collections) as a venerable institution because of its ontological affinity for preservation.

The films chosen for inclusion in this analysis were all released after 1980. I have chosen this time period in keeping with my goal of analyzing the way the rise of digital technology has affected cultural conceptions of collecting in live-action film, animation, and digital games. Digital gaming existed prior to 1980, but it was in 1985 that the Nintendo Entertainment System was first introduced in the United States, reviving the flagging game industry and posing a threat to the dominance of the cinema in visual entertainment. Thus, this chapter looks at Steven Spielberg's Indiana Jones series (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1981], *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [1984], *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* [1989], and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* [2008]), *The Ninth Gate* (Roman Polanski, 1999), *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000), *Everything is Illuminated* (Liev Schreiber, 2005), *Night at the Museum* (Shawn Levy, 2006) and *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (Shawn Levy, 2009).[15]

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to Detective Rhyme's (Denzel Washington) forensic evidence collection? Or to the killer Richard Thompson (Leland Orser)? Ultimately, the film suggests that Rhyme must become a collector in order to stop serial killers such as Thompson, inhabiting the mind of a killer in order to catch one.

[15] It may seem odd that the two films actually titled *The Collector* (William Wyler, 1965 and Marcus Dunstan, 2009) are not given primary consideration in this chapter. In the case of the former, it is because the film falls outside the period and country of consideration, and in the case of the latter, it is because the film had not yet been released at the time of original writing.

## 3.1     FILM AS PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

How does the cinema's relationship with material reality and the preservation of the past manifest itself in films? To claim that live-action film is predisposed to represent collecting in a particular manner requires a review of previous scholarship on film ontology. The classical claim that photography has a unique indexical relationship to its subject has influenced much film theory and is still compelling today. The cinema has long been supposed to preserve images that were "really" there in a specific moment in time and space, and this has been a compelling characteristic of the medium since its invention. One would expect, then, that the collector would be a positive figure in films since collected objects also preserve the past and make it visible in the present. Yet this is not the case. Live-action film is both intrigued by the figure of the collector and unnerved by the connotations of stasis, rigidity and elitism. A collection is often seen as something that is outdated and unchanging, whereas Hollywood film often strives to be action-oriented and always new. Thus, the representation of collecting in live-action film is somewhat schizophrenic: the collector embodies the negative characteristics of collecting, while the museum is valorized and exoticized. Horror and thriller films have found various incarnations of the museum setting as a useful space of unlimited mystery, being a plausible location for finding mummies, sacred objects, and valuable artwork, and for being inhabited by those strange and unpredictable collectors. As a place capturing the imagination of children, the museum is upheld, but such films tend to be action and comedy oriented, desiring to instill a respect for the past in children while at the same time countering the idea that museums are outdated and irrelevant.

In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," André Bazin argues that humanity's obsession with realism in visual representation answers a psychological drive to defend ourselves

against death. He also argues that "for the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent" (Bazin 13), and that, as a result, the photographer's personality is only evidenced in the selection of the scene to be photographed and his or her intention in constructing the image. Thus, although "all the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence" (Bazin 13). Photography can, of course, be used to create fantastic spectacles that have little or nothing to do with material reality, but what makes it different from the plastic arts is the "objective" nature of the camera machine itself. Even a distorted or manipulated image has a more direct relationship to the material world than does a painting or sculpture. It is on this basis that Bazin makes his famous claim that:

> The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. (Bazin 14)

The still photograph preserves the past through the objects (and subjects) that it depicts, just as a museum seeks to preserve the past by preserving the objects in its possession. Film, on the other hand, preserves change itself, "the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were" (Bazin 15). Film thus has a tenuous relationship with collecting: while it does preserve the past through the images of the material world it depicts, it does so it by presenting them as a series of images approximating (through the persistence of vision phenomenon) movement and change over time.

In *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Kracauer acknowledges that media often elude precise definitions of their properties, but argues that some are more easily defined than others. Painting, for example, "seem[s] to be least dependent upon…fixed material and technical factors" (Kracauer 12), while "the properties of photography…are fairly specific" (Kracauer 13). Therefore, "there is no earthly reason why the photographer should suppress his formative faculties in the interest of the necessarily futile attempt to achieve objectivity. Provided his choices are governed by his determination to record and reveal nature, he is entirely justified in selecting motif, frame, lens, filter, emulsion and grain according to his sensibilities" (Kracauer 15). Film adheres to the principles of photography and expands upon them. For Kracauer, photography's essential aesthetic principle is realism, arguing, "film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity for the visible world around us" (Kracauer xlix). As Miriam Bratu Hansen has noted in her introduction to Kracauer's book, this "affinity" is something a given filmmaker may choose to employ in a particular film style, not a trait that will always be present in a film.

Even though these principles include various kinds of manipulation of the image, Bazin confidently asserts that, "photography and the cinema…are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism" (Bazin 7). Though writing years later in *Theory of Film*, Kracauer espouses a similar precept, adding that, "strangely enough, it is entirely possible that a staged real-life event evokes a stronger illusion of reality on the screen than would the original event if it had been captured directly by the camera" (Kracauer 35). So it is not surprising, then, that Kracauer finds that while documentary films are invested in actuality, they "do not explore the visible world to the full" (Kracauer 201) because "documentary makers are often so exclusively concerned with conveying propositions of an intellectual or ideological

nature that they do not even try to elicit them from the visual material they exhibit" (Kracauer 207). Fiction is not free of ideology, but it seems that Kracauer finds fiction film more "artistic" and less pedantic than many documentaries, and thus more effective. For Kracauer, photography's realist tendencies are best used to reveal what cannot be seen with the naked eye alone (drawing upon the camera's scientific possibilities). "Realism" is not equivalent to unmanipulated documentary images for either Bazin or Kracauer.[16]

Films and photographs share with museum collections an emphasis on close scrutiny of objects. In "The Establishment of Physical Existence," a section of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer posits the cinema as a showcase for objects, revealing them in close-up detail not seen even in still-life paintings. Similarly, museums present fragments of material culture, revealing lost or hidden details of the past. The use of microscopes and carbon dating techniques in museums can also be likened to the cinema's close-up, providing views that cannot be seen with the naked eye alone. Objects used merely as background are uncinematic for Kracauer; however in some films (even fictional ones) there is a "long procession of unforgettable objects…objects which stand out as protagonists and all but overshadow the rest of the cast" (Kracauer 45). Not only that, but the cinema "has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing them to the fore—often just in moving about—previously invisible interrelationships between parts of them" (Kracauer 54). Thus, the museum and the live-action film both attempt to show us the world in ways we might not otherwise be able to see. Like museums, films can offer a glimpse into the past through the objects they preserve.

There are cracks developing in the indexical model of film ontology. As many scholars have noted, the increasing proliferation of digital technology spurred a resurgence of interest in

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[16] See Daniel Morgan's "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics" for a detailed analysis of Bazin's use of the term "realism."

classical film theories about the ontology of the photographic image. Miriam Hansen argues in her introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* that the historical moment of film as an indexical recorder of material reality has passed. Yet earlier film criticism "can offer us today…a theory of a particular type of film experience, and of the cinema as an aesthetic matrix of a particular historical experience" (Hansen x). But at the same time, she argues that there is a distinct difference between digital and non-digital cinematography.

> In the photochemical process, visual data are inscribed on a celluloid strip at a particular moment in time, the instance of exposure. Whatever may be done to them through static procedures such as editing or sound mixing, these images are fixed once and for all, and their meanings will be actualized only in belated perceptions and readings...It is a commonplace of contemporary media criticism that films no longer function quite that way; more precisely, the material conditions under which films are shot…are no longer as essential in determining the way films eventually look (Hansen vii-viii)

Once developed, the information on the traditional film negative can be printed, tinted, scratched or destroyed, but it cannot be fundamentally altered at the level of the negative. Digital technology has shifted much more of the work of film to the postproduction phase because of the manipulation possible.

The underlying point of tension is whether the physicality of the photographic image is significant in and of itself. Daniel Morgan contends that the classical theories of Bazin and others continue to have relevance because they "emphasize the productive tension between the form in which an artist expresses subject matter and the kind of thing an image is" (Morgan 444). Philip Rosen reconsiders the question of ontology in *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*,

emphasizing that in both Bazin and Benjamin's understanding, "objects in indexical imaging appeal to us not only from another space, but from a particular past existence, that is, from a specific time that is no longer available" (Rosen 168). This feeds into the modern experience of temporality, where "the perpetual possibility of the new, hence the continual repression of the old…opens up a radical separation or gap between present and past" (Rosen 168). The museum and the rise of popular collecting participate in the dissemination of institutional control concomitant with the Enlightenment, and the cinema inherited this model of history. Both Bazin and Rosen regard realism as an aesthetic, "or rather, various realisms are various aesthetics" (Rosen 13). The question facing the cinema today is how this aesthetic will fare against the challenge of the digital image.

Photography and the cinema hold an uneasy place in relation to indexicality. As David Rodowick explains in *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after New Media*, "comparing computer-generated images (CGI) with film shows that photography's principal powers are those of analogy and indexicality. The photograph is a receptive substance literally etched or sculpted by light forming a mold of the object's reflected image" (Rodowick 36). But a digital camera is also responding to light. The light received causes the memory card to create a specific set of information, which may not, in the end, be that different from etching. Rodowick elaborates that,

> In my view, from woodcut, to printing press, to lithography, to photography, to cinema, and even to the phonograph record, a genealogy is defined in the history of the analogical arts. All are arts of gravure, a sculpting of the image in a physical support, a history that includes of course sculpture, architecture, and fresco. There is a fault line in this history, however, in that cinema, photography, and video are two-stage arts that require a technological interface to mediate

perception such as film projector, turntable and amplification, or the television

monitor. (Rodowick 37-8)

The distinction of two-stage arts is crucial in shaping viewer/listener attitudes. As Rodowick

argues "the great paradox of the cinema, with respect to the conceptual categories of eighteenth-

and nineteenth-century aesthetics, is that it is both a temporal and 'immaterial' as well as spatial

medium" (Rodowick 35).

Rodowick, following Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Technical

Reproducibility," argues that the non-digital two-stage arts engendered an anxiety surrounding

mechanical technology, which was always visible as it mediated between subject and object:

"Originally, problems of aesthetic judgment assumed the reciprocal presence of artwork and

perceiver. But in the two-stage arts, the relation between presence and absence of subject and

object in space and time is refashioned in new and disturbing ways" (Rodowick 38). This new

relationship "inspired the utopian longing for a reality free of technological mediation"

(Rodowick 39). Digital media, on the other hand, have created a desire to escape reality and

enter into pure virtuality. "Here the digital interface wants to disappear no less than the

mechanical one, but this disappearance is more a marriage than a separation of body and

machine" (Rodowick 39). But like a painting, a digital image "does not have [a photograph's]

degree of credibility since it cannot serve as evidence of the presence of the referent at some

moment of the production of the sign" (Rosen 19). Though Rosen believes that digital imaging is

a matter of "sundering the contact between world and image," (Rosen 306) this is not always the

case, and he indeed concedes, "the seeming oxymoron 'digital indexicality' becomes necessary

for understanding the history of digitalization" (Rosen 307). Allowing for the possibility that a

digital camera has an indexical trace similar to a photographic camera alleviates some confusion.

As Rosen points out, the indexical trace's meaning is dependent upon the viewing subject's knowledge of how the trace was produced:

> The referential credibility of indexicality assumes something absent from any immediate perception: a different *when* from that of the spectator. Since this different *when* cannot be immediately present, it must be 'filled in,' 'inferred,' 'provided' by the subject. Thus, if indexicality is a crucial aspect of the image, we must assume some active capacity at work beyond the perceptual activities, be it memory, mental activities, subconscious investment, rational inference, the effectivity of cultural discourses, or whatever." (Rosen 20-1)

Essentially, digital technology may, by mimicking mechanical image production, take on an indexical trace, particularly if the receiving audience is aware of the method used to create the image (motion capture, a digital camera). But this is not an inherent property of digital images as it is with photography. The computer-generated image, for example, often bears no such relation to its subject since no camera is used.[17] In fact, it may be more closely aligned with animation than with photography, an idea I will pursue in chapter three. Live-action film, whether photographic or digital, maintains its relationship to change and action over preservation and stillness by characterizing collectors as unstable and sinister. At the same time, it directs our attention to the significance of objects as repositories of meaning through close-ups and expressive mise-en-scène, upholding the museum as a more positive institution than the collectors who stock it.

The films chosen represent an amalgamation of old and new – new spins on old genres (Indiana Jones), old books in new digital environments (*The Ninth Gate*), old objects in newly

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[17] Motion capture technology using live actors' motions to construct CGI images may present another type of digital indexical trace.

digital museums (*Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*), etc. The films show a medium in transformation, a fear of a radical break with the past that never quite manifests. So although the cinema has faced and survived threats from other media before, digital technology nonetheless seems like a stronger threat than ever before. And not without reason – in 2005 video game sales surpassed the domestic movie ticket sales. In 2008, they surpassed movie ticket sales worldwide as well. But while the cinema purists may feel threatened, the industry has made the most of new the new technologies. Digital special effects have proven to be great crowd-pleasers, and some of the top-grossing films of all time employed them liberally (such as *Jurassic Park* [Steven Spielberg, 1993], *Titanic* [James Cameron, 1997], and *Spider-Man* [Sam Raimi, 2002]).[18] Through the franchising model of business practice, films and video games have mutually profited from each other as well. Many popular films have video game spin-offs, and digital games have adopted a number of techniques and styles from the cinema (something that will be discussed further in chapter four).

## 3.2     *THE NINTH GATE*: COLLECTING AS A DEADLY PASSION

In spite of the cinema's connection to preservation, the figure of the collector himself (for he is nearly always male) in post-1980 film is often stuck with a disparaging stereotype, hearkening back to the association collecting has with serial killers. Roman Polanski's 1999 film, *The Ninth Gate*, is one such example. Dean Corso (Johnny Depp) is an unscrupulous rare book dealer who misrepresents the value of book collections to families who inherit a collection

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[18] One of most touted uses of digital cinematic technology has been the rise of computer-generated animated films, such as those made by Pixar. Chapter 3 explores why animation has a separate history from live-action film and a different relationship to collecting.

without a working knowledge of the field of rare books. One of Corso's best clients, Boris Balkan (Frank Langella), collects books about the devil. On showing him his private library, Balkan notices Corso's rapacious gaze at the volumes and comments, "Beautiful, aren't they? The soft sheen, the superb gilding, not to mention the centuries of wisdom they contain. I know people who would kill for a collection like this." Balkan clearly fits the bill as a stereotypical collector (he is eccentric, unmarried, and unethical), one who fetishizes his collected objects, and, as it turns out, is willing to commit crimes if that is what it will take to complete his collection. The film can be aligned with the serial killer film in depicting collecting as a deadly passion.

Balkan has recently acquired a copy of the *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows*, a rare satanic book with only three known extant copies. Corso is sent to Europe to verify the authenticity of Balkan's copy by comparing it to the others. Though it sounds like a simple task, Corso is immediately beset with burglaries and attempts on his life as someone tries to gain possession of the copy he now carries.

*The Ninth Gate* is partly a re-working of an old collecting tale in which the owner of a rare object seeks out and destroys other versions of the same item in order to possess the single remaining one. In 1909, William S. Walsh reported in the "Bibliomania" section of his *Handy-Book of Literary Curiosities* that:

> There is a story of a wealthy English collector who long believed that a certain rare book in his possession was a unique [sic]. One day he received a bitter blow. He learned that there was another copy in Paris. But he soon rallied, and, crossing over the Channel, he made his way to the rival's home. 'You have such and such a book in your library?' he asked, plunging at once *in medias res*. 'Yes.' 'Well, I

want to buy it.' 'But, my dear sir – ' 'Two thousand!' 'On my word, I don't care to dispose of it.' 'Ten thousand!' and so on, till at last twenty-five thousand francs was offered; and the Parisian gentleman finally consented to part with this treasure. The Englishman counted out twenty-five thousand-franc bills, examined the purchase carefully, smiled with satisfaction, and cast the book into the fire. 'Are you crazy?' cried the Parisian, stooping over to rescue it. 'Nay,' said the Englishman, detaining his arm. 'I am quite in my right mind. I, too, possess a copy of that book. I deemed it quite unique.' (Walsh 95-6)

The story may not actually be true, Walsh acknowledges, but it is part of the collector's lore, told and retold by Maurice Rheims, Jean Baudrillard and Susan Pearce. And as it turns out, this tale forms the backbone of the plot of *The Ninth Gate*. With its focus on copies and originals, the film can be read in the context of Walter Benjamin's ideas about the reproducibility of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

In *The Ninth Gate*, Balkan sends Corso out to compare his book to the other two extant copies, ostensibly to determine which is authentic, and then purchase the authentic copy if it turns out not to be his own. After Corso examines the copy belonging to Victor Fargas (Jack Taylor) someone breaks in, removes the engravings from it, burns the book and kills Fargas. Similarly, while Corso examines Baroness Kessler's (Barbara Jefford) copy, he is knocked unconscious, she is strangled, and again the engravings in her book are removed and the rest burnt in a fire that quickly rages out of control. In the course of his investigations Corso discovers that all three books are authentic, but there are discrepancies in the nine illustrations. In each book, three of the nine pictures are signed "LCF," for Lucifer, while the others are signed by the fictional book's author, Aristidem Torchiam. In order to summon the devil, the nine LCF

engravings must be assembled together. Corso soon discovers that Balkan is behind the thefts and murders. Once Corso discovers that the original engravings were spread between the three copies of *The Nine Gates*, Balkan arranges to have those engravings removed and the other books destroyed so that he alone would possess a complete copy, and he alone would be able to summon the devil and gain immortality.

Many reviews of *The Ninth Gate* noted that it was much influenced by film noir in style and plot. As such, it is not surprising that collecting is a key feature in the narrative. As James Naremore observed in *More than Night*, "many of the villains in films noir of the 1940s were dealers or collectors of fine art" (Naremore 254), and this alongside the fact that, as Chris Pizzello explains in "Satanic Verse," Polanski and his cinematographer Darius Khondji "found themselves hard-pressed to unearth many films set in the hermetic world of antiquarian book dealers" (Pizzello 39) to use as models for the film. This led Polanski to use a neo-noir style for his tale of a book collector on a satanic mission. Naremore's book limns noir's relationship to collecting briefly, arguing that "Dashiell Hammett's novel [*The Maltese Falcon*] can be read as a parable about art and surplus value showing how a fetish object is created through the sheer power of myth" (Naremore 254). Naremore understands the value of the falcon prop in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) to demonstrate how "thrillers can spread their aura across different media, becoming valuable as other things besides movies. *The Maltese Falcon* may have begun as a book and a couple of films, but it can become a statue in a museum, or practically anything else" (Naremore 255).

Though Naremore focuses on *The Maltese Falcon* because of the interesting discourse surrounding the falcon prop, the most interesting film noir collector is probably Hardy Cathcart in *The Dark Corner* (1946). Clifton Webb is particularly adept at playing the role of the effete art

collector in both *Laura* (1944) and *The Dark Corner*. The latter, in particular, makes the figure of the collector suspect for a combination of elitist snobbery, object fetishization, and closeted homosexuality. Webb plays Hardy Cathcart, a wealthy art dealer and collector. At a lavish exhibition at his gallery, Cathcart takes a select group of guests into his vault to see his new Reubens (a painting which in no way resembles a Reubens), his most prized painting. The guests are surprised to see that the woman in the painting looks just like Cathcart's wife, Mari (Cathy Downs). When one asks whether he had the painting altered to resemble his wife, he scoffs at the idea of tampering with fine art. "I found the portrait long before I met Mari. And I worshipped it. When I did meet her, it was as if I'd always known her…and wanted her." Cathcart has, in essence, married a painting, and his wife is less a person to him than an object. Earlier, Cathcart commented to one of his customers that, "The enjoyment of art is the only remaining ecstasy that is neither immoral nor illegal." Yet his conversation with his wife suggests perversity, if not immorality, in the way he regards art: "I never want you to grow up. You should be ageless, like a Madonna, who lives, and breathes, and smiles, and belongs to me." Cathcart knows Mari has been cheating on him, but his only concern is that she might leave him – whether she returns his love is unimportant. Cathcart saw the painting years earlier, but it was not for sale. "When I couldn't buy it I became obsessed with owning it." This, he explains, is "merely the passion of the true collector."

Viewing *The Ninth Gate* as neo-noir helps resolve or at least contextualize the ambiguous ending. Corso has entered the Kingdom of Shadows, a place that is all the more frightening because it is unknowable. The final scene of the film shows Corso entering the door to a castle out of which is pouring bright white light. This light grows until it fills the entire screen. It recalls the ending of *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949) and the brilliant white light of the "great

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whatsit" in *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955). It also aligns the film with the old model of collecting.

Polanski's film is very much a work of love when it comes to the collected books. In his DVD commentary to the film, Polanski explains that the atmosphere of the film was very carefully created because, "I like the atmosphere of these interiors because I like books. I like them as objects, and I like very much what's inside them. Particularly now when they have such serious competitor [sic] as the computer it's a good thing to make a movie about a book" (Polanski). With the exception of the three copies of *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows*, all the books in the film are real antiquarian books that Polanski borrowed from private collections, and he took special care in creating the remaining book prop for *The Ninth Gate* to make sure it looked as authentic as possible, noting, "The book itself, the prop itself, I am quite proud of, because if you take it in your hand you won't really believe that it's not an authentic book" (Polanski).

Polanski made extensive use of digital special effects in the film, creating the appearance of things that were not actually on set during shooting, but he felt the books needed to be authentic. *The Ninth Gate* is thus a film about traditional collecting, where the physicality of the book matters at least as much as the content. And the collectors themselves all conform to the stereotype: Balkan is the ruthless collector who will kill to get what he wants; Fargas is the aristocratic collector who has lost his family fortune and sold off nearly all his possessions except for his prized collection, and Baroness Kessler is the rich collector who has devoted her life to her favorite hobby: studying her collection of occult books.

The supernatural element of *The Ninth Gate*'s use collecting is matched in films like *Le violon rouge* (François Girard, 1998), in which a violin that was varnished with a dead woman's

blood appears to contain her soul and exert influence over its various owners, and horror films like *Exorcist: The Beginning* (Renny Harlin, 2004), in which a newly-unearthed relic unleashes supernatural forces. The implication is that objects can have power in and of themselves and must be treated with reverence and respect. Corso's dogged determination allows him to obtain the last remaining copy of *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows* and all of the original drawings. But what then? In Polanski's film, possession is not an end in itself, as it is in *The Dark Corner*. Polanski's end is perversely comfortable rather than unsettling. Unlike his earlier satanic film *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), where the devil's son is brought forth into the world, in *The Ninth Gate* Corso as the devil's agent leaves the world behind and we cannot help but feel we are better off without him since his passion for book collecting has left five people dead.

## 3.3    *EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED*: HISTORY, MEMORY, AND ECCENTRICITY

Thankfully, even in the cinema, not every collector is a killer. In Liev Schreiber's adaptation of *Everything is Illuminated* Elijah Wood's portrayal of Jonathan Safran Foer is a classic example of the eccentric male bachelor collector whose hobby is strange, but harmless. Small of stature and wearing thick glasses at all times, Jonathan is entirely unheroic. The film upholds collecting for the preservation of memory and history as a positive value, though one that is undertaken by a certain type of person: the socially awkward male. The tagline to the film is "Leave normal behind," reinforcing the idea that collectors are not normal, although other, non-collector, characters in the film are eccentric as well.

*Everything is Illuminated* is the story of a young man's search to learn more about his grandfather's past. Jonathan has been collecting family objects from a very young age. The walls of his room display his finds. Around a photograph of each family member he pins plastic bags containing items associated with them: deflated balloons, prescription bottles, used condoms, retainers, photographs, etc., each labeled with the year and month he acquired them. The walls around Jonathan's parents and siblings are thick with displayed items. The section around his grandfather is almost completely bare. Jonathan has only an amber pendant he took from his grandfather's nightstand after he died. Years later, Jonathan's grandmother gives him a photograph of her husband and his first wife Augustine (Tereza Veselkova) in Ukraine. Jonathan immediately recognizes the necklace that Augustine is wearing as the same pendant in his collection. The pendant contains a fossilized grasshopper, and its image, either alone or worn by Augustine in the photograph, is repeated throughout the film as a transitional image between scenes. It is in itself a form of naturally occurring preservation. It is further an item belonging to a woman from the past, whose story can be decoded only through the objects left behind. Jonathan matches the pendant to the one in the photograph and thus begins his journey to Ukraine to learn more about Augustine and his grandfather's life before the Holocaust.

Jonathan Safran Foer gives his name to the main character, suggesting that a writer is a kind of collector, not of material objects, perhaps, but of ideas and experiences. Since the story is primarily a work of fiction, this calls into question the idea that history is a truth than can be preserved. In a key moment in the film Jonathan and his guides, Alex (Eugene Hutz) and Alex's grandfather (Boris Leskin), have located Trachimbrod only to learn that the shtetl was completely destroyed. All that remains are objects that the residents buried by the riverbank before they died. The remaining resident of the old community, Lista (Laryssa Lauret), tells Alex

she's always been puzzled about why her sister would bury her wedding ring when she was expecting to die: "I didn't understand why my sister Augustine hid her wedding ring in a jar, and why she said to me, 'in case.' In case what?" Alex suggests that she wanted to be remembered, but Lista explains that it must have been in case someone would come searching for it in the future. "So they would have something to find," Alex says. But Lista rejects this answer as well, proposing instead that it was done in case someone should come looking for it, but that "it does not exist for you. You exist for it. You have come because it exists." Lista gives Jonathan the box labeled "In Case" full of Augustine's things, insisting that Jonathan "must take it. You are The Collector."

Aliki Varvogli has argued that the novel *Everything is Illuminated* demonstrates that Jonathan's "desire to uncover his grandfather's past and thus complete the picture of his family history shows that even a young American, born in the late 1970s, cannot have a complete sense of his identity and his place in the world while he remains ignorant of how European history affected his own forefathers" (Varvogli 89). Jonathan desires to illuminate his grandfather's past (and by extension, his own) but in spite of its title the film is ambiguous about just what is illuminated. Much of the story that had been told about what happened in Trachimbrod took place only in Alex's grandfather's head as he is forced to revisit a past he tried to forget. Jonathan presumably does not have access to this information, only the somewhat inscrutable objects he collects.

Lista is a collector just as Jonathan is, and both give mystifying explanations for their collecting activities. When Alex asks Jonathan why he collects, he can only say "I don't know, why does anybody do anything? It's just... something to do." Later in the film, Alex asks again, and Jonathan elaborates, "I guess sometimes I'm afraid I'll forget" (though the information he is

currently seeking is something he never knew). Similarly, Lista collects objects related to Trachinbrod – "silver, pinwheels, perfume" in one box, "journals, sketchbooks, underwear" in another. These boxes are carefully labeled and stacked up against the wall of her house, rather than on display as are Jonathan's objects, and this marks the main difference between their collecting practices: Jonathan seeks to bring the past to light in the present, whereas Lista prefers to keep it compartmentalized in the past. Yet she also regards her boxes as company, claiming that she does not live alone because she has "all of them." The film belies their claims that collecting is nothing more than a way to pass the time, however.

The additional material on the DVD release includes two deleted scenes in which Jonathan imagines that his collection will earn him approval from people he cares about. In the first, he sees the rabbi who is presiding over his grandmother's funeral transform into Hitler, who then lauds Jonathan as someone who was very special to his grandmother. The other people at the funeral have become other famous historical figures: Jonathan's brother is now Jesus and his father Gandhi. Joan of Arc, Mother Theresa, and others smile on as the Hitler rabbi praises Jonathans "for his unparalleled collection of family artifacts; this year's universe award for Outstanding Achievement goes to Jonathan Safran Foer." The outdoor funeral is transformed to an indoor awards ceremony, and the award with which Jonathan is presented is a gold cricket statue, integrating the item that began his collection in the first place: the amber cricket fossil. Parodic and over the top, and understandably deleted from the theatrical release, this scene reveals the extent to which, as director, Schreiber imagined collecting as the central activity of the character of Jonathan, rather than writing, which is given more emphasis in the novel. The second deleted scene was intended as the final sequence of the film. As Jonathan leaves the airport after returning home, he walks into the same awards ceremony, the crowd applauding

wildly at his success in tracking down his grandfather's past. The ending of the theatrical release depicts people from Jonathan's recent past mixed in with the people around him in the present moment. Through his collecting, Jonathan lives in the past and present simultaneously.

## 3.4    INDIANA JONES: "OBTAINER OF RARE ANTIQUITIES"

To find a portrayal of a collector who is neither a killer nor an awkward eccentric, one need look no farther than the famed Indiana Jones. But in fact, he is not actually a collector. The Indiana Jones films constitute college archeology professor Dr. Henry "Indiana" Jones (Harrison Ford) as an "obtainer" rather a "collector," thus displacing any anxiety about his character onto the unseen museum for which he "obtains" artifacts. He is in no danger of being labeled a criminal or an eccentric. In each of the four Indiana Jones films, Indiana embarks on journeys to exotic places in search of valuable cultural artifacts. Conveniently, the first three films are set before and during World War II, allowing Indiana to plunder items freely without the intrusion of UNESCO regulations or moral qualms about removing cultural items from their original locations. In fact, both *Raiders* and *Last Crusade* pit Indiana against the Nazis in a race to obtain an artifact. In the absence of UNESCO regulations, it is up to the US to "save" cultural artifacts from the Nazis. Furthermore, as Lester Friedman argues in "'They Don't Know What They've Got There': Spielberg's Action/Adventure Melodramas," "because all three Indiana films display a disdain for indigenous people, we rarely question Indiana's right to take their precious artifacts, even though he never condescends to learn their language or study their culture" (Friedman 104).

Indiana does not seek the objects for himself, however. In *Raiders* and *Last Crusade* his goal is to sell his finds to his college museum, while in *Temple of Doom* and *Crystal Skull* he

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returns items to their original locations. The films suggest that a "good" collector may be motivated by financial gain, moral obligation, or simply a sense of adventure, but never by a desire to possess the objects for him or herself. But in the quests detailed by the films, Indiana always fails to get his finds placed in a museum. In *Raiders*, the Ark of the Covenant is snatched by the U.S. government and buried in an enormous warehouse. In *Temple of Doom* Indiana opts to return the Sankara stones to the village from which they were stolen. In the prologue to *Last Crusade*, the young Indiana loses the Cross of Coronado to the man who will become his rival. The rest of the film centers on his efforts to locate his father and bring him home safely, which Indiana is able to do only by joining his father's quest for the Holy Grail. This object, it turns out, cannot be removed from the room in which it is enshrined.

*Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* is set in the late 1950s and updates Indiana's goals and methods to a certain extent. Here, as in *Last Crusade*, his main goal is to retrieve a lost friend, Professor Oxley (John Hurt), who has been abducted as a consequence of finding a supposedly mythical crystal skull. Both Indiana and Oxley want the crystal skull returned to its original resting place in South America (because the skull itself has instructed them to do so, rather than out of any sense of obligation to Peru).

For its part, the museum in which Indiana intends to house his finds is never shown in any of the films. It is simply "the museum," a place of such finality and stasis that depicting it would disturb the dramatic action of the film (unlike, for example, *The Mummy Returns* (Stephen Sommers, 2001), *The Relic* (Peter Hyams, 1997), and *Night at the Museum,* where the museum is the setting for action and adventure). In *Raiders*, Indiana and Marcus Brody (Denholm Elliot) are drawn into the search for the Ark of the Covenant because of Hitler's "obsessive" interest in the supernatural, and their colleague Abner Ravenwood's "obsession" with the location of the Ark of

the Covenant. Thus, from the beginning of the films a link is forged between collecting and unhealthy fixation. Yet Indiana's life's work revolves around antiquities as well, so the films carefully distinguish his activities from obsession.

In *Last Crusade*, collecting is associated primarily with three figures: Marcus Brody, the director of a museum and Indiana's colleague, Walter Donovan (Julian Glover) a rich private collector, and Indiana Jones, an archeologist who seeks objects for the museum and personal profit. Brody appears in two of the films, *Raiders* and *Last Crusade.* In the former, Brody slips into Indiana's class to discuss his latest trip to South America. As part of the viewer's first introduction to Indiana Jones, his role as a professor of archeology is sharply contrasted with his role as a field researcher. Brody insists that he does not want to hear the details of Indiana's loss of the golden idol because he's "sure that everything you do for the museum conforms to the international treaty for the protection of antiquities." That is to say, Brody wants to benefit from Indiana's actions without taking on the responsibility of determining whether they are ethical. His only interest is in the objects themselves and he functions as a mediator between Indiana and the government, setting up the quest for the Ark without dirtying his hands in obtaining it.

In *Last Crusade*, on the other hand, Brody accompanies Indiana on his quest because of his friendship with Henry Jones, Sr. (Sean Connery), and his incompetent dealings with the real world is the source of comedy and mishap: he is knocked out, kidnapped, and lost in various foreign locales. Though Indiana boasts to the Nazis that Brody is fluent in dozens of languages and so well versed in various cultures that he will blend in anywhere, a cut to Brody in Egypt immediately after reveals that Brody is in fact bumbling around in western clothes, bewilderedly asking "does anyone here speak English? Or even ancient Greek?" Later it is revealed that Brody is a man who "once got lost in his own museum." (One could perhaps see an older Jonathan

Safran Foer in Brody, *willing* to embark upon a quest, but not very adept at finding his way in a foreign country.) Brody's association with collecting is mitigated by his strong ties to Indiana and his father. His purpose in joining the quest for the Holy Grail is to ensure that Jones, Sr. returns home safely – he expresses no real desire for the grail (and, indeed, in this film desire for the grail is a sign of being unworthy to possess it).

Walter Donovan, on the other hand, is the collector who desires artifacts even at the cost of human life. He is in league with the Nazis who want the Grail for its power to grant eternal life, using Dr. Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody) to get close to Jones Sr. on his personal quest for the Grail. Through an uncertain sequence of events, Jones Sr. discovers Schneider is a Nazi, then is captured by Nazis trying to give her the slip, but manages to send his Grail diary to Indiana in the U.S. beforehand. When Jones, Sr. discovers Donavan's betrayal, he says, "I misjudged you, Walter. I knew you would sell your mother for an Etruscan vase, but I didn't you know would sell your country and your soul to the slime of humanity." Both Jones's and Brody had previously trusted Donovan because he made generous donations to the museum and was a knowledgeable collector of cultural artifacts, however in Donovan's case his interest in ancient artifacts was motivated by personal greed alone. In addition to ordering the Nazis to kill Indiana and his father after they have obtained both the diary and the map needed to locate the Grail, Donovan himself shoots Jones Sr. in the Grail cavern, forcing Indiana to solve the booby trap puzzles lying between Donovan and the Grail that will save his father's life.

Indiana is the final collector figure in *Last Crusade*, and the one with the most "proper" relationship to collecting according to the films' terms. Although Indiana is ostensibly an academic in his role as professor of archeology, he uses the college mainly as a source of information and funding for his adventures. *Lost Crusade* makes clear what was not in *Raiders*

and *Temple of Doom*: Jones's archeological collecting is done for the good of humanity (or at least the United States as a stand-in for humanity). As a teenaged Boy Scout, young Jones (River Phoenix) first attempts to rescue the Cross of Coronado from a group of looters he encounters in the Utah desert. The lead excavator in the dig is dressed in Indiana Jones's trademark leather jacket and fedora. With his head down and his back to the camera, the audience is lead to believe that this *is* Jones since the Boy Scout has not yet been named. But when the cross is found and his companions start whooping about how rich they will become, the faux Jones looks up and reveals himself to be a doppelganger. Young Indiana proceeds to fight against what is essentially his future self in this sequence, stealing the Cross of Coronado and attempting a daring escape through a circus train. When confronted by his unnamed doppelganger, he declares the looting of a cross to be an injustice because "it belongs in a museum!" After asserting this revisionist history of Jones' goals no less than three times in the opening sequence, Indiana loses the Cross of Coronado to the looter, who gives him his hat and tells him "You lost today, kid. That doesn't mean you have to like it." A flash-forward to the present day inserts Indiana into a fistfight on a boat in the middle of a storm. He defeats his adversaries, retrieves the same cross lost many years ago, and leaps into the ocean just before the ship explodes. This is the kind of collecting activity Indiana is at home with.

On returning home, Indiana is overwhelmed with students demanding his attention and a secretary nagging him about ungraded exams and a stack of telephone messages. Promising to attend to each student in turn, Indiana retreats to his basement office and escapes out the window to embark on another action-packed adventure. Though Indiana repeatedly flees from human interaction in polite society in favor of obtaining valuable objects, Lester Friedman notes that each film "culminates in a critical moment when Indy must choose between the desired object

and a person and, to emphasize his difference from his foe and how much he has learned during his journey, he selects the person and his antagonist the object" (Friedman 77). Indiana must ultimately let objects slip from his grasp in order to be a hero rather than a grave robber. In the first three films, "all the quests begin with his search for riches and fame, they peak in a defining moment when he must select a person over an object, and they conclude with his personal illumination; spirituality over cynicism and communal needs over individual goals" (Friedman 78). The most recent sequel makes the difference explicit when Indiana and Mutt (Shia LeBeouf) enter a graveyard bearing a sign stating, "Grave robbers will be shot." Indiana insists they will be fine because they are not grave robbers.

In *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Robert Kolker argues that Spielberg's films in particular show viewers what they are ideologically inclined to desire:

> The form and structure of the films produce images and narratives that respond or give shape to the current ideological needs of an audience, offering a safe and secure ideological haven. Their images and narratives speak of a place and a way of being in the world (indeed the universe) that viewers find more than just comfortable, but desirable and—within the films—*available*. (Kolker 238)

As such, what the Indiana Jones films offer is reassurance that museums are a fine place to store important acquisitions, but preservation is less important than moral value (all the objects Indiana seeks have religious significance). Acquisition through manly exertion of strength and cunning is ideologically positive, while tending to objects in a museum is harmlessly effeminate. In "Indiana Jones and the Museums of Imperialism," Mark Moss argues, "the Indiana Jones trilogy suggests values and belief systems which glorify a dated version of conquest" (Moss 111). The racism and imperialism of the Indiana Jones films are often overlooked because of

their setting in the past, allowing the viewer to discount the racist representations for foreign cultures as "realism" (though it certainly is not) in favor of sheer entertainment. This is the criticism most often leveled at Spielberg, that he is so astute in seducing viewers emotionally that his cinematic constructs are accepted as realism against all evidence. Situating *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in a mytho-religious context, Frank P. Tomasulo argues in "Mr. Jones Goes to Washington: Myth and Religion in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*" that the film "must harken back to a past era of national greatness and achievement in the international arena in order to restore and dynamize a cultural renewal in a nation beset with problems foreign and domestic, political and economic" (Tomasulo 332).

While museums in the 1980s were following and refining UNESCO regulations about looting and cultural sensitivity, Spielberg's films upheld the outdated idea that "it is okay…for some valuable items to be stolen, regardless of their meaning, and put into an American or British Museum" (Moss 114) – as long as those doing the looting are Americans, not Nazis. Even though by today's standards Indiana is stealing cultural property, he is a hero "because he is searching for an object that will give power, but he will not use it for evil" (Moss 116). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* supposes that the Ark of the Covenant must be removed from its resting places and shipped to the United States because if it is not the Nazis will use its destructive power in their war efforts. "By removing these cherished relics from their context of origin, by displacing them from their proper surroundings, Indiana Jones desires that they should be placed in a museum, where they are neutralized" (Moss 116). This leaves Indiana "free to roam the world and pluck whatever he is told to get, whatever he wants, or whatever he is paid to obtain because the object will rest within the religious-like (hence beyond question) confines of a museum" (Moss 117), only they never do.

The objects Indiana seeks all come from primitive ancient cultures but are revealed to have immense supernatural power (the Ark melts anyone who looks into it, for example, and the Grail grants eternal life). At the same time, Spielberg's presentation of ethnic others in the Indiana Jones films is disappointingly flat. He retains the typecasting of ethnic others from the classical Hollywood adventure films without significantly lessening its inherent racism. Thus, "The swarming throngs of Indian religious fanatics and gangs of oily Chinese gangsters…the tribe of painted South American savages and treacherous Hispanic double-crossers…and the exaggerated Arab mercenaries and slave laborers…all sustain formulaic dark Other and ethnic clichés that were part of Hollywood's unsavory history" (Friedman 100). As a result, Indiana's quest for cultural artifacts is marked by an urgency "to contain these potentially disruptive elements, as concretized in objects that represent the most sacred and powerful forces in ancient cultures (the Ark, Sankara Stones, Cup of Christ), westerners must entomb them behind glass cases and store them safely in museums; they must become objects of passive viewing rather than conduits of dynamic action" (Friedman 105).

In her essay on the grail myth in the Indiana Jones films, Susan Aronstein argues differently that Indiana Jones' desires and morals change over the course of the first three films. By comparing the films to Arthurian narrative, she argues that between *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Temple of Doom* Indiana changes from a selfish mercenary to a benevolent protector because he chooses to return the Sankara stones to their village of origin, thus "recognizing the stones as artifacts to be protected, not objects to be plundered" (Aronstein 11). Over the course of *Last Crusade*, Indiana further develops as a character by not only choosing the correct political action (leaving the Holy Grail in its original resting place), but also learning "the correct reading of texts and the recovery of lost wisdom" (Aronstein 19) through the help of his scholarly father's

wisdom. Thus, "the quest for the Grail has not been the quest to assert a proper cultural authority validated by the national acquisition of sacred relics; instead, it has been an individual quest for 'illumination'" (Aronstein 24). *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* upholds this reading and problematizes it at the same time. Indiana continues to be an altruistic hero in this film. His only intentions are to rescue his lost friend and Mutt's mother and to prevent the communists (the new ultimate evil after the Nazis have been displaced) from obtaining the crystal skull. The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull turns out to be a museum itself, stuffed with cultural artifacts collected by space aliens from "every era of human history," but Indiana leaves them where they are.

Returning the crystal skull to its alien body reveals that the myth of a city paved with streets of gold is a misinterpretation. "Knowledge was their treasure," Indiana explains, but when the possibility arises to partake of this alien knowledge, Indiana warns us that we "don't want to go that way." Indeed, it is the antagonist, Irina Spalko (Cate Blanchett), who seeks knowledge ("I want to know everything!" she insists) and is destroyed by it. The aliens' museum of human artifacts is also destroyed with the restoration of the final crystal skull as the chamber in which the skeletons rest turns out to be an interdimensional spaceship that creates a whirling mass of destruction as it departs, destroying the outer chamber where the collection rests into a great swirling mass of artifacts and treasure, fragmented, destroyed and buried. The image suggests the new (digital) world is destroying the past. Indiana's freedom to plunder exotic cultures has ended, and the museum of humanity is utterly destroyed. The image of whirling, chaotic debris acts as a visual metaphor for this film's take on the information culture and the World Wide Web: it heralds the destruction of history and memory.

Though this reading frees the Indiana Jones films from some of the charges of racism and imperialism, they nevertheless remain distinctly conservative films. *Last Crusade*

records the passing of the trilogy's earlier ideal of a politically redeemed America and yet replaces that ideal with one that is perhaps even more conservative: American has failed because it has lost its religious and familial (read patriarchal) values, and its strength will be recovered only in an individual recovery of these traditions and a return to both transcendent and human fathers. (Aronstein 25)

Friedman attempts to redeem Indiana from previous readings of the films as wholeheartedly participating in Reaganite politics and reactionary conservatism. "Indiana never aligns himself with wealthy collectors, such as the unscrupulous man in the panama hat (Tim Hisler) who takes the Cross of Coronado from him early in the film and later washes overboard in a violent storm. His goal is always to bring objects of antiquity back intact, to study them in museums rather than to use them to gain power over others or to satisfy personal manias" (Friedman 115). He concludes by arguing that Indiana moves from a position of blind imperialism to one of worldly wisdom, and that the films ultimately demonstrate that removing artifacts from their source cultures is "arrogant, dangerous, and destructive" (Friedman 117).

Ultimately, the Indiana Jones films are about the quests and not the objects that are ostensibly the goal. Since Spielberg is working within rather than against classical Hollywood narrative, Indiana has to be a heroic figure of action, not a sinister or effeminate lover of things. Even the visual style of the films reinforces this idea. Shots of his quest objects are rather sparse, and mostly unremarkable. Further, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* depicts archeology as a linear quest. The opening scenes show Indiana moving without hesitation through a jungle in South America, his notes guiding him without hesitation to the temple of the golden idol. The temple appears to consist of a single long passage. As long as Indiana can avoid the booby traps, all he needs to do is walk in and remove the idol. Even though Indiana has some difficulty achieving his goals,

each quest is a logical sequence of deductions and movements. This idea is reinforced by the animated maps showing the plane route from the United States to Nepal, and then from Nepal to Egypt in neat, straight lines. When Marion (Karen Allen) is captured by the Nazis and transported to an unidentified island, the submarine's route is depicted as more serpentine on the map animation. Similarly, the headpiece to the Staff of Ra gives Indy a direct route to his quest object. Positioned properly in the map room, the sun will shine through the crystal and create a beam of light that falls on the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, which he then measures with a tape measure. In *Last Crusade,* the chase on the train follows another linear path as young Indiana scrambles from car to car trying to escape with the Cross of Coronado. The model in all of the films is the obstacle course, and primarily forward-moving race with a series of obstacles set along the path. Spielberg again uses the animated air travel maps to indicate Indiana's movement from New York to Venice and the obstacle course model for Indiana's struggle to locate the knight's tomb in the catacombs underneath the library. Winding car road map from Venice to Salzburg. The resting place of the grail is Petra, one of the "Seven Wonders of the World" – the film depicts the interior of the structure as another straight-line obstacle course, most notably the leap of faith section, which is a seemingly bottomless canyon across which there is no visible path. But the way to cross is to blindly step straight forward anyway. The linearity of Indiana's travels and quests puts the emphasis on his actions. He is an "obtainer" of things, not a collector.

### 3.5   *HIGH FIDELITY*: THE FANBOY COLLECTOR

Although there are numerous films in which collectors are no more than stereotypes, there is the occasional exception. Stephen Frears' adaptation of *High Fidelity* is one such film. Although it does not strongly contradict the reigning stereotypes of collecting, it connects the activity to everyday popular culture fans. The film opens with an image of the collected object in use, a close-up of a spinning record. It then cuts to a close-up of a headphone cord, panning from its connection in the receiver to the headphones on Rob Gordon's (John Cusack) ears, suggesting that his connection to his music is umbilical. His girlfriend Laura (Iben Hjejle) has to yank the cord out in order to get Rob to pay attention to the fact that she is leaving him. After she leaves, Rob asks the audience in direct address, "Which came first, the music or the misery?" But the film might well be asking a different version of the question, which came first, Rob's record collection or his compulsion to rank and organize things? Though one of Frears' more commercially successful films, most critics have overlooked it as mere juvenile entertainment.

In "Love, Lists, and Class in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*," Barry Faulk argues that collecting and listing are the tools of canon formation, and "intellectuals hungry for status still police the borders of taste" (Faulk 154) by employing them on various forms of pop culture such as rock music. Faulk claims that, "lists may testify to the ubiquity of the evaluative impulse, even in popular arts that intellectuals traditionally have doubted in fact would organize the field. However, lists also fix a specific relation between art and history, privileging the past over present. Giving the past an upper hand can be fatal to experimental, innovational activity in the arts and in life" (Faulk 167). Thus, Faulk ultimately sees the film as a sad elegy to rock music in its old age, one which "participates in the archivist, curatorial moment of rock's middle age—a reactive, conservative codification of rock into something to rank, evaluate, and historicize"

(Faulk 154). Faulk argues that rock music was initially a form of rebellion that challenged the patriarchal order. "Rock knowledge was initially a tool used by the young in their struggle with elders and other authorities that just didn't get it; rock consumption was used, in other words, to construct meaningful differences among social groups" (Faulk 161). However, over time rock was tamed and normalized. Today, "the rock connoisseur bears the same symptoms of the schizoid subject produced by other modes of consumption. In *High Fidelity*, Hornby details rock's shifts from social practice to privatized, solipsistic, and anxiety-inducing consumption practice" (Faulk 161). Rob's investment in organizing his collection and making lists based on its contents links him to a static past rather than a progressive and changing future.

The fact that Rob is a private collector interested in pop culture items aligns him with the rise of fan culture documented by Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. When Jenkins wrote the book in 1992, it "described a moment when fans were marginal to the operations of our culture, ridiculed by the media, shrouded in social stigma, pushed underground by legal threats, and often depicted as brainless and inarticulate" (*Fans* i). Over time, fan culture has gained more acceptance, and as Jenkins notes in his introduction to *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Media Consumers in a Digital Age*, his 2006 book *Convergence Culture,* "describes a moment where fans are central to how culture operates. The concept of the active audience, so controversial two decades ago, is now taken for granted by everyone involved in and around the media industry" (*Fans* i). What Jenkins and others working with fan culture have witnessed and even fought for has gradually become more widespread and more acceptable (though not fully mainstream). Collecting is a large part of fan culture, and thus increased acceptance of fan activities should lead to an increase in collecting activity. Yet, as we shall see, live-action film portrayals remains out of step with this shift.

In a comparative analysis of Rob and his main romantic rival Ian (Tim Robbins), Faulk demonstrates that the difference between Rob and Ian is based partly on their different relationship to material objects, a relationship determined by class. "If Rob deals in consumer objects that he often refuses to treat as commodities (a tendency most strikingly seen in his refusal to raid another man's record collection even when an estranged, angry wife makes the collection available at a cheap price to Rob), Ian brandishes a taste that never quite conceals its roots in capital and privilege" (Faulk 164). While both men are defined by their material things (Rob by his sneakers, rumpled t-shirt and leather jacket, and Ian by his long ponytail, silver rings and purple sunglasses), Ian's business class taste is "too demonstrative about its attachment to material things to lay claim to cultural authority" (Faulk 165) in Rob's mind. "Rob's imagined elite rests on the purity of their existential investment in esoteric pop truths unavailable to outsiders" Faulk argues (165). Thus, Rob's collection consists of far more than the records themselves, but the combination of detailed knowledge about the records (tracks, cover art, lyrics, music, release date), the artists (biographies, musical abilities), and the circumstances under which he acquired the record or first heard the music (concerts attended, reasons for purchasing a particular record, date and location of purchase).

However, unlike other films with collectors as main characters, the film is not structured as Rob's quest to find the ultimate record for his collection, but rather as a series of meditations on love and past failed relationships, which Rob has ranked just as he has ranked his records, starting with his "Desert Island All-Time Top Five Most Memorable Breakups (in chronological order)." Though on the one hand this can be seen to trivialize Rob's relationships with women, on the other it functions as a tool for self-reflection. Rob picks the five most hurtful breakups he has experienced and then reflects on what made them so and why he seems doomed to a life of

romantic failure. Rob's lists are not fixed and authoritative like the inventory of a classical museum, but flexible and subject to change. Midway through the film he revises the memorable breakups list to include Laura when he learns she left him for someone else. New knowledge and new experience are reflected in Rob's rankings.

People have to make a "special effort" to shop at Rob's out-of-the-way specialty store. This limited clientele is not a problem for Rob since, as a collector of relatively inexpensive objects, he has a somewhat non-commercial relationship to his records. He characterizes his customers as, "mostly young men who spend all their time looking for deleted Smiths singles and original, not rereleased (underlined) Frank Zappa albums." Rob and his record store employees live by the motto "what really matters is *what* you like, not what you *are* like. Books, records, films – these things matter." In a deleted scene Rob visits a woman who is selling the best record collection he has ever seen – her estranged husband's collection, as it turns out. But when the woman tells him, "Give me fifty bucks and they're all yours," Rob has doubts. He learns that she is selling her husband's records at his request, because he is in Jamaica with a nineteen-year-old friend of their daughter and wants her to sell the collection, keep ten percent of the profit for herself, and send the rest on to him to further fund his Jamaican affair. The wife knows the records are worth thousands more, but she wants to sell them cheaply and hurt her husband. Though torn, Rob declines her offer because, he says, "I couldn't do that to another collector." He buys one record from the wife at a bargain price, but leaves the rest even though he knows another record collector won't have the same sense of ethics as he does.

Rob's relationship to records is the opposite of Dean Corso's to books in *The Ninth Gate*. When Corso is called to appraise the collection of books of an ailing elderly man, he tells the ignorant family members that the most expensive ones, a prized four volume edition of *Don*

*Quixote*, is the least valuable and buys it for far less than market value. He sets his appraisal of the rest of the collection at a price much higher than its actual value, seemingly just to thwart the dealers who will come after him.

Laura's complaint about Rob is that he has not changed since she met him, and he expects that other people will stay the same as well. His record collection changes, but he does not. Though she does not directly criticize his collecting, the idea that he is too focused on the past and keeping things the way they are correlates to the preservative instinct of the collector. While many people grow out of their youthful obsession with pop culture, Rob has made it his life by owning a record store. Over the course of their breakup and reunification Rob is forced to reevaluate his career goals as well as his past relationships. He makes a list of his top five dream jobs, which Laura mocks for being unrealistic since they are unconstrained by limits of time or ability (such as the job in the number one slot, "Journalist for *Rolling Stone* magazine, 1976-1979"), and because, of the more realistic goals, his final choice of architect is something he does not really think he would like to do after all. When pressured to replace architect with something he actually wants, Rob picks record store owner, which is what he already is.

The list is open in that Rob excludes no possibility, and considers everything he is interested in regardless of feasibility; but it does not provide him with any career ambition as he has already obtained the only reasonable dream job on the list. To Rob, the idea of changing is like giving up on an achieved goal. Yet immediately following this scene Rob hears the demo tape of two teen skate punks who have previously shoplifted from his store, and, on impulse, he decides to produce their record and start his own Top Five record label. The film concludes with the launch party for this album, something Rob thinks is no big deal, but which Laura sees as a huge step forward: "You're making something. You, the critic, the professional appreciator, put

something new in the world." While Laura's implied criticism is of critics who do not produce anything of value, it has implications for collectors as well. Collectors do not produce anything new in Laura's view; they only buy what someone else has made.

In the end, *High Fidelity* attempts to reconcile the status quo with the need for change. Rock music continually evolves, and though Rob cannot happily remain solely in the past with his classic records now enshrined in the rock music canon, he can use the taste he has built as a hard-core record collector to determine and shape the music of the future, such as the skateboard kid's punk band, the Kinky Wizards. Rob's obsession with listing and ranking cultural objects is mutable, allowing for change over time. It is not enough for him to just be a collector anymore. His obsession with records is only acceptable when he joins the media industry itself as a producer. So although Rob is a classic fan in Henry Jenkins' sense and is intended to be a (mostly) sympathetic romantic hero in the film, the acceptability of his collecting activity is mediated by his final decision to become a producer.

### 3.6    *NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM*: BREATHING LIFE INTO THE MUSEUM

While there is a clear trend in portraying the collector as a specific type of person in film that even the exceptions cannot fully escape, the physical space of the museum itself has a much more varied representation in the cinema. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common examples come from European films. Esther Johnson's short essay, "The Memory: Museums in Cinema," provides an overview of these. From George Franju's *Hôtel des Invalides* (1952), to Jean-Luc Godard's *Bande a Part* (1964), to Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002), the public museum has been the locus for explorations of questions of truth, authority and memory in these post-war

European/Eastern European films. Johnson's conclusion is that though each of these films differs in their use of the museum, they "draw attention to the fact that museums seek to pacify the past by neatly encasing and memorializing it behind glass, yet remain haunting places which can psychologically affect the visitor" (Johnson 9). However, the representation of museums in American films is markedly different than in the European art film tradition.

As Johnson notes, Alfred Hitchcock used museums as backdrops for two of his films, *Blackmail* (1929), which featured the British Museum, and *Vertigo* (1958), in which an unknown art museum holds the portrait of Carlotta Valdes that Madeleine Elster, and her double, Judy Barton (both played by Kim Novak), spend hours contemplating. Though unique instances exist s in the works of Hitchcock, the appearance of a museum in American films usually falls into one of three categories: it is either the location of a desired work of art or artifact in a heist or detective film (*The Pearl of Death* [Roy William Neill, 1944], *How to Steal a Million* [William Wyler, 1963], *The Order* [Sheldon Lettich, 2001]), the source of mystery, monsters and/or exoticism in suspense and comedy films (*Mystery of the Wax Museum* [Michael Curtiz, 1933], *Ghostbusters II* [Ivan Reitman, 1989], *The Relic* [Peter Hyams, 1997], *The Mummy Returns* [Stephen Sommers, 2001]), or a playful space for kids to learn or adults to goof off (*From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* [Fielder Cook, 1973], *L.A. Story* [Mick Jackson, 1991], *Night at the Museum*, [2006] and *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* [2009]).

The appearance of the museum in the first two types is mainly a plot contrivance rather than a thoughtful interrogation of the kind of space museums represent. Museums contain objects of value and elaborate security systems, making them enticing but challenging targets for both fictional and real-life thieves. As repositories for mummies, dinosaur bones, and spiritual objects from exotic cultures, museums also make good fodder for stories about skeletons, statues and

paintings come to life to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting modern world. Generally commenting on loss of magic and spiritualism in modern rational society, this second category of films is the most prolific. However, it is the third category that I want to explore in-depth in this chapter, because *Night at the Museum* most closely dovetails with the issues of museum usage and computer-generated imagery discussed in other chapters.

*Night at the Museum* is the story of a down-and-out divorcé, Larry Daley (Ben Stiller), who desperately needs to find a job – any job – in order to be a good father to his son. The film is predicated on the idea that Larry's failed entrepreneurial schemes and multiple evictions from apartments are damaging his relationship with his son Nick (Jake Cherry), even though his ex-wife, Erica (Kim Raver), has primary custody. She tells him, "It's just that too much instability, it's not good for him…I don't think Nicky should stay with you." Faced with losing the partial custody of his son that he has, Larry desperately takes the only job he can find: night guard at the American Museum of Natural History. For Larry, taking a menial, everyday job like this represents not only giving up on his business ambitions, but admitting that he is "just an ordinary guy who should get a job" and not a hero in the eyes of his son.

Larry's job turns out to be anything but ordinary, however. Instead of walking through darkened halls filled with silent exhibits, Larry finds himself being chased and harassed by exhibits that come to life when the sun sets. Larry's job is not so much to protect the museum from theft as it is to prevent the exhibits from destroying each other or wandering away when they come to life each night. As a vivified wax model of Teddy Roosevelt (Robin Williams) explains to Larry, "Your job is to make sure that everyone stays inside the museum, because if the sun rises and anyone is on the outside we turn to dust." Roosevelt explains that the mummy Akmun-ra's gold tablet has had the power to bring dead things to life, ever since the exhibit was

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set up in 1952. But given the variety of people, animal and objects in the museum, chaos ensues because they each engage in their former behaviors: the civil war dummies want to fight each other, the Roman soldiers and American west pioneers seek to expand their empires, the lions want to hunt, and the dinosaur in the atrium wants to play fetch. Suddenly, Larry's job is transformed from a mundane blue-collar position to a dangerous and action-packed job unlike any other.

The retiring night guard Cecil (Dick Van Dyke) gives Larry an instruction manual, and tells him to follow the directions exactly in order. Larry's ineptitude results in the instructions being destroyed, and so he has to invent new procedures for controlling the living exhibits. By not following the old instructions (whose torn, yellowing pages mark it as a vessel of hidebound thinking), Larry is ultimately able to create harmony where none existed before. He lets the mummy that everyone is afraid of out of the sarcophagus, only to find that Akmerah (Rami Malek) is a handsome young man (rather than a crusty, shriveled corpse) who speaks perfect English (because of his time spent on display at Cambridge University) and wants nothing more than to be free to walk around. Larry gets the Northern and Confederate soldier dummies to stop fighting and work together, and the Roman Centurions and western pioneers become friends.

Reviews of *Night at the Museum* were on the whole negative, and those that were positive seemed to mainly praise it for being inoffensive rather than actually good. Nevertheless, the film did well enough to spawn a sequel, *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (2009). While Ruthe Stein calls *Night at the Museum* "coyly hilarious" and concludes that the special effects extravaganza makes history more interesting than any teacher ever could, she hardly seems to believe her own final line, "Who knows, it might even inspire them to want to visit an actual museum." Those critical of the film point to failures in the plot, uninspired special

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effects, and a poorly used star cast. As the ultimate insult, Claudia Puig concludes, "A daytime field trip to a local museum with a droning guide beats the tedium of the strangely lifeless *Night at the Museum*" (Puig).

The museum is more than a convenient backdrop for Larry's domestic drama. The film illustrates the changing philosophy of museum usage that has been underway since the experiential turn in the 1960s. It begins with a montage of shots of different exhibits in the empty museum, all lifeless and still, confirming most viewers' expectations that the museum is a place for quiet contemplation of hackneyed dioramas and dusty examples of taxidermy. This impression will soon be disrupted and is part of an argument that today's museums are exciting and interactive locations for public entertainment and education. The reason Larry is hired to replace Cecil, Gus (Mickey Rooney) and Reginald (Bill Cobbs) is, as Cecil explains, because "The museum is losing money. Hand over fist. I guess kids today don't care about wax figures or stuffed animals. So, they're downsizing, which is code for firing. Myself, and the other two night guards." Each exhibit pictured in the opening sequence is later shown come to life. Before this new approach can be embraced, however, Larry must learn to control the chaos of the night museum and convince the museum director to come around to a new way of thinking.

Dr. McPhee (Ricky Gervais), the museum director, is the representative of the old-school ideal of the museum. He becomes apoplectic and incapable of coherent speech when children touch the exhibits. He, along with the docent, Rebecca Hutman (Carla Gugino) (who is also a graduate student writing a dissertation on Sacajawea) views the museum as a quiet place for adult research and contemplation. Although Rebecca is easily won over, McPhee has more difficulty with change. When excited children climb up on the edge of the dinosaur skeleton exhibit in the front lobby, McPhee throws a tantrum: "Please don't touch the exhibits!

[muttering] I mean, riff raff. Ms. Hutman, I cannot tolerate this type of chaos. I mean, this is a museum, not a…Do you know what museum means? It doesn't mean, ooo, Daddy, it's a big tyrannosaurus thing. Can I touch its leg? No! Work it out, please." After Larry's third night of messily restoring order to the feuding exhibits, the chaos far exceeds what McPhee can overlook and he fires Larry. However, the dinosaur tracks in the street, cave drawings in the subway, and Neanderthals cavorting on the museums roof are interpreted by the media as an advertising campaign on the part of the museum that brings flocks of patrons to the museum. McPhee takes one look at the increased patronage and wordlessly hands back Larry's keys and flashlight.

*Night at the Museum* is essentially an hour and a half long advertisement for New York's American Museum of Natural History. The exterior shots are of the museum itself, although all interior scenes were shot on a sound stage. The depiction of the interior corresponds with the real museum (the dinosaur skeleton in the atrium, the blue whale, the hall of gems and minerals). In fact, MSNBC reported "AMNH officials have credited the movie with increasing the number of visitors during the holiday season in 2006 by almost 20%. According to Museum president Ellen Futter, there were 50,000 more visits over the previous year during the 2006 holiday season." (MSNBC.com).

The 2009 sequel, *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, addresses the anxiety of museum relevance by having the wax figures and stuffed specimens from the first movie crated and shipped of to storage to make way for an all-new digitally interactive museum (featuring a flickering hologram of Teddy Roosevelt). The Smithsonian museum archives are the place museum exhibits go to die (at least in the world of these two films). McPhee derisively calls the renovations "version 2.0" of the museum, but he is outvoted by the board of directors. Larry merges the public's love for "what's new" with the traditional aims of preservation by

adding night hours to the museum – the animated figures are the interactive display and the creaky old museum pieces all at once.

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

From nearly its inception, live-action films have espoused a very limited view on the nature of collecting. As an activity, collecting is not an enterprise favored by commercial, action-oriented cinema, involving as it does a lot of time-consuming research, internal contemplation, and arranging of things on shelves. But while collectors themselves do not often make good action heroes or romantic leads, they appear as primary and secondary characters with surprising frequency. Though this analysis has only considered a few examples in-depth, similar representations can be seen in *Alice Solves the Puzzle* (Walt Disney, 1925), *Bringing up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941)*, The Long, Long Trailer* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953), *The Eiger Sanction* (Clint Eastwood, 1975)*, The Relic* (Peter Hyams, 1997), *The Golden Bowl* (James Ivory, 2000), *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001), *Adaptation* (Spike Jones, 2002)*,* and *The Forty Year Old Virgin* (Judd Apatow, 2005).

Live-action film seemed to have settled into a comfortable rut in its portrayal of collecting by the 1980s. Collectors made good eccentrics and criminals, but rarely needed to be considered as anything more than stock characters. Although this tendency can be linked to the industry practice of employing stereotypes as a narrative shorthand, newer forms of visual entertainment are calling into question old assumptions about what collectors and collecting are. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, digital game narratives have a radically different attitude toward collecting, and given the close association between the film and game industries, it is

likely that the old stereotypes are being chipped away, albeit slowly. However, although live-action film may be showing signs of change (as in *High Fidelity*), its counterpart, the animated feature film, is not.

# 4.0    "TOYS DON'T LAST FOREVER": COLLECTING IN ANIMATED FILMS

I have chosen to consider animated films separately from live-action films in keeping with the long-standing practice of separating the two. Yet my goal is not to do so to avoid the complications of their relationship,[19] but to confront them head on. Past critics have divided animation and live action based on a perceived lack of photorealism in animation. Unfortunately, this has never been more than a convenient fiction. Animated film may not look photorealistic in the same way that live-action film does, but it is nevertheless a photorealist reproduction of the drawing (or other material) placed sequentially in front of the camera. The case of stop-motion animation complicates things even more. The individual images in a stop-motion film like *Street of Crocodiles* (Stephen and Timothy Quay 1986) are just as photorealistic as a live-action film, but stop-motion is nevertheless generally considered to be a kind of animation. Another differentiation posits that live-action film involves actors while animation does not, however this does not hold up very well either since films like the early actualities sometimes did not feature people or even animals, instead surveying a landscape. (Or consider Hollis Frampton's 1969 film *Lemon*, which "stars" only an unmoving lemon.) Additionally, this view overlooks the

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[19] Previous film theorists such as Siegfried Kracauer explicitly set animation aside from their consideration. In the preface to *Theory of Film*, for example, Kracauer states that he intentionally neglects both the "animated cartoon" and color [Kracauer xlvii]

contribution of voice actors to animated films. Until recently, most critics have dealt with all this confusion by calling animation an exception to the rules and leaving it at that.

It seems likely that animation and live-action are not two different media, merely two different styles, however there does seem to be a divide between the two when it comes to conceptualizing collecting. This chapter divides animated films from other cinema because of the more polemic stance they take on collecting as a social practice. Through an analysis of *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989), *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter and Ash Brannon, 1999), *Curious George* (Matthew O'Callaghan, 2006), and *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), I argue that animated films favor objects in constant use and transformation over objects with more historically or symbolically fixed meaning. The narrative premise of *Toy Story 2*, for example, is that it is better for toys to be loved, worn out and abandoned by their owners than to be preserved forever in a Japanese toy museum. This tendency arises from the very principles of animation that construct it as a highly flexible and experimental form, one that emphasizes transformation, change, and the fleeting moment, rather than preservation and history.

Animation abounds with inanimate objects that talk, walk, and transform: adventurous toasters in search of an owner, singing teapots that used to be human housekeepers, and psychic talking mirrors.[20] Animated objects are therefore antithetical to collecting since collections attempt to pin objects down and prevent them from changing. While many have excluded animation from critical consideration of the cinema at large, there is a small, but growing body of work that studies animated film and television programs as part of the cinema.[21]

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[20] In *The Brave Little Toaster* (Jerry Rees, 1987), *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) and *Snow White* (David Hand, 1937), respectively.

[21] This study will focus primarily on animation produced for the cinema, but the differences between film and TV animation are less pronounced than the differences between live-action films and television shows.

In 1947, Erwin Panofsky observed in "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," that the "very virtue of the animated cartoon is to animate; that is to say, endow lifeless things with life or living things with a different kind of life. It effects a metamorphosis" (Panofsky 285 f). He further argues that "the very concept of a stationary existence is completely abolished. No object in creation, whether it be a house, a piano, a tree or an alarm clock, lacks the faculties of organic, in fact anthropomorphic, movement, facial expression and phonetic articulation" (Panofsky 285-6). The animated cartoon is an expression of pure cinematic possibility for Panofsky. As a result, animated and photorealistic images do not have the same function. Instead, Panofsky argues that

> It is the movies, and only the movies, that do justice to that materialistic interpretation of the universe which, whether we like it or not, pervades contemporary civilization. *Excepting the very special case of the animated cartoon*, the movies organize material things and persons, not a neutral medium, into a composition that receives its style, and may even become fantastic or pretervoluntarily symbolic, not so much by an interpretation in the artist's mind as by the actual manipulation of physical objects and recording machinery. The medium of the movies is physical reality as such: the physical reality of eighteenth-century Versailles—no matter whether it be the original or a Hollywood facsimile." (Panofsky 292, emphasis mine)

Thus, Panofsky and others have long held that no matter how fantastic, live-action film always refers to reality as such, and the ontologic argument that film has an especial affinity for presenting the material world only holds up as long as animation is excluded from consideration.

In keeping with the periodization of other chapters, I focus here on post-1980s animated films, although earlier examples also exist. In Walt Disney's *Alice Solves the Puzzle* (1925), for

example, Woodleg Pete steals Alice's (Margie Gay) crossword puzzle because it is the one missing from his collection. Early Warner Brothers Looney Toons also featured collectors or museums on occasion, such as *Buddy's Bug Hunt* (Jack King, 1935), in which one-time Warner Brothers cartoon star Buddy is a bug collector whose collection turns on him in pursuit of revenge, and *The Egg Collector* (Chuck Jones, 1940), in which Sniffles the mouse and Bookworm collect owl's eggs until they realize that owls eat mice and worms. In *Louvre Come Back* (Chuck Jones and Maurice Noble, 1962), Pepe Le Pew chases his paramour through the Louvre museum, and the joke is that he smells so bad that even the normally lifeless paintings come to life in order to hold their noses.

## 4.1    DEFINING ANIMATION

Before analyzing collecting in animation more deeply, a persistent question must be answered: What is animation? Frequently, the term is understood to mean hand drawn cartoons in motion, and Paul Wells notes in *Animation: Genre and Authorship* (*Animation* 2), specifically the cel animation style made famous by Walt Disney. Recent technological advances have strained this definition, and some critics have found it easiest to think of computer-generated imagery (CGI) as essentially the same as hand-constructed works, regarding the computer as just "another pencil" (Wells *Animation* 2), particularly since the abstract cartoon style of films employing CGI is visually similar to cel animation to date. However, this view fails to address the fact that CGI animation lacks the intermediate step of photographing the created object. Cel animation consists of hand-drawn images photographed and projected in sequence. CGI images may be artist-created, but they do not result in a physical object (drawing, model, etc.), which is

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then photographed.

Ultimately, the question that needs to be answered is whether animation should be defined by style or method? Preston Blair defined animation in 1994 as "the process of drawing and photographing a character...in successive positions to create lifelike movement" (Blair 6), however Blair's definition excludes some of the work of animators like Émile Cohl (an early stop motion animator), Norman McLaren (a powerhouse of experimental animation who worked with a wide variety of material and techniques) and Art Clokey (the creator of the claymation *Gumby* series). Claymation and other stop-motion films are not drawn by hand or by computer, but are most commonly considered animation nonetheless. In *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, Paul Wells seeks to open up the field of animation by noting "Fundamentally, to make an animated film, it is necessary to create the illusion of movement frame-by-frame through a variety of technical applications" (Wells 7), which restores the work of Cohl, McLaren and Clokey, but still leaves in doubt how frame-by-frame movement is different from live-action film, since, as Scott McCloud points out in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*: "you might say [that] before it's projected, film is just a very, very, very, very, slow comic" (McCloud 8). Such an attitude toward animation, "draws attention to the individual cels or frames, particularly in the field of two-dimensional cartoon animation, as specific works of fine art made distinctive by virtue of their necessary place within the 25 [sic] frames required to make one second of full animated movement onscreen" (Wells *Genre* 6). Norman McLaren has famously defined animation through his claim that "How it moves is more important than what moves...what the animator does on each frame of film is not as important as what he or she does in between" (qtd. in Wells 6). Jayne Pilling has suggested that the term "animation" is in fact a misnomer, that animation is less about motion than about representational practices shared in other media, such

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as painting.

One thing that animation scholars do agree on is that change and transformation are key characteristics of the art. Precisely because of the slipperiness in defining it, animation has had a tendency to emphasize transformation, change and the fleeting moment. Wells, for example, argues that, "The mutability of the body, and indeed, the whole material environment, is a fundamental aspect of the way animation revises and questions aesthetic norms and social orthodoxies. It is, therefore a key enunciative aspect in the modernising process as it literally and metaphorically illustrates instability, change and alternative perspectives" (*Animation* 39). The depiction of metamorphosis is unique to animation since it does not rely on tricking the viewer into thinking one thing changes into another, but actually depicts an object or figure changing (Wells *Animation* 69). Rather than there being just a thematic difference between animation and live-action, Wells argues that the difference affects narrative structure as well:

> Metamorphosis can resist logical developments and determine unpredictable linearities (both temporal and spatial) that constitute different kinds of narrative construction. It can also achieve transformations in figures and objects which essentially *narrate* those figures and objects, detailing, by implication, their intrinsic capacities. In enabling the collapse of the illusion of physical space, metamorphosis destabilises the image, conflating horror and humour, dream and reality, certainty and speculation. (*Animation* 69)

Metamorphosis is part of the overall release from the laws of physics that typifies cartoons like Chuck Jones' Road Runner series, in which Wile E. Coyote inevitably ends up being suspended in midair just long enough to realize his mistake, at which point gravity begins to function again. Some of these values are reflected in experimental forms of live-action film. The Surrealists, in

particular, were interested in complicating the relationship between dreams and reality. But for the Surrealists, photography "produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact" (Bazin 16). Arguably, the animated image never becomes real, but always remains an image.

Animation, though still indexical in the sense that the artist's drawings or models are photographed, takes a different philosophical stance in its relation to physical reality. Though most animation is seen as life-affirming (breathing life into inanimate objects and images), transformation, degradation, pain and even decay are oft-repeated themes in animated films. Because of its strong alliance with fantasy, however, death is not permanent: What is transformed can be restored. What is dead can come back to life, either the same life or a new one. Animation assuages our fears not by preserving the past, but by promising us that everything is ultimately reformed anew, no matter how much it changes. We rise from the ashes or adopt new forms of being. In explaining Bazin's mummy complex, Philip Rosen argues in *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* that "The lure of automatically produced images is attributable to subjective obsession precisely because time is a threat. It threatens the stable existence of the subject (death, decay) as well as the object (degradation, transformation)" (Rosen 28). Animation counters that threat by denying the passage of time and the stability of existence – the laws of the physical world simply do not apply in cartoons.

Stephen Rowley tackles the complex question of realism in animation in "Life Reproduced in Drawings: Preliminary Comments Upon Realism in Animation." The animated films of the Disney corporation are often noted for their realism, but the kind of realism presented in these films is not photorealism, but psychological realism or realism of motion. Rowley notes that

Disney films do not seem to attempt an exact duplication of either reality or live-action filmmaking. Wells makes the point that in animation, the depiction of characters, objects, and environments are over-determined: exaggerated so that they move into a 'realism which is simultaneously realistic but beyond the orthodoxies of realism.' (Rowley 69)

Thus, Rowley concludes that Disney animation employs "ultra-realism," favoring "heightened [and] exaggerated depiction[s] of the real" (Rowley 69). Disney is only one producer of animated images (even if it is the most prolific), and its practice of ultra-realism does not mean that animation, in general, is ultra-real. Realism can take many forms in animation, and Rowley outlines five of the more common types: visual realism, aural realism, realism of motion, narrative and character realism, and social realism (Rowley 70).

Rosen, like so many others, pushes animation to the side in his analysis of the cinema. But doing so is problematic when it leads to statements such as the following:

In the digital utopia, the old is fixation in the sense that the function of photography and film is to fixate things: fixation of the preexistent world in the image; fixation of the preexistent spectator captivated by the desire for perception and knowledge of the world; and therefore fixation of stable identities of world and spectator. They are therefore opposed to the change, flux, unending process proposed by the digital utopia. (Rosen 334)

Here, Rosen argues that what is new about digital media is its shift from fixation to flux, from indexicality to interactivity, but he ignores the fact that animation has embraced this all along. In fact, what is happening is that digital media is transforming nearly all live-action film into animation. Following this argument, it would seem that animation is the new standard for

realism. But all digital technology is doing is extending principles that already existed in animation.

As a result, there are those who question whether animation exists as a category anymore, or indeed if it ever existed at all. In *Image Future*, Lev Manovich explores the way animation techniques are a ubiquitous component of most moving images produced today. He argues that "while most live action films and animated features do look quite distinct today, this is the result of deliberate choices rather than the inevitable consequence of differences in production methods and technology" (Manovich *Image Future* 26); he concludes that "If we consider this multiplicity, it is possible to come to a conclusion that 'animation' as a separate medium in fact hardly exists anymore" (Manovich *Image Future* 35). His definition of animation takes into account newer computer-generated techniques not considered (or not considered in-depth) in previous writing on animation. Early animation was primarily defined by an artist creating drawings, choosing key frames (drawings which define the beginning and end of a smooth motion in animation), and then creating the "inbetween positions" (Manovich *Image Future* 35). Using this technique, the animator directly controls the movement of the animated figures. In newer computer generated graphics, "the animator does not directly create movement. Instead it is created by the software that uses some kind of mathematical model" (Manovich *Image Future* 36).

Manovich contends that even though computer graphics do sometimes capture "real physical movement" (Manovich *Image Future* 36) they cannot be considered live-action footage. The use of motion capture technology, or mocap, for animated films has received a great deal of media attention recently due to its use in the *Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) series of films in particular. Though it is similar in principle to the rotoscoping used in early animation,

mocap is a much more direct capture of motion. Instead of tracing over film footage (as in rotoscoping), motion capture technology generates a cartoon image based on the movements of the actor. The captured footage is not simply a guide to the artist, but the final product itself, needing only to be placed into the scene. In 2006, *Happy Feet* (George Miller and Warren Coleman) won the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award for Best Animation because of its use of mocap technology to create dazzling dance sequences. At the same time, they do not fit the traditional definition of animation as a manual creation of movement.  CGI is thus a hybrid form wherein the animators "act as film directors – only in this case they are directing not the actors but the computer model until it produces a satisfactory performance" (Manovich *Image Future* 36). Even in the case of various motion capture technologies which do not use mathematical models but instead capture real performances by human actors and later convert them to animated sequences, Manovich argues that reigning logic is that of animation:

> Just as the case when animators employ mathematical models, this method avoids drawing individual movements by hand. And yet, its logic is that of animation rather than cinema. The filmmaker chooses individual sequences of actors' performances, edits them, blends them if necessary, and places them in a particular order to create a scene. In short, the scene is actually constructed by hand even though its components are not. (Manovich *Image Future* 37)

Manovich concludes by predicting that the "information aesthetics" of moving images currently emerging will be very different from that of modernism. Rather than desiring to erase the old, hybrid media seek to place old and new side by side, working in contrast and concert to each other. "Therefore," he argues, "I think that it is not worth asking if this or that visual style or method for creating moving images which emerged after computerization is 'animation' or not.

It is more constructive to say that most of these methods were born from animation and have animation DNA – mixed with DNA from other media" (Manovich *Image Future* 43). Manovich's language of evolution is notable here. Cinema has evolved by mixing live-action and animation "genes," but Manovich might have gotten his conclusion backwards. He argues that animation does not exist anymore. It seems more likely that everything is becoming animation, that "animation DNA" is the dominant trait and "live-action DNA" the recessive trait. What Manovich overlooks is the fact that animated films had mixed DNA from the very start: Windsor McCay and the Fleischer brothers mixed animated and live action sequences in their earliest films, such as *Winsor McCay, the Famous Cartoonist of the N.Y. Herald and His Moving Comics* (1911) and *Out of the Inkwell* (1918). The technique is simply proliferating due to technological advances that allow the mixed images to be produced more quickly, and integrated more seamlessly into live-action footage.

Paul Ward takes a different approach and considers video games to be a remediated form of animation in "Videogames as Remediated Animation." The connection between video games and computer-generated animation is easy to see as contemporary CGI cartoons employ the same principles as video games for rendering their images, however Ward goes further and claims that all forms of animation share the same form of illusion of movement with video games. In computer-generated imagery the images are constructed and recorded on a computer. They may be made to resemble real movement, but they do not capture any actual movement. Likewise, "In traditional forms of animation a corresponding thing happens in the sense that any movement or action is not 'captured' but is rather *created* (or simulated) frame by frame" (Ward 123).

While live-action film is also captured frame by frame, the movement is not simulated; real movement is recorded and converted to a series of still images. This view puts an emphasis

on movement not visible to the eye. In the animated film, the movement of the artist's hand creates the images that, shown in quick succession, give the impression of movement on screen, but his or her hand is not actually seen itself (with some few exceptions, such as the Fleischer brother's *Out of the Inkwell* films where the artist is shown in the act of drawing – but such films are not purely animated, but a mix of live-action and animation. Rotoscoping is another example, where the recorded movements of an actor are traced to form the movements of an animated character.).

Likewise, in a video game the actions of the programmer are not shown, only the result. Animated images have a looser relationship to movement than live-action footage, hence while both forms can depict fantasy worlds where the laws of physics do not function in the usual way, the animated film does not show any real-life movement directly, while the live-action film may show such movement assisted by various tricks and impressions (such as reverse printing or hidden wires), but it is real movement nonetheless (in spite of the gaps between shots, we know that the movement continued across the frame). The only physical reality animation can be said to present directly (rather than *re*present indirectly) is the material it is made from: ink, paint, paper, clay, pixels, etc., and perhaps a trace of the artist's hands. Animation is thus not a medium disposed toward preservation of actual things, only perhaps the preservation of an artist's idea of a thing.

Though animated films may share only a loose relationship with the laws of physics and photorealism, they are still as useful for conveying social and political realities as live-action film. At times, they are even more effective, as when they use their cloak of "silly kid's stuff" to slip a message past political or social censors. Sergei Eisenstein had a great admiration for the animated films of Walt Disney, particularly their use of synchronized sound, but he did not see in

them much potential for political or social change, viewing it rather as another opiate of the people: "Disney is a marvelous lullaby for the suffering and unfortunate, the oppressed and deprived…But the revolt is lyrical. The revolt is a daydream. Fruitless and lacking consequences" (Eisenstein 3-4). Ultimately, Eisenstein believed that it is not that animation cannot invoke a real revolt so much as that Walt Disney chose not to put the form to such a use, and this influenced both public opinion and animators following in Disney's footsteps. Still, animation holds the potential to instigate radical social change through its affinity for upheaval and transformation, and there are a number of explicitly or implicitly political films. Examples include *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (Windsor McCay, 1918), which reconstructs the infamous disaster and accuses the Germans of committing a "treacherous and cowardly offense," a "dastardly deed in a dastardly way." Additionally, the United States government commissioned numerous animated propaganda films during World War II, including the Private Snafu series. More recently, *Persepolis* (Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, 2007) is a story about a young girl growing up during the uncertainties of the Iranian Revolution.

For Eisenstein, animation had the same fascination as fire, the attractiveness of which:

…lies in its infinite changeability, modulation, transitivity and the continuous coming into being of images…Thus, fire is like an embodiment of the principle of eternal coming into being, the eternally life-producing womb and *omni*-potence. In this sense, it also resembles the potentiality of the primal plasma, from which everything can arise. (Eisenstein 45)

Animation, like fire, is a form of ecstasy and spectacle. It is both dangerous and fascinating. It threatens us with death and destruction, but at the same time affirms life with warmth and light. This is how animation avoids stirring up uneasiness even as it denies us the mummy complex.

As Wells argues in *Understanding Animation*, "Eisenstein effectively equates the apparent freedom of the animated form with personal and ideological freedom. He implicitly suggests that audiences recognised that animation succeeded in demonstrating liberation from social constraint and the fulfillment of personal desire" (Wells *Understanding* 22). Thus, emphasis on transformation is inherently political.

## 4.2    COLLECTORS' ITEMS: ANIMATION AS OBJECT

Wells astutely notes that, "[w]hilst Eisenstein championed the *aesthetic* principles inherent in the language of animation, and most particularly in Disney's early works, Disney himself became more preoccupied with the development of animation as an *industry*, and most specifically in the development of new technologies" (Wells *Animation* 22), and this same split is reflected in the form and practice of animated filmmaking today. Animated films are both radically anti-materialistic and strongly associated with materialism and collector's items. Animation is paradoxically a haven for radically experimental filmmaking and one of the biggest commercial markets in visual entertainment at the same time. The characters in *The Little Mermaid*, *Toy Story 2,* and *WALL-E* spurn consumerism and collecting in favor of love. The Disney and Pixar marketing department, however, have ensured that each of the films has a full line of merchandising that fans of the films "must" have. Ironically, it may be animation's more abstract imagery that enables this marketing, at least to some extent. There is something slightly creepy about action figures made to resemble human actors in live-action films, but cartoon mermaids and robots do not attempt to be photorealistic and avoid Masahiro Mori's concept of the uncanny valley quite neatly.

Animated character franchises have a long association with merchandizing and fan collecting. In "Selling Bugs Bunny: Warner Bros. and Character Merchandising in the Nineties," Linda Seminsky argues that "Merchandising and animation have been linked since the twenties, coinciding with the inception of animated films, the advancement of consumerism, marketing to children, and the development of mass production" (172). In *Toy Story 2*, Woody the 1950s cowboy doll must reject nostalgia for the time when he was the star of "Woody's Roundup," a fictional television show cancelled when Sputnik was launched and children became more interested in space-theme toys. Instead, the film espouses living in the present as one of a mixed bag of toys owned by Andy. Of special interest in animation is the collecting that goes on outside the films. More than any other film genre or form (except, perhaps, the live-action superhero genre), animation is associated with collectible merchandise.

Though not the first film company to realize the potential profits of licensed product sales,[22] Walt Disney[23] began using character merchandizing to increase profits and broaden their audience in 1929, first by selling the rights to use the Mickey Mouse image to a New York company, then signing a contract for international licensing to the George Borgfeldt Company in 1930 (deCordova 205). As Richard deCordova notes,

> [T]he merchandising of Mickey Mouse was soon astoundingly successful. By the beginning of 1932 there were twenty-one licensees in the United States alone, most producing a number of different Mickey Mouse Products. Children could, with enough money, have the image of the mouse on almost all of their possessions—their underwear, pajamas, neckties, handkerchiefs, and jewelry;

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[22] Most notably, Richard F. Outcault's Yellow Kid comic and Otto Mesmer and Pat Sullivan's animated Felix the Cat preceded Disney's foray into character licensing (Simensky 174).

[23] To avoid confusion, from here on "Disney" will refer to the Walt Disney Company, and "Walt" will refer to Walt Disney himself.

their toothbrushes, hot water bottles, and bathroom accessories; their silverware

and china; their toys and games; and their school supplies. (deCordova 205)

As a result, much effort was spent on developing "star" characters with wide audience appeal that would translate into further merchandise sales. Felix the Cat, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, Porky Pig and others were designed to have lasting appeal that could be exploited in merchandising. Studios were known by their "star" characters, as Disney was and still is for Mickey Mouse. In *Serious Business: The Art and Commerce of Animation in America from Betty Boop to* Toy Story, Stephan Kanfer notes that by the 1930s, "[Disney's] characters were licensed to a merchandiser. Money came in from Mickey and Minnie dolls, watches, plates and buttons, sold in every dime store in the United States" (Kanfer 84). Thus, while much of the rest of the country was struggling during the Depression, Disney's company (and much of the Hollywood film industry) was more profitable than ever. In 1955 the Disneyland amusement park opened in California, providing a new venue to profit from old characters.

While live-action films have their share of profits from associated merchandising, the more abstract nature of animated images seems to lend itself to more readily to consumer items such as figurines, clothing, house wares and toys. And it does not hurt that profits do not need to be shared with any star actor (for voice actors have not, for the most part, had the same clout as actors appearing on screen). Disney animated characters are now synonymous with consumer products, and every new film comes with a complete line of associated merchandise. Indeed, Disney's merchandising push affected the landscape of toy sales more broadly. Previously, children's toy sales in the United States were mainly seasonal, with the largest number occurring during the Christmas holidays. "For the toy industry to flourish," deCordova argues, "the child's consumption patterns had to be modernized, wrested from the stranglehold of the yearly ritual

and connected to other rituals and, particularly, to the flux of everyday life" (deCordova 206). By associating toys with the movie-going experience, Disney's merchandising efforts were largely responsible for shifting toy sales from a seasonal event to a more regular occurrence. One bought new toys when a new movie was released, or when a new line of Disney items was unveiled. In fact, in 1932, the toy industry trade paper, *Playthings*, "encouraged stores to cooperate with local movie theaters and to offer to dress up their lobbies with a display of Mickey Mouse toys. Here the theater became quite explicitly an extension of the department store" (deCordova 207).

The advent of television brought the next big break in marketing aimed specifically at children. Kanfer argues that post-WWII advertisers "concluded that commercials, shrewdly produced for children's uncritical eyes, might convert them into miniature consumers…Under the National Association of Broadcasters Code, prime-time programs could not carry more than 9.5 commercial minutes per hour. Children's programming had no such restraints; it allowed 16 minutes per hour" (Kanfer 196). And the audiences absorbed the consumerist message well: "Not only did children obediently consume the products advertised on television, they clamored for toys based on the shows' leading characters—one reason why animation houses accepted lower fees for their cartoons. If they had learned one lesson from Disney, it was that millions could be made in the 'after market' of figurines, stuffed dolls, and clothing" (Kanfer 197).

The sixteen minutes of commercials per hour policy in children's programming remained in place until the late 1960s when a group of mothers formed a committee called Action for Children's Television (ACT) and started a campaign of petitions and public speeches advocating reform in children's television. Kanfer reports that "In the early seventies, the organization asked the FCC to bar sponsorship to television commercials, to ban performers from plugging products and services, and to require that each station devote a minimum of fourteen program hours per

week for children" (Kanfer 199). ACT was successful in achieving many of its demands, and the National Association of Broadcasters eventually "reduced the number of commercials per hour on children's TV from sixteen minutes to twelve [in 1972]" (Kanfer 199). The use of tie-ins and program hosts or characters as spokespeople was also dropped under these reforms. These changes only lasted for a little over a decade. According to Seminsky,

> The growth of character merchandising and licensing in the late seventies and eighties…can be attributed to the change in management of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which had carefully regulated children's television until the late seventies. Mark Fowler, who became chairman in 1981, eliminated many of the existing restrictions that prevented children's programs from becoming advertisements for toys. (Seminsky 173)

As part of overall FCC deregulation changes, Fowler dropped the guidelines for the amount of advertising permitted in 1985. Seminsky points out that the date when the advertising restrictions were dropped coincides with the appearance of animated kids shows created from existing toys, like *My Little Pony and Friends* (1986) and *G.I. Joe* (1985), making them no more than half-hour long commercials. In 1990, the Children's Television Act restored commercialization limits on children's programming again, and instituted requirements that a certain amount of such programs be educational in content.

The battles fought over children's television programming shaped attitudes toward animation in general. Kanfer relates that the *Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends* (1959) cycle in which Bullwinkle collects cereal box tops was created as a comment on the increased commercialization in animated children's television programming in 1950s and 1960s: "To pique the sponsor, Badenov suggested that capitalism could be toppled by counterfeiting box

tops. General Mills saw to it that the first such impudence would be the last" (Kanfer 185).

The strong ties between animation and merchandizing were far from broken, however. The educational children's television programming that arose in the 1970s may have had fewer commercial minutes per hour and an absence of in-show product endorsements, however most still came with a full line of toys and other products related to the show. The much-touted *Sesame Street* (1969), which mixed both live action and animated footage, "used precisely the same strategies as network advertisers—encouraging short attention spans, pushing toys and tapes, organizing promotional tours, hiring publicists to burnish the image of the parent organization, Children's Television Workshop" (Kanfer 200). The reason why even the reform programming continued to push merchandise on viewers, Kanfer argues, is simple: "As all producers knew, the trinkets brought in more revenue than the films" (Kanfer 200). In the meantime, Disney productions remained as popular as ever. The company's most famous character, Mickey Mouse, is rarely featured in any new animation but stuffed animals, figurines, and other products bearing his image are still sold widely.

Not only the associated merchandise but also preproduction materials are collected as artwork through the selling of single cels. "Such frames, particularly drawn from the 'Golden Era' of American studio animation now constitute highly collectable art-works in their own right" (Wells *Animation* 6).[24] The story of how animation cels came to be collector's items is related differently depending on the source. According to Kanfer, Chuck Jones claims he started selling a few signed sells for sixty dollars or so in the 1970s, never thinking they would catch on widely, and Kanfer speculates that cels appealed to "those searching for their lost youth" (Kanfer 235) primarily. But Linda Simelsky locates the rise of animation cels as consumer products with

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[24] Though frames of original live-action film prints have not, to my knowledge, ever been sold as collector's items to the general public, occasionally various iconic film props are.

the rise of the Warner Bros. Studio Stores in the 1990s, which were seeking to attract more adult consumers of Warner Brothers products to broaden their market.

Cecil Munsey, on the other hand, dates the sale of cels from animated Disney features much earlier, to 1938. Munsey's book, *Disneyana*, is a rich source of information on the collection of Disney paraphernalia up until 1974, and his dating of sales of animated art cels is likely the most accurate. He asserts that,

> By 1938 Mickey Mouse, the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf, Donald Duck, Pluto, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs were the very popular subjects of millions of dollars worth of character merchandise. By mid-year Guthrie Sayle Courvoisier, the owner of a very exclusive fine art gallery in San Francisco, had convinced Walt and Roy that the original watercolors on celluloid that were used in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* were valuable original works of art and that they could be sold through art galleries all over the world. (Munsey 186)

In order to sell cels, Courvoisier needed to argue that each was an "original" work of art, different from the mass-produced products Disney was already selling. Courvoisier's pitch was convincing, but the first sales of Disney cels were not done through his gallery. Instead, Walt and Roy had their marketing representative, Kay Kamin, test the market for cel art with a department store in St. Louis (Munsey 106). Eventually a contract was drawn up with Courvoisier, who managed sales of Disney cels until 1940, when the limited returns gained from selling art prints to the general public were deemed not worth the effort. But thanks to Courvoisier's vision and effort, in two short years twenty-five museums in the United States had "acquired Walt Disney originals for their permanent collections" (Munsey 190), including The Metropolitan Museum of

Art, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the San Francisco Museum of Art.

After 1940, "Original art, mostly in the form of hand painted cels, was periodically released by Walt Disney Productions from 1946 until 1955" (Munsey 190). In 1955, the "Art Corner" opened in the new Disneyland theme park, selling cels on a regular basis through the 1970s. In 1975 Munsey predicted that "while [theme park] sales are not [made] primarily to collectors, as in the past a percentage of the merchandise will be saved and eventually, when collector interest is sufficient, it will appear on the market again" (Munsey 315), and time has proven him right. In 2003, the Disneyland Collectibles Reference guide boasted "This guide is created [sic] to become a community collection as people from around the world contribute information and photos of the various Disneyland memorabilia collected since the first souvenir stand opened at the Anaheim construction site" (www.oconnornewmedia.com/Disneyland).

Chapter 1 made clear that collectors' interests vary widely and there is no limit to the number or kind of things people collect. Disney memorabilia is one of the more popular subjects for collections for a number of reasons. First, Disney animated films are beloved by generations of children. Collecting memorabilia can be an act of nostalgia for adults. Second, the Disney Company also encourages collecting from two angles. Walt and Roy Disney's vision of their corporation included an interest in preserving its history, and after their death a reference librarian was hired to set up the Walt Disney Archives, which includes not only Walt's personal papers and business files, but also much of the merchandise licensed by the corporation over the years. Thus, "the Walt Disney Archives currently contain the most complete collection of Disney character merchandise in the world," (Munsey 321), providing a valuable resource to collectors seeking to authenticate or research their own collections. Additionally, Disney maintains a steady output of limited-edition series targeted specifically at collectors and endorses the Walt Disney

Collectors Society (www.waltdisneycollectorssociety.com), established in 1993, which bills itself as an exclusive club with various special privileges, including the right to buy collectors' items not available anywhere else.

For a picture of collecting after the 1970s, Simelsky's essay provides a detailed history of merchandising and licensing efforts in American animation, chronicling an important shift from child-oriented products to adult/collector-oriented products. Even though no new Looney Tunes cartoons were made after the late 1960s, they have been frequently shown on television ever since. As a result, the Warner Bros. Studio Stores has been successfully marketing the old characters alongside products related to the newer Warner Brothers cartoons like *Steven Spielberg Presents Tiny Toon Adventures* and *Steven Spielberg Presents Animaniacs*. Simelsky notes that the Warner Brothers Studio Stores sought to elevate Looney Tunes cartoons to the status of art by including an art gallery within the larger stores. These galleries feature "original cels, limited edition cels, collectibles, and designer jewelry related to the Warner Bros. animated characters and DC Comics characters" (Simelsky 179). Thus, many Warner Brothers Studio Stores had a section modeled as an art gallery in which cels from Warner Brothers cartoons were displayed and sold. Simelsky finds that the explosion of consumer goods coinciding with the advent of the Disney Store and the Warner Brothers Studio Store has discouraged some collectors: "Since most collectors are completists, they find collecting through Warner Bros stores frustrating because they have no chance of keeping up with the stores' turnover of merchandise" (Simelsky 190). Tourist-oriented items may also be seen as "dumbed down" or not worthy of collecting. Simelsky's analysis of collectors only represents the views of a particular type of collector. While completion is often the goal of collecting, the satisfaction of a complete collection is generally short-lived.

In spite of its lucrative history as merchandise generator, animation never surpassed live-action film in terms of profits or overall output. The 1970s and 1980s are sometimes seen as a "dark age" of animation, where funding was scarce for quality productions (or, as Kanfer puts it, "In 1966, American animation entered its Great Depression" [193], dating the decline from Walt Disney's death), and the television market was glutted with poorly-animated and poorly written children's cartoon programs (such as *The Fantastic Four* [1978], arguably continuing through *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* [1983] and *The Care Bears* [1985]). Stefan Kanfer's history of animation in the United States focuses mainly on commercially popular animation, particularly that of Disney, Warner Brothers and Pixar, and is perhaps overly critical of animation in the late 1960s. Kanfer goes so far as partially to blame imported Japanese animation for the decline in quality of American animation after the death of Walt Disney in 1966. "ABC, NBC, and CBS, convinced that domestic animation was too expensive, imported shoddier products from Japan, and these in turn blighted the American output" (Kanfer 194). Animated shows like *Speed Racer* (1967) and *Astroboy* (1963) were popular with American children, and it was cheaper to import them from Japan than to sustain a US-based animation industry.

Aside from its commercial successes, animation proponents have been valued for its ability to provide escapist fantasy, a vehicle for political ideology, and even documentary realism. Beginning with early innovators like Windsor McCay, Kanfer traces animation's roots to vaudeville "chalk talks" and comic strip Freudian fantasies like "Little Nemo in Slumberland" (Kanfer 31). McCay enjoyed brief fame as the first animator to use cels and produce multiple animated box office successes (including *Windsor McCay the Famous Cartoonist of the N.Y. Herald and His Moving Comics* [1911] and *Gertie the Dinosaur* [1914]), but after attempting a more realist approach with *The Sinking of the Lusitania* he returned to newspaper comics and

was mostly forgotten.

> During his brief film career, McCay peered into the future and delighted in the view. "There will be a time," he burbled, "when people will gaze at pictures in a museum, and ask why the objects remain rigid and stiff. They will demand action. And to meet this demand the artists of that time will look to the motion picture for help and the artist, working hand in hand with science, will evolve a new school of art that will revolutionize the entire field…The coming artist will make his reputation, not by pictures in still life, but by drawings that are animated." (Kanfer 31-2)

McCay's vision of the future was not one dominated by live-action motion pictures, but hand-drawn animation. And while his prediction was not entirely accurate, animation has been going strong since his early experiments in the 1910s.

Animation, like live-action film, has been valued for its ability to provide an escape from a harsh or demanding reality. This is evident in Eisenstein's analysis of Disney's success. He argues that animated films find their greatest appeal in

> …those who are shackled by hours of work and regulated moments of rest, by a mathematical precision of time, whose lives are graphed by the cent and dollar…The grey, empty eyes of those who are forever at the mercy of a pitiless procession of laws, not of their own making, laws that divide up the soul, feelings, thoughts, just as the carcasses of pigs are dismembered by the conveyor belts of Chicago slaughter houses, and the separate pieces of cars are assembled into mechanical organisms by Ford's conveyor belts. That's why Disney's films blaze with colour. Like the patterns in clothes of people who have been deprived of the

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colours in nature. That's why the imagination in them is limitless, for Disney's

films are a revolt against partitioning and legislating, against spiritual stagnation

and greyness. (Eisenstein 3-4).

While Eisenstein sees Disney's films as stopping short of engendering political action, he grants

that the delight audiences take in absurdly flexible characters reveals "a lost changeability,

fluidity, suddenness of formations—that's the 'subtext' brought to the viewer who lacks all this

by these seemingly strange traits which permeate folktales, cartoons, the spineless circus

performer and the seemingly groundless scattering of extremities in Disney's drawings"

(Eisenstein 21).

For Eisenstein, this desire for fluidity and seemingly impossible bodily movements can

be found in Lewis Carroll's original drawings for *Alice in Wonderland*, in a German story about

a boy with a long arm, and in Japanese woodcuts – it is not a principle exclusive to animation.

The ability to imagine is a "revolt against partitioning and legislating" because it encourages

people to believe in more than the reality in place in front of them. For others, however, the

escapism of an animated cartoon simply makes a life of hardship tolerable, as the titular

character of *Sullivan's Travels* (Preston Sturges, 1941) discovers when he is mistakenly

sentenced to six years in a hard labor camp. In this instance, it is specifically a Disney cartoon,

and not just any Hollywood film, which provides the prisoners with an escapist pleasure. These

prisoners have little use for the past or present, which is marked by the Depression, poverty, and

criminality, and little hope for the future. Preservation and memory are not concerns that will

resonate with them, crowded out by the more urgent needs to survive and alleviate the pain of

hard labor. Instead, the more abstract fantasy of Mickey Mouse enables them to simply bear the

conditions of the present. *Sullivan's Travels* makes the argument that frivolous comedies and

cartoons are doing a social service by helping people through tough times, but it overlooks the darker side of escapism: such works can act as a pressure valve that releases tension and discourages social and political change.

## 4.3    POOR SUBSTITUTES FOR THE REAL THING: *THE LITTLE MERMAID*

Of the four films discussed in detail in this chapter, three of them are associated with The Walt Disney Company. *Toy Story 2* and *WALL-E* are both Pixar films, but Disney was the distributor for *Toy Story*, and on January 24, 2006, The Walt Disney Company bought Pixar, and subsequently both produced and distributed *WALL-E*. Given Disney's long association with product licensing and merchandising, it is somewhat surprising to find collecting represented as anything other than a wonderful and fulfilling experience in their films. Yet this is not the case. Instead, two of the films in question depict collecting as an immature activity that temporarily substitutes for mature romantic relationships; and the third, *Toy Story 2*, deprecates the toy museum as a perversion of the proper function of toys.

After making a case for animation as an experimental medium focused on fantasy over reality, choosing to analyze the films of Walt Disney might seem to be a contradiction. Disney is known primarily for the psychological realism and "verisimilitude in his characters, contexts and narratives" (Wells 23). It is also well documented that he was politically conservative and strongly anti-communist in spite of his friendship with Eisenstein. And certainly, Disney's rise to prominence and domination of the animation market led to a limited conception of what animation could be for the general film-going audience for many years. Wells observes that "Disney perfected a certain language for the cartoon and the full-length feature which took its

model from live-action film-making" (Wells 24). But Disney's films demonstrate most clearly a sharp incongruity between the anti-collecting messages contained within animated films and the pro-collecting merchandising practices the mainstream animation studios employ. In other words, Disney's films eschew collecting even if the studio's business practices and merchandising efforts do not.

*The Little Mermaid* was the last feature-length Disney film produced entirely with hand-drawn cel animation. Based on the 1837 Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, the Disney film makes several significant changes to the original story. In this much happier narrative, Ariel, the youngest daughter of the sea king Triton, has a beautiful voice and an obsession with the human world above the sea. Sneaking out of the safety of the castle, Ariel raids shipwrecks for items to place in her collection of human artifacts, invoking the anger of her father when in doing so she misses a choral recital. Triton assigns a crab, Sebastian, to follow Ariel and prevent her from visiting the surface again, but Sebastian is ineffective and Ariel departs once more and peeks into a ship carrying Prince Eric, with whom she promptly falls in love. When Sebastian informs Triton that Ariel disobeyed him again, Triton is enraged and destroys Ariel's cherished collection (which now includes a statue of Prince Eric). The destruction of her collection drives Ariel even further away from her oceanic roots and she seeks the help of Ursula the sea witch. Deciding she wants to be human, Ariel bargains with Ursula: in exchange for her voice, she will be granted three days in which to make the prince kiss and fall in love with her. If she succeeds, she will remain human for the rest of her life. If she fails, her soul belongs to Ursula.

In the Andersen fairy tale, the Little Mermaid is unable to make the prince fall in love with her in time. Her sisters offer her a chance to return to her previous life if she kills the prince with a special knife, but the Little Mermaid chooses self-sacrifice, and is rewarded instead with a

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chance to earn a soul. Disney's version ends with Ariel regaining her voice at the last minute, but just as Prince Eric realizes he loves her, time runs out and Ariel's spirit is added to Ursula's garden of lost souls. In a frenzied series of final events, Triton exchanges his soul for Ariel's, Ursula briefly becomes the ruler of the underworld, and Prince Eric kills Ursula by ramming her with a ship. With his powers restored, Triton realizes he must respect his daughter's feelings, grants her human form without handicap, and Ariel and Eric are married.

The narrative structure of *The Little Mermaid* is classically conservative: the unmarried female protagonist meets her future husband, is confronted by social and (in this case) physical obstacles to her desire, works to overcome her problems, and is happily married at the end of the film. Even in such a standardized plot structure (one common to live-action film as well as animation), animation's tendency toward transformation is evident: Ariel must become a human in order to marry the prince. In this case, the transformation works to undercut any potentially radical message about mermaid/human coupling as a metaphor for interracial marriage: the only way Ariel can marry Prince Eric is to become human. Nonetheless, the visual spectacle of the film depends upon transformation and metamorphosis. Ariel's first transformation from mermaid to human is drawn out with a lengthy musical number persuading her to the deal. Then in a screen suffused with a green tint, two ghostly hands extract Ariel's voice. Abruptly shifting to an orange color scheme, Ariel's body is seen in silhouette as a golden light spirals around her body. The abstract background emphasizes the transformation of Ariel's body as a series of extreme close-ups show her tail ripping lengthwise to form legs. The change is violent and sudden, and the newly human Ariel immediately begins to drown as she can no longer breathe underwater. This transformation emphasizes what is lost in changing forms. Ariel is more vulnerable as a human than as a mermaid. Sebastian's big musical number, "Under the Sea," abounds in visual

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puns and transformations (while ironically arguing that staying the same is better than exploring new worlds): oyster shells become steel drums, coral formations are used as flutes and maracas, and octopus legs form base guitar strings.

In "Escape from Wonderland: Disney and the Female Imagination" Deborah Ross argues that Disney's reworking of the narrative transforms Andersen's "tragic celebration of feminine self-sacrifice" (Ross 58) into a "triumph of adolescent self-will and entitlement" (Ross 59). In Andersen's story, the Little Mermaid fails to win the prince's heart and though she could save herself by killing him on the night of his wedding to another woman, she chooses to sacrifice her life for his happiness. In Disney's version of the story, Ariel's risk-taking and determination are rewarded in the end: she marries the prince, becomes permanently human, and regains her father's approval. Nevertheless, Ross finds that the film merely puts a veneer of feminism on a film that undermines any ideas of imaginative freedom for women. The world Ariel desires to join is utterly dull for the audience. Ariel is fascinated with everyday objects like forks and pipes, whereas the film viewer is likely far more interested in the more colorful and magical underwater kingdom Ariel wants to leave behind.

While the underwater world is drawn with bright colors and rippling light effects, Ariel's collected human objects are drab and hidden in shadow. As Ariel sings her counterargument to Sebastian's "Under the Sea," the cave containing her collection desaturates the colors of everything around her. As the camera pans and tilts upward to reveal the tiers of shelves containing Ariel's collected items, the colors that dominate are muted black and indigo, with deep gold highlights. None of the objects are visually arresting or notable. She appears to have many jars, boxes and books. The prince's domain is picturesque, certainly, but compared to the undersea kingdom comes up short. As Ross explains, "it seems ludicrous that Ariel should put so

much rebellious energy into becoming the girl next door" (Ross 59). In the end, "whatever Ariel might *say*, or sing, what we see her *do* is flee a world of infinite possibility to settle in the land of the banal" (Ross 60), and Ariel's collecting must be understood in this light. Her collection demonstrates a legitimate curiosity about the world above the sea because it, rather than Prince Eric, is the origin of her fascination with all things human. Ross writes, "instead of making the mermaid love the human world because she loves a human, the movie has Ariel love a human mainly because she is already curious enough about his world to have collected a cave full of human souvenirs (in Andersen's story this collection belongs to a mermaid sister)" (Ross 59). However, Ariel's interest in the human world quickly shifts from its objects to its subjects when she falls in love with the prince. As Laura Sells explains in "'Where Do the Mermaids Stand?': Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*," "Ariel's fascination with the human world becomes transformed into love for Prince Eric," (Sells 180), and this is a "sanitizing" move on Disney's part, erasing any sense of "the cost for participating in the white male system" (Sells 179) that women face. Whereas previously Ariel had sung of her desire to walk, run, and dance in the human world, now she seems only interested in marrying.

"Have you ever seen anything so wonderful in your entire life?" Ariel asks upon finding a fork in a sunken ship. When Flounder asks her what it is (naively unaware that fish are eaten with forks by humans), Ariel admits that she does not know. Like any good collector of cultural artifacts, however, Ariel intends to find out. She consults a seagull named Scuttle whom she presumes to be knowledgeable about the human world because he lives above the water. Scuttle is willing to act the part of the authority, but in fact he has no idea what the objects Ariel brings him are used for. He explains to her that the fork is a "dinglehopper" and is used for combing hair. Already Ariel's collecting is being set up as an inappropriate activity. Not only does it put

her in physical danger, but her understanding of human culture as read through her collection is faulty. Scuttle is a scatterbrained klutz who makes up names and uses for human artifacts even though he has more direct access to the human world as a seagull. There is no reason why he could not have observed that a fork is used for eating even if he did not know what it was called. But the point is that Ariel is getting nowhere by collecting human artifacts.

Because Ariel's interest is in forbidden objects, she keeps her collection hidden in a cave. In her own way, she is as adventurous as Indiana Jones in obtaining her artifacts. Viewed this way, Ariel is an active and rebellious character who is attracted to the exoticism of the human world and will stop at nothing to gain access to it. The human world poses great danger to mermaids since for humans the ocean is a source of food. Triton fears Ariel will be caught on a fisherman's hook if she continues to go to the surface. There are other dangers as well. While searching the sunken ship, Ariel and Flounder are surprised by a shark that tries to eat them both. During the chase, Ariel's bag of artifacts gets snagged on a protrusion and she drops it. Rather than leave it behind, Ariel swims back toward the raging shark and snatches the bag from its jaws. She also struggles to represent the culture she studies to her fellow merpeople. "If only I could make him understand. I just don't see things the way he does. I don't see how a world that makes such wonderful things could be bad."

The song "Part of Your World" makes Ariel's feelings and desires explicit. "Look at this stuff/isn't it neat?/Wouldn't you think my collection's complete?" she asks, but in fact her collection, like all collections, can never be complete and it does not satisfy her curiosity, only whets it. What she wants is to be able to walk on land and interact with the people who create the objects that fascinate her so much. Her limited access to the human world up to this point has allowed her to imagine it as a utopian world as well, one that grants young women the freedom

Ariel craves: "Betcha on land they understand/they don't reprimand their daughters." For Ariel, becoming part of the human world is the ultimate collector's fantasy: her collection is complete when she can enter into it.

Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan have analyzed *The Little Mermaid* as an allegory for U.S. cultural imperialism and the fall of Eastern European communism in "A Spectre is Haunting Europe: Disney Rides Again." They argue that "from the start this has been a story about a deprived dissident's desire for the amenities of the West" (Byrne and McQuillan 23). Thus, Ariel is "the very embodiment of consumer-fetishism and [she] demonstrates this by collecting 'human stuff'" (23). They quickly move from Ariel's collection to an analysis of the lender/borrower relationship between Ariel and Ursula and Ursula and Triton and the various costs associated with allowing Ariel to become part of the human (read: western and capitalist) world. "It is not that Ariel lacks consumer choice (she has a natty red handbag and a cockleshell bra) but that the human world has better kitchen accessories on offer" (Byrne and McQuillan 24). What Byrne and McQuillan overlook here is that Ariel is a king's daughter, and as such her interest is not in "kitchen accessories" and other bourgeoisie trappings. Ariel does not participate in a consumer economy directly at any point in the film: she does not buy things, but finds them. Her "natty handbag" is more akin to Indiana Jones' field bag since she uses it only during her scavenging expeditions to transport her finds. It is natty not because there is nothing else available in the mer-world (her sisters are shown wearing a variety of necklaces, tiaras and hair accessories), but because Ariel is not a typical fashion-conscious teenager.

Once she has become human, she is given clothes and various toilette items, but she never goes shopping and does not carry a bag anymore, suggesting that she has no need for money or exchange. The items she expresses interest in are comically ordinary: she is excited by

forks, chickens, and a Punch and Judy puppet show (a retro pre-animation form of kids'

entertainment). In the one instance of exchange Ariel participates in, she proves a naively

unaware consumer: she trades her voice for three days of having legs, with the addendum that if

she does not make the prince fall in love with her during that time she will also give up her soul.

*The Little Mermaid* is not so much a parable of Western consumer capitalism as it is an overly

romanticized and exoticized fantasy of a pre-capitalist past. Prince Eric's kingdom is a feudal

one (albeit with happy and hygienic peasants), and Ariel's fascination with the human world is

based on its difference from the mer-world, not on its consu*mer* economy. For a depiction of

collecting in an animated film set in a present-day capitalist economy, one must turn to Pixar

Animation Studio's *Toy Story* franchise.


## 4.4    LOVING THINGS TO DEATH: *TOY STORY 2*


*Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1995) was the first feature-length animated film composed

entirely of computer-generated imagery. The content of the film was determined by the technical

limitations of the technology at the time. In 1995, CGI had made great advances in achieving a

more photorealistic look that conventional animation, but it still struggled with depicting humans

and natural scenery. As the director John Lasseter noted, "The computer likes to make objects

look plastic and perfect and manufactured" (as qtd. in Kanfer 229). Hair in particular was

difficult to render since on a photorealistic human head, each hair would have to move

individually with every motion the character made. As a result, the main characters in *Toy Story*

are mostly plastic toys, in part because they looked more realistic with the technology available

at the time, and indeed the film was much remarked upon for its "realism."

In spite of the shift in animation techniques and a new emphasis on realism, CGI animated films remain aligned with the previous animation affinities: transformation and change. Though computers may be capable of providing a more photorealistic and less cartoony look to animated films, they are still used primarily to create images not otherwise possible in live-action film. Both *Toy Story* movies thus imagine a world in which toys come to life when humans are not around. *Toy Story* focused on the conflict between an old, beloved cowboy toy, Woody, and a new high-tech space toy, Buzz Lightyear, paralleling the conflict between old and new media. In *Toy Story 2*, on the other hand, the conflict is between decay and preservation: should mass culture products like toys be used until they are worn out and thrown away, or should they be preserved in museums?

*Toy Story 2* is told from the point of view of the collectible object, rather than the collector. The premise is that Woody's arm rips just before his owner Andy leaves for cowboy camp. Woody finds himself left behind and placed on the rejected toy shelf as Andy's mother reminds him that "toys don't last forever." While Andy is away, his mother has a yard sale, and in an attempt to rescue another broken toy from being sold, Woody is discovered at the sale by an unscrupulous toy collector, Al. Although Andy's mother refuses to sell Woody, Al is desperate to add Woody to his collection and steals him instead. Woody, it seems, is a vintage cowboy doll from the 1950s television series "Woody's Roundup" (a loose imitation of *Howdy Doody* and other 1950s western-themed television shows). Al has obtained all of the Woody's Roundup merchandise except for a Woody doll. Al's collection is not motivated by his own pleasure and nostalgia for the show, but rather by financial gain. The Konishi Toy Museum in

Japan[25] is willing to pay him an unimaginably large sum of money for a complete set of Woody's Roundup items. Woody finds himself torn between wanting to return to the boy who loves him (though he plays with him roughly), and wanting to stay with the other members of his Roundup Gang and be put on display and preserved forever.

Thus, as Alan Ackerman notes in "The Spirit of Toys: Resurrection and Redemption in *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2*," both films "are deeply invested (thematically and financially) in the mortality of toys" (Ackerman 895). Ackerman argues that the fear of death is an obsession with the toy characters. For toys, death occurs both when they are literally destroyed, but also when they are forgotten (and hence thrown away or put on dusty, high shelves where no on notices them). In *Toy Story*, death is personified in the eight-year-old boy next door, Sid, a child who wears a black t-shirt with a skull on it and treats his toys so roughly that they rarely remain intact for more than a few hours since "In his demolition area of a backyard Sid blows up action figures and wreaks havoc" (Ackerman 896). However, the film also makes it clear that Andy, the "good" boy who does not treat his toys sadistically, is also a force of death and destruction. "Andy performs his own casual, happy violence on his toys" (Ackerman 897), and as the film progresses the toys acquire marks of decay and destruction. In "The Importance of Being Plastic: The Feel of Pixar," William Schaffer argues that "The characters in *Toy Story* experience these cycles of appropriation and disposal as humans might experience the ungovernable cycle of seasons determining their fate. They are therefore more or less permanently neurotic, constantly anxious that they are no longer equal to their function as objects of play" (Schaffer 77). They are

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[25] Perhaps inspired by the Japan Toy Museum in Himeji, the Konishi Toy Museum of *Toy Story 2* intensifies the feeling of permanent separation Woody will have from Andy if he acquiesces. It is also a nod to the fact that the economy of post-war Japan was boosted in the 1950s by a booming toy manufacturing industry. And as David Desser argues in "Consuming Asia: Chinese and Japanese Popular Culture and the American Imaginary," the increasing popularity of Japanese-made toys in the 1960s US was partially due to the "increasing popularity of Japanese animated programming" (Desser 184). Thus, contemporary toys and animation can both be seen as originating in Japan – and, as we shall see in the following chapter, video games as well.

also subject to death or obsolescence when their child owners grow up and no longer want to play with toys.

In *Toy Story 2* the toys are safe from Sid, but not Andy, and it is Andy's rough play that tears Woody's arm, leading Andy's mother to put Woody on the dusty shelf of books and toys that are broken or uninteresting to Andy, instigating Woody's crisis of mortality. As Ackerman argues, "Apparently made of dead matter (plastic and chemicals), these toys enact a fantasy of continual resurrection, an idealizing revival of the dead, not only in the games of an individual child but also in the process of production and marketing, of which both movies are highly self-conscious" (Ackerman 897). Self-referentiality is one of the defining tendencies of animated films, from McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* to Chuck Jones' *Duck Amuck* (1953), animated cartoons have referenced their own status as drawn images through actual footage of the animator or narrative events calling attention to their mode of production. Experiments in animation, like the Fleischer brothers' *Out of the Inkwell* series, included images of or references to the animation process itself, exposing the processes used to create the animated images. Though there have been numerous straight animated films as well, reflexivity is still common. *Toy Story 2* also includes images from past films (the baby from Pixar's short film *Tin Toy* [1988] appears briefly on a television screen in the film).

The notion that toys can come alive and possibly be resurrected is an established theme in children's literature. As Henry Jenkins notes in "How Texts Become Real," Margery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* reassures readers that when a toy is really loved by a child it comes alive. Thus, Jenkins notes "The boy's investment [in a toy] will give it meaning that was unanticipated by the toymaker, a meaning that comes not from its intrinsic merits or economic value but rather from the significance the child bestows upon the commodity

through its use" (Jenkins 51). The theme of toys coming to life is a common one in children's literature. Carlo Collodi's 1883 *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, for example, is about a wooden puppet that wants to become a real boy, and was famously adapted by the Disney Company in 1940 (Hamilton Luske and Ben Sharpsteen). The 1922 *Velveteen Rabbit* differs from *Pinocchio* in that the stuffed rabbit gains life through its relationship with its owner, whereas the puppet Pinocchio is carved from a pine log that is already alive (it speaks to the first person to try to carve it). The Disney version has Gepetto wish on a star for the wooden puppet to come to life, but it is up to Pinocchio himself to find a way to become a real boy. But in the process of being loved, toys wear out and are eventually discarded.

In spite of certain death through overuse, the toys in *Toy Story 2* would rather be owned and loved than preserved. As Jessie tells Woody, "To [Andy] you're his buddy, his best friend. And when Andy plays with you it's like even though you're not moving, you feel like you're alive, because that's how he sees you." Thus, as Schaffer has also noted, even though the film portrays the toys as alive when people are not around, and still and lifeless when they are, the argument the film makes is that they are more alive when being played with than when they are not. Buzz's struggle for recognition after the newer model Buzz traps him in the plastic Buzz Lightyear packaging emphasizes the mass-produced nature of children's toys. Buzz is indistinguishable from all the other Buzz units (except for the fact that he lacks the "utility belt" of the newer models). It is only through handling and play that toys become individualized and have names and personalities that set them apart from the rest of the units. In spite of the utility belt, the only way the other toys can identify the "real" Buzz is because Andy writes his name on the feet of all his toys.

Ackerman concludes by noting the toys in both films are obsessed with their own identity, which is obscured by their status as mass-produced toys that refer to fictional and real cultural items (the "real" Mr. Potato Head, and the fictional Buzz Lightyear video game, which becomes a "real" videogame) available for purchase by viewers of the *Toy Story* movies. Ackerman reads the toys' uncertainties as a product of their CGI status:

> The quality of film as index, as opposed to icon, depends on it being an imprint of light, a trace left by a real body…I have purposefully avoided using the term *film* to discuss *Toy Story* because the movies were not shot on film. Entirely computer-generated, they cannot have even the faintest trace of an original unless audience members project one fantastically. (Ackerman 909-10)

To say the toys have no trace of an original is misleading. Even though many CGI processes do not involve photography or celluloid processes (particularly when distributed to theatres with digital projection systems), Pixar's animators often work very closely with the physical objects they are animating. While Woody and Buzz are new creations influenced by a general idea of western- and space-themed toys, many of the other toys depicted refer to real-world toys that preexisted the films, such as Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head, Etch-a-Sketch, the green plastic army figurines, and the Magic Eight Ball. Pixar's animators are scrupulous in studying the real counterparts of objects they wish to animate, such as a desk lamp in the short film *Luxo Jr.* (John Lasseter, 1986). This in itself does not make the resulting animation indexical, in particular since this film was not shot with a digital camera, the indexicality of which was discussed in the previous chapter, but created entirely on a computer. But there is a direct connection between the image and product in this film since the toys all function as advertisements for both existing toys and new toys based on the film. Schaffer claims that the film "addresses parents and children

through these characters in terms that at once acknowledge, make ironic, and promise to ameliorate the intervention of marketing in the most intimate relations of family life" (Schaffer 77). The mix of new and old toys in a story trajectory about cooperation also assures adult viewers that there is no need to work hard to preserve the past – children today will play with toys both old and new.

*Toy Story 2* is not only selling traditional action figure toys and DVDs, but also the video game associated with the movie (a trend becoming more and more common, especially with animated features). The film opens in space, in what the viewer thinks is the end of a Buzz Lightyear movie. Buzz speeds through an alien landscape, destroys an army of robots, and falls into his arch-nemesis Zurg's lair. After narrowly escaping a trap, Buzz finds himself in a cavernous room in which is suspended a battery labeled "Source of Zurg's Power." As Buzz hops on a series of disks suspended over a seemingly bottomless pit, the familiar notes of "Also Spake Zarathustra," made universally familiar by Stanley Kubrick's use of it in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), are heard, one for each step Buzz takes. This further reinforces the idea that what the viewer is seeing is a sequence from a film. But then the cinematically unthinkable happens: Buzz tries to seize the source of Zurg's power only to discover it is a hologram. Zurg appears behind Buzz and defeats him in battle. Buzz is destroyed.

The next shot reveals that the preceding sequence was in fact from the Buzz Lightyear video game, being played in the film by Rex the Green Dinosaur in Andy's bedroom (familiar to the viewer from *Toy Story*). Thus, Buzz's death is restored to generic conventions: film action heroes do not die, but video game avatars die repeatedly until their players become skilled enough to prevent it. Because of its cartoon aesthetic, *Toy Story 2*'s "real" world is indistinguishable from its video game images, reflecting contemporary fears that players of

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violent video games (especially children) are prone to committing acts of violence because they do not understand the difference between the real world and the game world. At the same time, however, the film draws attention to the implausibility of this idea in its very images.

Pixar released a related video game with *Toy Story 2*, called *Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue*. This is the game that Rex is presumably playing in the film, however the images representing this game in the film are far more detailed than the images in the game itself. Generally, digital game images are of lower quality than film images because of the greater processing power needed to create images that react to player input. As Paul Ward notes, "We are usually *aware* of the status of what we are watching or interacting with. Players are unlikely to mistake a computer animated videogame game [sic] for a computer animated film not only because the animation is 'not as good', but because a game will have someone *playing* it" (Ward 131). Ward argues that CGI films and games may strive toward different kinds of realism, but that their specific pleasures are always rooted in the fact that they are not either "real" or even photorealistic. Instead, "the 'uncanniness' of the computer animations in question is predicated on their being perceived as *simultaneously* highly naturalistic/transparent *and* hypermediated/opaque; this combination appears to be their central allure" (Ward 132). This is further supported by the fact that, on being released from Al's Toy Barn, the second Buzz Lightyear believes he is the video game Buzz and acts accordingly, to comic effect.

Unlike *The Little Mermaid*, the main characters of *Toy Story 2* are not the collectors, but the collected. Since the narrative conflict centers on whether Woody will end up in a museum or at home with his owner, the various characters take sides on the issue. Those who are in favor of collecting are Al, the fat, child-hating, owner of a children's toy store, The Prospector, a mint-in-the-box member of the Woody's Roundup gang (also fat and old), and the unseen Japanese toy

museum staff. Both Al and The Prospector conform to the negative stereotype of collectors identified by Susan M. Pearce in *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*. Al is the American version of a "dispirited, anorak-clad loner who is unable to form personal relationships," (Pearce, *Collecting* 27). Instead of an anorak, Al wears a button-down short-sleeved shirt over a white undershirt 50s-era nerd glasses, and does his hair in a comb-over. Unlike Andy's bright suburban family home, Al lives in a dim bachelor apartment at the top of a city skyscraper, which is spartanly furnished with retro decor and spilled cheese puffs. He is the very essence of a loser, a man who hates his job (since he hates children and yet owns a toy store) and has to humiliate himself in television advertisements by wearing a chicken suit. He is a hairy, overweight slob who is alternately whiny and pushy, depending on whether he thinks he needs to bully or plead with someone to get his way. When he discovers Woody mistakenly lying among the garage sale items his joy is almost orgasmic: "Original hand-painted face, natural-dyed blanket-stitched vest. Little rip, but fixable. Oh, if only you had your hand-stitched polyvinyl (gasp) hat. I found him! I found him!" When Andy's mom refuses to sell him the toy, he steals it.

The Prospector is on the pro-collection side primarily because he's "mint in the box." As Stinky Pete the Prospector he was not an attractive toy to children. He is old, overweight, and missing teeth, and his catch phrases include "Help, I think I'm stuck!" and "Oh boy!…beans for dinner," marking him as unheroic and pathetic. Unsurprisingly, Stinky Pete merchandise was not popular, and he was never loved by a child the way Woody and Jessie were. Thus, his only value is his monetary value as part of a complete set of Woody's Roundup merchandise. The Prospector is voiced by Kelsey Grammer, who brings to the role his usual pompous persona, making The Prospector a character divided, both a hickish western denizen and an eastern intellectual who despises everything that character represents. It is the emotionally stunted

intellectual part of The Prospector who champions the collection, arguing eloquently for a life in the museum: "How long will it last Woody? Do you really think Andy is going to take you to college? Or on his honeymoon? Andy's growing up, and there's nothing you can do about it. It's your choice, Woody. You can go back, or you can stay with us and last forever. You'll be adored by children for generations."

As The Prospector finishes speaking, Woody wavers in his determination to return to Andy for the first time. A point of view shot of Woody's perspective shows the depths of the dark ventilation shaft Woody was about to make his escape through. Woody is facing the void of existence, and fear makes him choose to stay and become part of the museum exhibit. Yet this is not the end of the film. The toys left behind in Andy's room have mounted a rescue mission, and they burst into the apartment in time to convince Woody that his place is with Andy – and that Jessie and Bullseye should join them. But the climax of the film is yet still yet to come. The Prospector refuses to let the toys go without a fight, with the result that Jessie is trapped in a box when Al returns home to transport them all to the airport. The final daring rescue, involving a hectic race through the airport baggage transport system and Woody and Jessie swinging from a lasso out of a plane's cargo hold, is framed as the final unfinished episode of *Woody's Roundup* – the one that was never aired in the 1950s because children lost interest in westerns with the launch of the Sputnik sattelite. In the final analysis, the collection is equated with the interruption of narrative development. If Woody and Jessie had acquiesced to entering the Japanese toy museum, they would have effectively put an end to their adventures, and never have found out how things "really" end.

*Toy Story 2* is the most polemic animated film featuring collecting to date. Bound up in competing discourses of nostalgia and commercialism, it comes down firmly on the side of

commercialism: it isn't necessary to preserve the toys of the past in a museum because children in the present should have it all: 1950s western toys and 1990s space toys, preserving the toys in a way that doesn't involve locking them down in museums. Even as the film evokes nostalgia in its older viewers, it argues that living in the present moment is more important than remembering the past.

## 4.5 THE DETRITUS OF HUMANKIND: *WALL-E*

Between 1999 and 2008, CGI technology vastly improved, becoming faster, cheaper, and capable of more photorealism. For years, the goal of CGI innovation has been to achieve more and more realistic images, and recent advancements have been so successful that there is a potential crisis in animation. What is animation if it looks exactly like live-action film? Pixar's 2008 film WALL-E is the most recent animated representation of collecting. The film most clearly demonstrates the shift from live-action indexicality to CGI "improved" reality.

The story is centered around a small trash-compacting robot who has been left behind on Earth to clean up the mess humans created through their gross overconsumption and failure to preserve the environment. WALL-E is an acronym for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class, and while originally there were many WALL-E units gathering trash, compressing it into cubes, and stacking them into massive towers, there is now only one functional unit left. After seven hundred years alone on the planet, this WALL-E has developed a personality and become lonely. Though he still diligently compacts the seemingly endless mounds of garbage (including some old, discarded toys, echoing the fears expressed in the earlier *Toy Story* movies), WALL-E has taken to collecting certain items that catch his interest. With a mini-cooler strapped to his back,

he saves rubber ducks, sporks, bowling pins, toasters, egg beaters, cigarette lighters and more from his compacting efforts and takes them back to his trailer. The trailer once housed dozens of WALL-E units on rotating racks of shelves, but now houses WALL-E's collection (and also his pet cockroach). His most prized possession is a videocassette of *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969),[26] and he is fascinated with dancing and the expression of emotion through touch depicted in the turn of the twentieth-century New York shown in the film.

WALL-E's solitude is broken with the arrival of a spaceship that deposits a new robot on Earth's surface: EVE (Extra-terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator). Earth is a dystopian Garden of Eden, then. EVE's directive is to scan the planet for any sign of vegetation, which would indicate that the planet is ready to be recolonized by the long-absent humans, and it is only with WALL-E's help that she is able to find plant life on earth. WALL-E is immediately smitten with EVE, and when the space ship returns to take her and the plant WALL-E has given her back to whence she came, WALL-E grabs hold of the ship and tags along. He then finds himself aboard the luxury space cruiser Axiom helping EVE report back her finding of plant life and instigate recolonization procedures against the opposition of a HAL-9000-like autopilot robot named Auto. It is at this point we learn that the humans have all become slug-like blobs who interact only through computer screens and are ferried everywhere on flying chairs, a tongue-in-cheek dig at the film viewers themselves. They have so succumbed to their life of luxury and consumerism that they no longer know how to walk or interact with real, physical objects (other than food, but even that comes primarily in liquid form) other than robots. These digitally

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[26] WALL-E runs the signal from the VCR through an iPod in order to view the antiquated medium, connecting the old and new technologies and in one small moment assuring viewers that there is no need to worry about obsolescence – old media can be remediated through new media.

addicted couch potatoes bear little resemblance to the people who created and used the objects WALL-E collects.

WALL-E's theme is apropos of the current moment. Following in the wake of *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006) and growing concerns about the environmental damage caused by consumerist lifestyles, the film presents a vivid image of a bleak future if people do not clean up their acts soon. Echoing previous science-fiction dystopias like *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), humans respond to the ecological crisis by abandoning the planet (compare "Too much garbage in your face? There's plenty of space out in space!" [*WALL-E*] with "A new life awaits you in the Off-world colonies! A chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure!" [*Blade Runner*]). While the original plan is that the WALL-E units will clean up the garbage while the humans embark on a five-year cruise, at the end of the allotted time the last Buy n' Large CEO, Shelby Forthright, reports back that the cleanup operation has been a failure, and "Rather than trying to fix this problem it'll just be easier for everyone to remain in space."

Because they abandoned their responsibility to the earth, the humans become caricatures of themselves: they grow fat and lazy aboard the luxury spaceship. In fact, they are so fat that they are unable to walk since "Due to the effects of microgravity, you and your passengers may have suffered some slight bone loss." EVE's discovery of plant life on earth awakens the ship's current captain to the need to take responsibility for humanity's past actions. After researching life on earth in the computer's database, he realizes that the reason life on earth is unsustainable is because no one looks after it. In his struggle to wrest control of the ship from Auto (who is bound to his directive not to return to Earth in HAL-9000-like logic), the captain argues "Out there is our home. *Home*, Auto. And it's in trouble. I can't just sit here and do nothing." The

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message is clear: either we take care of the earth, or we become fat, lazy, computer-addicted wanderers in space. But there is a second message in *WALL-E* that will be addressed later, one concerned with the relationship between CGI animation and photorealism.

As a collector, WALL-E fits the stereotype established by Susan Pearce: he is a male bachelor with poor social skills. Though he is an endearing character from the start, when EVE arrives on earth he does not know how to interact with her. He tries to impress her by showing her objects from his collection. WALL-E is similar to Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* in that his collection arises from his loneliness and fascination with the human world to which he has only limited access. The robot carefully categorizes his daily finds, placing like with like (grappling with the conundrum of a spork, the robot carefully places it equidistant between his cans of forks and spoons).  But neither WALL-E nor Ariel can determine the original uses of the objects they find outside their original context. Without the people who use them, objects are just amusing enigmas.

WALL-E also uses items in his collection. Some are replacement parts for himself from other WALL-E units, but he has also created a mobile out of holiday lights and compact discs, and uses a hubcap as a pork pie hat while imitating the dancers in *Hello, Dolly!* Further, like Ariel, his understanding of human culture is only partial. WALL-E can only guess at the significance of many items in his collection. He puts a basketball in a globe stand, for example, and upon finding an engagement ring in a box he discards the ring and keeps the box. It is not material things, but the live-action movie *Hello, Dolly!* which teaches him the universal value of love (because it is not the video cassette that teaches WALL-E, but its contents). Watching the performance of "It Only Takes a Moment" in the film, WALL-E is moved by the physical expression of love through handholding and mimics it by holding his own hand, reaffirming the

primacy of materiality in both collecting and emotional experiences. Unlike Ariel, however, WALL-E does not desire to become human to find love, and at the end of each day he fits himself into a space on the shelves with the rest of his collection, thereby identifying himself as part of his collection, another object left behind on the trashed planet by the absent humans.

Although WALL-E and EVE successfully orchestrate the return of humanity to Earth, WALL-E's collection does not function as a museum of human history for the now seventh-generation exiles. The Axiom's computer files have preserved more of Earth's history than WALL-E could ever hope to do on his own. Simply by asking the computer, the ship's captain learns how to care for the plant EVE brings him, what a hoedown is, and much more. The computer database contains the complete film of *Hello, Dolly!,* whereas WALL-E's video copy seems only partial. For his part, having achieved his goal of finding companionship, WALL-E no longer needs to collect.

The closing credits of the film show WALL-E and EVE helping the people re-learn how to grow crops, construct buildings, and continue the clean up of Earth, but WALL-E's collection makes no further appearance. The Axiom colonists must rebuild human society on Earth from its primitive beginnings. They (along with WALL-E and the other robots) are first depicted learning agriculture in images done in a CGI-generated cave painting style, next in a more advanced state rendered in the style of ancient Greek painting, then in an industrial society pictured in lithograph style, and so on until they are finally represented as 8-bit arcade game characters when the sequence ends. The final shift is from a Van Gogh-style painting of WALL-E and EVE in front of a tree of life (which grew from the replanted sprout EVE used to bring the Axiom back to earth), to the 8-bit arcade images, bypassing photography, film, and modernism entirely in this condensed version of evolution. The initial wonder and amazement WALL-E and EVE

share over the physical existence of Rubik's cubes and light bulbs vanishes and is replaced by WALL-E and EVE's affection for each other and their new goal assisting in the re-growth of human civilization – a civilization that is man-made and technological, but environmentally-friendly this time around.

Thus, although WALL-E's collecting activities are what characterize him as a loveable and friendly character (as opposed to Auto, the threatening robot whose strict adherence to orders blinds him to the need for change), in the end the film makes clear that change and adaptation are more valuable characteristics. Evolution is invoked in the visual representation of the humans on the Axiom. The human figures WALL-E watches in *Hello, Dolly!* are photorealistic (the film mixes live-action footages with CGI animation in these sequences), but the present-day humans on board the Axiom are decidedly cartoonish. This is explained in a sequence of ship's logs from earlier generations: the people who first left Earth were slim and rendered photorealistically. Over seven hundred years of an extremely sedentary lifestyle, human beings have not only become fat and skeletally devolved to the point where standing and walking is nearly impossible for them, but they have also become cartoonish. The Buy 'N Large (BnL) corporation is responsible for promoting the mass consumerism that destroyed the earth in the first place as well as the decision to abandon the planet and live on the luxury ship Axiom until the WALL-E units finished the clean-up job.

Forthright, played by a human actor, Fred Willard, is projected on the ship's computer when the current captain investigates Auto's refusal to allow the ship to return to Earth. Thus, humans have evolved from having a photorealistic appearance to a more abstract, cartoony one (the Earth itself is somewhere in between: it is a dystopian showpiece of CGI technology and more photorealistic than any previous animated film, but still clearly animated rather than

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photographed). This may at first seem like devolution, but the end credits skip photography and film in their portrayal of the regrowth of human society on Earth. Though the film suggests our lost past can be reconstituted, this time around the humans bypass indexical photography and go straight to digital computer images. It seems CGI animators have learned from the failure of Square USA's *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Hironobu Sakaguchi and Moto Sakakibara, 2001), an animated film that billed itself as a photorealistic. Indeed, *Final Fantasy*'s CGI images were cutting edge and impressively real – but as Vivian Sobchack argues in "Final Fantasies: Computer Graphic Animation and the [Dis]Illusion of Life," by attempting photorealism (without actually being photographs) the film betrayed the ethos of animation, the "integral *irrealism*" (Sobchack 173) animation desires, since it is "guided by an alternative ideal founded on the 'total' creation (not re-creation) of the world in its own image" (Sobchack 173).

What is at stake in the closing credits is an understanding of the trajectory of animated imagery. By excluding photography and film from the history of art (symbolically representing the history of humankind), the animators are asserting animation as being separate from live-action film. It has a different history, and presumably different goals. So in spite of the drive toward realism in technological development, ultimately animation remains apart. Indeed, it is suggested that it will overtake photorealism as the dominant mode of visual representation, perhaps fulfilling Windsor McCay's vision of the future after all.

## 4.6    FUN IN THE MUSEUM: *CURIOUS GEORGE*

As with live-action film, the treatment of the museum differs from the treatment of the collector in animation. The final film analyzed in this chapter, *Curious George*, departs significantly from the negative portrayals of collecting and museums. While at first it may seem more closely aligned with the live-action Indiana Jones films and *Night at the Museum* (2006), analysis shows that it is ultimately in line with the other animated representations of collecting. The most recent screen adaptation of Margret and H. A. Rey's beloved children's book series centers on how Ted Shackleford, also known as the Man with the Yellow Hat, meets George the monkey. Ted is a docent at the Bloomsbury Museum, a natural history museum located in New York City. Due to decreasing attendance and a growing lack of interest in the few patrons that remain, Mr. Bloomsbury, the director, is considering closing the museum to allow his son Junior to erect a parking lot in its place, one "with high hourly rates and no daily maximum." In an effort to drum up public interest in the museum, Ted travels to Africa in search of the "lost shrine of Zagawa," a spectacularly large cultural object Ted and Bloomsbury believe will draw the large crowds they need to prevent the museum's demise. In searching for the shrine, Ted befriends the orphaned monkey George who follows him back to New York and proceeds to cause trouble in true Curious George fashion.

Visually, *Curious George* emphasizes distortions in point of view as part of its message that we should see the world anew. The film features mostly traditional cel animation (with some city scenes rendered through CGI), though many options were considered. Director Matthew

O'Callaghan indicated that "*Curious George* has gone from all live-action with a computer-animated George [and prior to that, an actual-chimp George] to an all-CGI movie to what it is now, which is all 2D animation. This was all done before I joined the project" (Strike) – though O'Callaghan claims *Curious George* is all traditional 2D animation, his animation overseer, Ken Tsumura, reveals that "there is simply no such thing as a purely 2D film anymore. 'Twenty percent of the movie takes place in 3D environments. They look like traditional animation backgrounds, but they move in 3D space'" (Strike). The DVD release features a short documentary on how "flip animation" works (the artist draws images on thin sheets of paper stacked on top of each other, and flips between them to see the progression of movement), aimed primarily at young audiences, but suggesting to older viewers that this film is a traditional animated film, more classic Disney than Pixar.

The conscious marketing of *Curious George* as a hand-drawn animated film in sea of CGI is reflected in the kinds of metamorphosis emphasized in the plot. Ted's first trip to Africa is a disappointment because the idol he finds is only a couple of inches tall. Thinking he has failed, he photographs the small idol with his cell phone and transmits the pictures to Mr. Bloomsbury. However, since there is nothing but sky behind the idol when he photographs it, Bloomsbury and his son mistakenly believe the idol is over forty feet tall. When Ted returns he finds that the museum has advertised his "humongous" find far and wide. While floating over the city tied to a bunch of helium balloons, Ted holds the miniature idol over the museum below him and notices that, from an aerial perspective, it looks impressively huge against the ground below. This inspires him to try manipulating the perspective of the museum patrons for the exhibit. Using an overhead projector and a magnifying glass dome, the small idol can be projected at great size. Loading the equipment into the back of a truck, Ted drives it to the museum and

George causes panic in the streets by turning the machine on and projecting an enlarged image of himself in the city streets, an act which alludes to *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) and the use of models and other special effects to create film spectacles. (The Lost Shrine of Zagawa is also a monkey statue called "The Eighth Wonder of the World," as King Kong was when put on display in New York.) The suggestion is that museums need to join the entertainment media in constructing interest in their displays, and recalls "blockbuster" exhibits like *National Geographic*'s ongoing *Tutankhamen the Golden King and the Great Pharaohs* exhibit. Later Ted mistakes a television broadcast of the oversized rampaging George for George himself since the image has been reduced to normal size. Thus, it is perspective rather than literal transformation that is valorized by the film. Though Ted's attempt to fool museum patrons ultimately fails, it is the imaginative possibility the distortions provide him that drives his adventures, leading to eventual success in finding the full-sized idol.

In his role as docent, Ted's primary school audience is far from impressed with his index card-based presentations. They answer his rhetorical questions and throw his rhythm off, ask their teacher why they have to come to the boring museum every week, and give no reaction at all to Ted's dramatic use of props. When the children become interested in whether a model cave man is holding a "real" spear and want to know if they can play with it, Ted responds, "Kids, the museum is a place where we observe. We don't play." Ted subscribes to the traditional model of museums as sacred spaces for observation of artifacts vetted by experts who hold the keys to understanding their importance. The conflict in the film is between George, the uninhibited and playful monkey, and Ted, the hapless and stuffy scholar (once again a bachelor). Ted's idea of a good joke is "What's the difference between Neanderthal man and Cro-Magnon man? Linguistic competence and polychromatic cave paintings!" Over the course of the film, Ted learns to have

fun through his interactions with George, and, in the end, the museum is saved because he applies a new philosophy of fun to the exhibits there.

Like both *The Little Mermaid* and the Indiana Jones films, in *Curious George* the collection is a representation of the exotic other. Moving from the ultra-modern New York City filled with skyscrapers and taxis, Ted travels to the African jungle, returning with a shrine and a monkey. The film calls attention to Ted's status as an interloper through his absurd yellow suit, which he acquires from "Outback Beyond," an Australian-themed store staffed by two New Yorkers who put on fake Australian accents for customers. In the original children's books, The Man in the Yellow Hat's wardrobe choice is never explained, but in the film the shady salesmen convince Ted that "yellow is the new khaki." As Ted proceeds through the jungle with his African guides, he attempts to educate them on the shrine of Zagawa, telling Edu that "it says here 'zagawa' means 'enlightened,'" to which Edu replies, "I know, sir. I live here." Although Edu points out Ted's absurdity as a dorky, white, ethnocentric New Yorker (for Ted is no Indiana Jones), other than harmlessly sniping at Ted's cultural ignorance he does little in the film.

Ted's right to remove the idol from Africa (no country is specifically identified) is never questioned despite current controversies about Western "looting." When Ted tries to convince Bloomsbury that the museum can be saved with one big archeological find, he argues, "You can finally finish what you started, which is bringing home [here Bloomsbury finishes the sentence] the lost shrine of Zagawa." "Home" for the African shrine is apparently the United States. Ted and Bloomsbury's understanding of museum work is antiquated at this point, mired in the imperialist model of western nations plundering the third world for primitive artifacts.

Though the film modernizes the original stories (written in the 1940s by H. A. and Margaret Rey) with cell phones, rocket ships and computers, the imperialist vision of the museum is unchanged. When sunlight shines through the small idol it projects a large image of the map to the full-sized shrine. This is reminiscent of both the staff in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which directs the archeologists to the location of the Ark, and of pre-digital cinema, in which a small image is projected large upon a screen.

After Ted learns to have fun and discovers the full-sized idol, the Bloomsbury Museum becomes a modernized experiential museum, one that children and their parents flock to visit. The artifact becomes background decoration for a set of activities rather than the *raison d'être* of the museum. Instead, activity stations aimed at the children are the main focus, and the new philosophy of the museum is one of "fun," as Ted explains: "I just have one important thing to say. Anyone can memorize facts and figures. The real way to learn anything is to go out and experience it. Let your curiosity lead you." Now, instead of hearing a lecture about the evolution of mankind, the children can dig for planted fossils, play on a climbing wall, finger paint, and, for some inexplicable reason, play in a working rocket ship. While on the one hand the museum can now afford to stay open because of renewed public (read: child) interest, it appears to be more of a theme park than a place of research and learning. The fossil digging directly relates to the ostensible purpose of the display (to learn about the shrine of Zagawa and the people who built it), but the modern rock climbing wall and finger painting seem dissociated from any historical or cultural learning. The inclusion of the space ship suggests that modernization will save museums. Whether new or old, however, the new museum is "fun." Even though it is the hands-on aspect of the new exhibit that the children respond to, the museum cannot provide this without the authentic artifact as the centerpiece. When Ted only had the two-inch tall model of

Zagawa the museum could not be saved. A small artifact does not make for an impressive spectacle. All the play with perspective ties in to the overall message of *Curious George* that reconceptualizing the presentation of musty old museum objects will renew the public's interest. It is ultimately just the cel-animated version of the *Night at the Museum* movies.

## 4.7    CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that animation is a style of cinema, rather than a separate medium or genre. Yet the tradition of separating it from live-action film in both scholarly writing and popular perception has relegated it to the role of ugly stepchild to live-action cinema's golden boy status. As a result, animation has on the whole defined itself in opposition to live-action: instead of preservation and realism, it embraces transformation and fantasy. But the separation has always been a false one, and I believe it is coming to an end. The new realism is animation. What the more recent animated films are showing is a shift to an animation-centric image metaverse,[27] that is, a digital visual metaphor for the real world as the dominant understanding of reality. Live-action films are part of this shift as well, since the majority of them now enhance their photography with digital post-production practices. And, animation demands more attention than ever (not that it ever got what it deserved) because of video games, which draw strongly from the visual style of animation, much more so than from photorealism.

Indeed, all of the animated films discussed in this chapter have been adapted to at least one video game as well. *Little Mermaid* was released as a game for NES and Gameboy in 1991. *Toy Story* was adapted as *Toy Story* for the Super Nintendo and Windows 95 PCs in 1995, and

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[27] As coined by Neal Stephenson in *Snow Crash*.

*Toy Story Racer* in 2001 for the PlayStation. *Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue* was released for Nintendo 64, PlayStation, Dreamcast, and PC in 1999 and 2000 (depending on the platform). *Curious George* was released as a game for the GameCube, GBA, PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC in 2005, and *WALL-E* was released for Microsoft Windows, Nintendo DS, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable, Wii, Xbox 360, and Mac OS X in 2008. This strategy is used with popular live-action film releases as well, and indeed there are video games based on *Indiana Jones* (there are more game versions than films, in fact) and *Night at the Museum*. Of the examples discussed in the live-action film chapter, only the *Indiana Jones* films and *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* have been adapted into video game form.

Major Disney and Pixar feature films have video game releases are part of the general effort to merchandise widely, and most games are released on numerous platforms for maximum market saturation. The proliferation of platform releases alone indicates the growing market for video games, and as with films adapted from existing literary works, it's easier to sell a game based on an existing franchise than to start with a fresh idea. Pixar's success with CGI feature films and the saturation of the video game market with animation-based games suggests that animation has very close ties with digital games. As a result, animation's importance is on the rise. It is not merely piggybacking on the success of the games market, however. The cartoon aesthetic is in fact the backbone of video game imagery and style, as I shall argue further in the next chapter.

# 5.0 JEWELED EGGS AND MARIO TROPHIES: COLLECTING IN DIGITAL GAMES

The previous two chapters have demonstrated that while stereotyped roles dominate the representation of collectors in live-action film and animation, there are some variations in the message conveyed. Digital games break sharply from both cinematic and popular conception. Instead of casting an awkward single male or sociopath as a character who collects, a surprisingly large number of games invite or require the player act as a collector. Thus, any negative stereotypes are downplayed since the player *is* the collector.[28] As Steven Jones observes in *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies*, "Games involve collecting, and collecting itself is a game" (Jones 47). To collect everything in a game is to win. This chapter will analyze how and why the practice of collecting is conceived of differently in digital games, with attention to the collecting of game memorabilia, the history of collectibles and games, and museums and collecting in games. This chapter will also provide a brief history of those digital game genres that have the most emphasis on collecting (primarily the simulation game, the adventure game, the computer role-playing game [CRPG], and the massively-multiplayer online role playing game [MMPORG]), with a particular focus on the Japanese origins of those genres and the resulting cross-cultural exchange with the United States. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how the ludic form of digital games invites an emphasis on collecting and analyze several specific games, namely *Zork: The Great Underground Empire – Part 1* (1980) (also known as *Zork 1*), *Pikmin 2* (2004), the *Katamari Damacy* and *We Love*

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[28] Though in many games players vicariously enjoy playing thieves and killers, in a great many cases the violence and criminality is justified by the context. In the *Final Fantasy VII*, for example, players fight against the evil corporation Shinra, which is destroying the world by draining its resources. *America's Army* (2002) was developed by the U.S. Army as a recruitment tool and as such, any violence presence in the game is validated as necessary for national defense purposes. There are exceptions, of course, such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series (1997 – 2009), in which the player tries to rise in the criminal underworld through his or her felonious actions. However, even in these cases any collecting activity performed by the player are code as positive – they represent the player's success in playing the game, whether they play a character upholding law and order or one bent on destruction and mayhem.

*Katamari* (2004 and 2005), *Animal Crossing* (2002), and *Kingdom of Loathing* (2003). Each of these games includes in-game collecting as a significant activity and is exemplary of collecting in digital games as a whole.

Though a very different medium than live-action and animated film, digital games are included in this study as they are an increasingly popular form of visual entertainment, and their influence on film is on the rise, as seen by the close ties between the two as ancillary markets. Alexis Blanchet reports that while earlier game systems had "about eight to 11 percent of their libraries comprised of adaptations [from films], the current generation of consoles has seen a higher proportion – particularly the Wii, whose library may be about one-fifth adaptations" (Remo). Wikipedia lists some 116 digital games based on preexisting films, and 74 films based on games, though these lists are anecdotal and likely incomplete. Digital games have been seen as a competitor to both the film and television industries because viewers have a finite amount of leisure time available with more and more entertainment options to choose from. Additionally, while a movie may take an average of two hours to view, and most television shows thirty to sixty minutes a week, a single video game can contain eighty or more hours of material to play through. It is thus advantageous for the film industry to forge connections between games and films where possible.

One of the ways collecting is defined is as a play activity, and although we rarely see this in live-action film. Indiana Jones, Boris Balkan, Al from Al's Toy Barn, and Ted Shackleford – all of these men collect or obtain collection items because it is their job to do so (or in Al's case, because he thinks he can make a lot of money from selling a complete collection). Rob Gordon and Jonathan Safran Foer pursue their collecting as a recreational hobby, but both of these men are portrayed with a very serious single-mindedness that it seem less like something they enjoy and more like a source of anxiety. Jonathan doesn't know why he does what he does; he is

simply compelled to do it. Rob knows that he likes music and certainly enjoys it, but he also makes music his career.

Most often, collecting is neither a job nor an obsession, however. For many non-professional collectors, it is simply fun. Where live-action and animated films fail to portray this other side of collecting, digital games pick up the slack. Susan Pearce's analysis of collectors reveals that for the non-professional, collecting is not part of a mundane routine – it is a leisure activity: "The distinction between the economic activity of working to make a living, and collecting, is usually very clear in the collector's mind: collecting is voluntary and the collection is separate and distinct" (*Museums* 50), and furthermore, "[i]t is set aside from daily life, like the fenced-off enclosures in which games are played, and acquires a sacred character of apartness from the profane world, enshrined in its display shelves and cabinets. Collecting, like all sport, has the character of ritual activity which is carried out for its own sake with all the social and emotional quality which this implies" (*Museums* 50). Looked at from this angle, it seems quite natural that collections constitute a large part of the appeal of digital games. Steven Jones goes so far as to assert that the "fundamental activity in almost all video games" (Jones 47) is collecting game objects.

## 5.1   WHAT IS A DIGITAL GAME?

The digital game experience is paradoxical in that it always tends toward completion *and* expansion, the same desires that motivate the traditional collector of objects. While frequently the purported goal of playing a game is to win, there are games that cannot be won, and even in those games that can be won, the experience is less defined by the end than by the activity of

playing. In her analysis of gender roles and video games, Gillian Skirrow argues that the pleasures of digital games are not about finishing, since the end is a traumatic rather than pleasurable event. She writes, "Since there can be no adequate reward for success the game has to be about lack itself - the desire to continue to play - rather than about a final satisfying resolution." (Skirrow 128). In a board game such as Monopoly, winning the game is the primary pleasure of playing. The satisfaction of winning derives from beating one's fellow players. Beating a computer at a game is less fun in this sense since the computer has no feelings, and thus no competitive spirit.

In a digital game, on the other hand, the gratification of solving a particular puzzle or beating a final monster is fleeting, because the player is immediately thrown into the next level or the next challenge. Conquering a puzzle or winning a fight gives the player a momentary feeling of power or mastery, often accompanied by a musical or graphical flourish, or perhaps a virtual trophy or new game item as a reward. Both types of rewards motivate the player to continue the game. The musical and graphic "prizes" are momentary; however the digital objects provide more lasting satisfaction when they can be displayed or revisited in a collection – as long as new levels provide a reason to keep coming back to a particular game. Such game-specific prizes are not the only thing that drives players to continue the game. It is the anticipation of new levels and new challenges that also compels the gamer ever onward. The somewhat paradoxical movement toward completion and expansion mirrors the collector's desire to have a complete collection while at the same time desiring that there always be more to collect. Collecting is about both the acquisition of specific objects and the anticipation of obtaining the next item on the horizon.

When discussing what are commonly called "video games" or "computer games," I prefer to use the term "digital games," because it is inclusive of games played on personal computers, consoles hooked up to television sets, and portable devices like cell phones. A computer game is a game involving interaction with an electronic visual display. This broad definition excludes games which are merely electrified, such as Operation[29], air hockey and Electric Football[30], but includes electronic adaptations of games like chess, football, etc., as well as text-based computer games such as Infocom's early 1980s interactive fiction offerings such as *Zork I* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1984), which consisted entirely of text displayed on a computer screen. According to Wikipedia.org, a computer game is "any computer controlled game." The Oxford English Dictionary defines it similarly: "A game played on a computer or with computers, *esp.* one involving graphics and operating in real time; a software package for such a game." The term video game is reserved for games with a "graphic video interface," or, according to the OED, "a game played by electronically manipulating images displayed on a television screen" (Wikipedia.org, "video game"). In *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts and Rewired Our Minds*, J. C. Herz uses "videogame" to refer to Steve Russell's 1961 creation, *Spacewar*, written for a Digital Equipment Corporation PDP-1 computer - clearly a computer game according to the previous definition. In popular parlance, however, gamers often use "video game" to refer exclusively to games played on a console dedicated to gaming, and "computer game" to refer to games played on a personal computer (PC). This terminology is confusing as some games, such as the various versions of *The Sims*, are released in both PC and console versions. Thus, I will use the term

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[29] A battery-operated Milton-Bradley game first released in 1965

[30] Tudor 1949. Tudor's Tru-Action Electric Football is believed to be the first game available to the general public to incorporate electricity. http://boardgames.about.com/od/gamehistories/p/elec_football.htm

"digital game" to refer to any permutation of game involving electronics and a non-analog display (excluding things like Electric Football and most pinball games, but including games played on computers, on hand-held devices like the Nintendo DS and cell phones, most arcade games, and game consoles hooked up to televisions, like the Wii and Playstation 3).

Although often neglected in favor of concerns over violence and gender construction, objects are the crux of many video games and gameplay revolves around how players interact with game objects. It is therefore not surprising that collecting in one form or another has become a common feature in video games. Collecting does not appear equally across all video game genres, however, but occurs more frequently in some genres than others. In role-playing games, or RPGs, (such as the *Final Fantasy* series [1987-2006, multiple], *Tales of Symphonia* [2004], and both *Dark Cloud* games [2001 and 2003]) the player generally controls a troupe of characters who embark on a quest. The characters and narrative are highly developed, and although similar in some ways to the adventure game, in the role-playing game there is generally more monster fighting, more emphasis on narrative and fewer puzzles to solve.

The adventure game genre (including games such as the *Legend of Zelda* [1987] and *Myst* [1993]) generally emphasizes exploration of an environment that contains a series of puzzles for the player to solve. Characters and narrative are more developed than the simulation game, but the primary emphasis is on solving the puzzles to win the game. Simulation games (such as the many variations of *The Sims* [2000-2009, multiple] and *Harvest Moon* series [1980-1982, multiple]) imitate some aspect of reality (such as farm life in *Harvest Moon*). The gameplay consists of a combination of logic, luck and strategy in placing and manipulating the objects in the game. *The Sims* is in many ways a virtual dollhouse, and players are in charge of building and furnishing their characters' homes. Like the RPG, interactive fiction games (such as the early

*Zork* games [1980-1982]) usually consist of a quest, such as solving a murder mystery, however the game is played through textual interactions – there are no graphics and no special controller needed. Players read a short description of a place or event and then type a command, such as "pick up knife," which determines the next installment of description.

Some of the best examples of collecting in video games do not fit easily into these genre categories, including *Animal Crossing* and *Katamari Damacy*. First-person shooters[31] and sports games are the two popular digital game genres that do not typically feature a significant collecting element. This study omits these genres because although many players claim there is a collecting component to them, their definition of "collecting" differs greatly from that outlined in chapter one. Is winning a series of trophies in *Madden 10* (2009) a collection in the same way that trying to find a complete set of Series 1 Tiny Plastic items is in *Kingdom of Loathing*? One involves a choice of object and theme while the other does not. The use of collecting in these game genres is worth further consideration in the future, however.

### 5.2    "REAL" OBJECTS VS. DIGITAL OBJECTS

Nathan Clinton Garrelts' *The Official Strategy Guide for Video Game Studies: A Grammar and Rhetoric of Video Games* and Mirjam Eladhari's *Object Oriented Story Construction in Story Driven Computer Games* both address the use of objects in video games. Garrelts' attention to objects is limited to dissecting the various components of a video game. He defines an object as "a set of parameters for behavior," (Garrelts 43) drawing on computer

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[31] A first person shooter is a game that renders the player's view from the perspective of the character. The gameplay centers on finding and shooting a target.

programming terminology, and categorizes the graphical objects appearing in video games but devotes little time to discussing the significance of any of these objects in detail. Eladhari's study is written for game programmers, with an eye toward minimizing "false causal relations in game stories" through the use of "object oriented narration" (Eladhari 5). Eladhari's work in particular demonstrates the close ties that exist between objects and narrative in video games. It is clear from my research that collecting is a feature in a surprising number of games, and therefore has significant import to material culture in general.

It is difficult to explain what a "real" object is in live-action film alone, but there is a difference between a live-action film that has material props and an animated one that has only drawings. Digital games share this lack of physical props with animation, but there's a key shift in how the viewers/players regards the animated "objects." In cartoons and live-action films, a drawing or photograph of a gun is always a drawing of a gun to be looked at by the viewers and perhaps used by the drawn characters. While the cartoon characters may perform all kinds of actions using the representation of the gun, the viewers themselves cannot do anything with it. In a game, however, the digital objects are not just visual representations of things; they also *are* the things themselves. In *Kingdom of Loathing* (*KoL*), the Obsidian Dagger is more than just an image (though it has an image associated with it); it is also a chunk of code (unseen to the average player) that gives it characteristics that control how it behaves in the game. Some of that behavior is explained in the "item description" part of the inventory: "This is a knife that has been cunningly chipped from volcanic glass, making it sharper than the sharpest thing ever" (*KoL*). Additionally, the player is informed of the battle capabilities of the weapon:

Type: weapon (1-handed knife)

Power: 30

Muscle Required: 10

Cannot be traded

Cannot be discarded

Enchantment:

+3 Spooky Damage

+3 Stench Damage

+3 Hot Damage

+3 Cold Damage

+3 Sleaze Damage

Each time the player chooses to use the Obsidian Dagger in the game, these pre-defined characteristics interact with the characteristics of other equipped weapons and armor, and the characteristics of the target it is employed against, to generate a result based on game algorithms. Buzz Lightyear's laser in the *Toy Story* series, on the other hand, only has descriptive characteristics. The films tell the viewer that it is in fact an LED light and not a real laser, that the light is red, and that the laser's battery sometimes needs to be recharged.

Games like *Animal Crossing*, *Pikmin 2* and *Katamari Damacy* all contain an impressive number of objects for players to and find and collect, but it is always a finite number. Massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) like *Kingdom of Loathing* and *Ultima Online* (1997), on the other hand, have a potentially unlimited number of objects to collect. Because players pay a monthly fee to play, (average monthly fees are between five and thirty dollars a month, with rare free exceptions like *Kingdom of Loathing*), programmers continually add new quests and content to maintain player interest and discourage cancellation of accounts. These games extend the logic of completion and expansion to a level on par with real world

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collecting. Players can choose what they would like to collect and determine the parameters of their collection. A player interested in weaponry can make his or her goal having one of every weapon available in a certain game. Another player may choose to collect items based on the location where they can be obtained (a particular game city or continent, for example).

MMORPGs are subscription-based games. Players download the game software and pay a monthly fee to access the game online. This payment structure is desirable to game developers since instead of paying once (usually no more than $70 per title) to play a game, players keep paying as long as they keep playing the game. However, to keep players interested, new content must be added on a regular basis. This new content includes not only new locations and new quests, but also new game items, many of which can be collected. Thus, the MMPORPG is the game genre in which the most research into game objects has been done because objects from these games have been spilling over into areas outside the game world. Specifically, there is much interest currently in the buying and selling of game objects and characters for real money in markets like eBay. As of 2004, it is estimated that ten million people are involved in online role-playing games, shattering the notion that video games are a subculture activity of little significance - particularly since online role playing games are only one type of game available (Castronova, Synthetic Worlds 77). Such large numbers of players make an attractive target market for entrepreneurs, a market that may by left out of traditional advertising venues. In *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online* Games, Edward Castronova notes that, "[m]any gamers say that playing games only required cutting one thing out of their lives: TV," (Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds* 77) which he links to the recent 10% viewership decline among 18 - 34-year-old males in the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 television viewing seasons, making video games a threat to longstanding forms of media entertainment.

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Although his research began as an amusing application of real-world economic theory to the game *EverQuest* (1999), Castronova discovered that *EverQuest*, in fact, had a measurable impact on the US economy, and that, "Commerce was important outside the game as well, revealing how many people seemed immersed in this place and what they were willing to pay, in real money, to do things there" (Castronova 134). MMORPGs like *EverQuest* ask players to explore synthetic worlds and navigate challenges to the character's abilities. A common way to increase the character's ability is to acquire items that have defensive or offensive capabilities - weapons or armor, for example. These can be obtained in any number of ways, including by purchase with in-game currency. The fact that neither the currency nor the items have any material existence is irrelevant: "Just as one cannot conclude that diamonds are worthless because they are said to 'have no valuable uses,' one also cannot conclude that the items in synthetic worlds are useless 'because they are only virtual.' Price indicates social value; virtual items have a price; therefore virtual items do have social value" (Castronova *Synthetic Worlds* 16). Furthermore, Castronova argues that the choice to engage in synthetic worlds is significant for an individual because it is a political statement about the state of the real world. Citing A. O. Hirschman, Castronova explains that entering a synthetic world means exiting the real world, and all exits are "inherently political statements" (Castronova *Synthetic Worlds* 76). All games are part of the real world in the same way that filmic worlds are, despite the fact that they are generally imagined and treated as separate realities to help maintain suspension of disbelief in the audience. Thus, all game objects are also real objects, capable of being bought, sold, or collected. Virtual objects are not only treated as real for the duration of the film or game in which they appear, but at times their reality extends beyond the boundaries of fiction. The

growing appearance of digital goods in the real world market attests to the ease with which digital objects infiltrate the real world.

In addition to collecting *in* digital games, there is a culture of collecting associated with fan culture outside games (as there is with live-action film and animation). Digital games have strong ties to fan culture, and fan culture has strong ties to collecting. Not only games, but also new media in general has facilitated the increased popularity of collecting by making it easier for collectors to locate desired items. Ease of purchase is only one part of the equation, though. What the Internet, in particular, has done is facilitate the formation of fan communities, out of which many collections arise.

In "Ephemeral Culture/eBay Culture: Film Collectibles and Fan Investments," Mary Desjardins examines the way the internet has fostered fan communities, noting, "Fans typically come together over shared interests in objects, texts, and figures—both real and fictional—that matter to them, and doing so is a major pleasure and function of fandom, if not always a conscious motivation" (Desjardins 33). Desjardins analyzes how eBay harnesses the film fan's impulse to collect and whips it into a frenzy by limiting how long something is available for sale, and pitting fan against fan in bidding wars (Desjardins 34). The same applies to fans of other media, of course. According to Desjardins, the CEO of eBay "sees the buyers and sellers of collectibles as eBay's 'essence' because they come together over a shared interest" (Desjardins 31).

> As a group, buyers of collectibles (who may also be sellers of collectibles) express their desires for material objects serially (they keep adding to their collections) and personally (they keep adding particular kinds of items because their collections relate to self-identity). As historians of collecting have argued,

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there is a widespread assumption that collectors' motivations originate and express themselves in affective contexts. Not surprisingly, then, Whitman and others at eBay conceive of collectors as constituting a community, the members of which buy and sell not just for utilitarian purposes but also because *something more than the sale matters to them*. eBay mobilizes this conception to define the site as a whole and thereby brands eBay as a site for financial transactions that are also affectively bound community interactions. (Desjardins 31-2)

Addressing the changing landscape of antique dealing and collectibles, William Gibson writes in "My Obsession: I Thought I was Immune to the Net. Then I Got Bitten by eBay," "the main driving force in the tidying of the world's attic, the drying up of random, 'innocent' sources of rarities, is information technology. We are mapping literally *everything*, from the human genome to Jaeger two-register chronographs, and our search engines grind increasingly fine" (Gibson 20). Even junk items that would previously have fallen off the radar are increasingly being entered into databases like eBay.

Because *Animal Crossing*, *Pikmin 2*, *Katamari Damacy*, *Kingdom of Loathing* and countless other games all stress buying, finding, or winning scores of objects, some critics mistakenly assume that what the games promote is simply consumer materialism. Katie Degentesh, for example, writes in *Gamers: Writers, Artists & Programmers on the Pleasures of Pixels* that what video games taught her was the simple lesson that if she "possessed the right objects, all would be right with the world" (Degentesh 92). All the catalogue sets of *Pikmin 2* and the museum collections of *Animal Crossing* may at first seem to be offering this same ultimately unfulfilling lesson: buy more stuff and you will be happy. In-game collecting is rarely so simple, however. In *Animal Crossing* there are two ways a player can figure out how to

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arrange furniture to best please the Happy Room Academy, an organization that ranks furniture placement in the game: through trial and error (requiring creative thinking), or through research online or in the strategy guide. Possessing the right objects is not enough – one must know how to use the right selection of objects.

Pikmin 2's collecting aspect is more rigid since the player does not have any control over how objects are categorized. Games like *Pikmin 2* and *Animal Crossing* model a consumer society very well, contrary to Degentesh's belief. In these games, the in-game currency is in short supply early in the game, but in both cases this is a deceptive consumerist model. In *Animal Crossing*, the player can very quickly earn far more money than it is possible to spend in the game, so although house items are can be bought from Tom Nook's store, the player is challenged more in the finding of objects than in the buying of them. In *Pikmin 2*, Captain Olimar earns the 10,000 pokos (the name of the in-game currency for *Pikmin 2*) necessary to pay off the company debt around the halfway point of the game. The rest of the game involves finding the secondary character Louie who has gotten lost on the Pikmin planet during the mission. There is, in fact, nothing to buy in *Pikmin 2* even though all the treasure Olimar finds is intended for sale back on their home planet, Hocotate. All the pokos Olimar earns are for his company; none are for himself. While searching for Louie, the player continues to collect treasure, but the money no longer has any meaning. Even in MMORPGs like *Ultima Online* and *Kingdom of Loathing*, in which in-game money is scarcer and objects can be sold between players, most of the various quests cannot be solved simply by buying the right objects, as Degentesh suggests. Buying better objects may give the player an edge in defeating a particular monster, but it does not help in solving the puzzles and challenges involving more than brute strength.

As the previous chapter noted, the recent resurgence of interest in the ontology of photographic images was brought about in part by questions about the status of digital images. André Bazin makes evident the seductiveness of the unique relationship between the camera and its subject. The increasing use of computer generated image (CGI) technology is responsible for some of this renewed interest in photographic ontology. Do films employing CGI technology have a compromised sense of realism? Are virtual objects (like those in digital games) less meaningful to material reality than film objects? While the idea that an indexical image as a fascinating kind of realism is appealing, Stephen Prince's notion of perceptually realistic images is more accurate in explaining how contemporary viewers understand photographic images. He writes, "A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space," (Prince 32). If the viewer reads the image as realistic, then it has the same effect as if it were an indexically realistic image – particularly since studio tours and behind-the-scenes interviews have long cast doubts on the realism of *any* object shown on the cinema screen. The point is not that viewers naively believe in the existence of what they see onscreen, but that CGI technology makes digital objects visibly indistinguishable from profilmic objects. Perceptual realism is not about duping the viewer, however, as Prince's main example is the use of CGI to create dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1993). Viewers know there are currently no real dinosaurs. But they also know that they look real in the film.

Digital game objects are shaped not only by the cinematic regime, but also by their algorithmic construction. Games emphasize objects in their very programming through the use of object-oriented programming (OOP), a method currently used for writing much game software. OOP does not refer to a particular programming language, but rather to a way of conceptualizing how elements within a program relate to each other. Essentially, a program using object-oriented

design regards the program as a series of discrete units (or objects) that interact with each other. Previous paradigms for computer programming regarded the program as a list or set of instructions the computer executed. While this may seem unrelated to a discussion of collecting in video games, it results in an underlying philosophy that regards every image appearing on a video game screen as an object (and the fact that the non-image components of the program are also regarded as objects further privileges materiality and discrete boundaries). The narrative structure of *Zork 1* demonstrates the way the underlying code of a game influences its representation of game objects.

Examining the text from *Zork 1* reveals that it is composed mainly of descriptions of settings, with particular attention to the presence of objects, some of which merit their own paragraphs. For example, the Maintenance Room is described thusly:

> This is what appears to have been the maintenance room for the Flood Control Dam #3. Apparently, this room has been ransacked recently, for most of the valuable equipment is gone. On the wall in front of you is a group of buttons colored blue, yellow, brown, and red. There are doorways to the west and south.
>
> There is a large group of tool chests here.
>
> There is a wrench here.
>
> There is an object which looks like a tube of toothpaste here.
>
> There is a screwdriver here.

The final four sentences are set off from the main text, in part because of the way the computer processes information. Each variable chunk of text is a separate unit. When assembling a description, the computer determines which objects have been moved during gameplay and may therefore be present in the Maintenance Room in addition to items that are always there (the

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buttons and the doorways). Thus, the cited passage begins with the basic description of the locale, then adds a new sentence stating the existence of each object currently present in the room.

## 5.3    A HISTORY OF DIGITAL GAMING

The rapid evolution of digital games makes it difficult to accurately document. While Herz credits Russell with creating the first video game in 1961, Ralph H. Baer argues that military simulation programs (such as flight simulators) created during WWII were the first cathode ray tube games, and arguably video games, even though they were not primarily intended for entertainment purposes (as qtd. in Wolf ix). Nathan Clinton Garrelts reports that video game studies begin variously with Russell's *Spacewar* or with Willy Higginbotham's *Tennis for Two* in 1958 (Garrelts 20f). The confusion is partly due to the ill-defined nature of the word "game" itself, and also due to the fact that the first games were not available to the general public, but bound to the enormous and expensive computers of the 1960s and 1970s, mainly located in computer science and engineering departments of universities. So although future computer programmers were already playing and writing video games in the 1960s, these games were not commodities (they were mainly written in spare moments, for fun) and were not available to the public. The release of the first coin-operated arcade game in 1971, *Computer Space,* transformed digital games from a hobby to a business. In 1974, Atari released *Pong* and digital games entered the home (Herz 14).

Along with *Joystick Nation,* Mark J. P. Wolf's 2001 *The Medium of the Video Game* is one of the standard historical accounts of video games in the United States. Because the field of

video game studies is trying to find a foothold in the predefined American university system, critical work is scattered across fields. There has been a recent trend to study the relationship between video games and films, since the economic power of video games has now superseded the film industry (Chan). Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska's *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces* is a notable example of this approach. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's *Rules of Play* is unique as a textbook for aspiring game designers which deals not with the mechanics of video game software design, but the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of games generally and video games specifically. So far, most academic programs dedicated to video game studies in the US are production-oriented. The rest of game research and study is done by scholars from sociology, anthropology, communications, English, film studies and other fields.

One of game studies' biggest proponents is Espen Aarseth, who expresses strong reservations about interdisciplinary models of digital game study in his editorial for the first issue of *Game Studies*: *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*:

> Games are not a kind of cinema, or literature, but colonising attempts from both these fields have already happened, and no doubt will happen again. And again, until computer game studies emerges as a clearly self-sustained academic field [sic]. To make things more confusing, the current pseudo-field of "new media" (primarily a strategy to claim computer-based communication for visual media studies), wants to subsume computer games as one of its objects. There are many problems with this strategy, as there is with the whole concept of "new media," and most dramatically the fact that computer games are not one medium, but many different media. From a computerized toy like Furby to the game Drug

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Wars on the Palm Pilot, not to mention massively multi-player games like EverQuest, or the recent Anarchy Online…the extensive media differences within the field of computer games makes a traditional medium perspective almost useless. (Aarseth *Game Studies*)

Aarseth's graduate work was in comparative literature, and he is now a Principal Researcher at the Center of Computer Games Research at the IT University of Copenhagen. The field of new media studies is amorphous and, as Aarseth notes, can at times be a battleground for scholars seeking to promote their particular approach to studying games. Yet there are others, like N. Katherine Hayles, who see the current dispersed state of digital media studies as a strength. The conflict is reminiscent of film studies' earlier struggles to legitimate itself in the academy. Rather than having scholars from each different discipline try to pull digital media studies into their existing fields to assert ownership and make it conform to previous modes of study, an interdisciplinary model ensures that all aspects of digital media are addressed: technical, social and aesthetic. Ultimately, there is value in both approaches – Aarseth is right to want game studies legitimized as a unique field with its own methodologies, but interdisciplinary scholars have much to contribute to the shaping of game studies from their separate fields.

Aarseth created *Game Studies* as the online home for video game studies. Aarseth argues in "Video Game Studies, Year One" that "the potential cultural role(s) of computer games in the future is practically unfathomable. It seems clear that these games, especially multi-player games, combine the aesthetic and the social in a way the old mass media, such as theatre, movies, TV shows and novels never could" (Aarseth *Game Studies*). Aarseth argues that while previous mass media arts had "imagined communities" (in Benedict Anderson's sense), online multi-user games in particular incorporate literal communication

between users as a function of the game. Although ardent fans of novels, films and single-user games have been forming communities for years, Aarseth sees the integration of the communities in the game itself as a marked difference, one that forces players to engage in social activity, belying the notion of the isolated video game geek. As a result, computer games have increased potential for impacting the outside world. One of Aarseth's main arguments in "Year One" is that this emerging field needs to free itself from the ideological baggage of pre-existing fields of study and ultimately be exist as a separate entity from English, Film, Sociology or other departments, while at the same time game studies should continue to be studied within these diverse fields. My approach in this work is partly comparative, thus hopefully avoiding the trap of studying games as if they were films, while also acknowledging the growing interdependence of the film and game industries.

## 5.4     THE JAPANESE CONNECTION

It would be remiss to discuss video games as a cultural phenomenon and not address Japan as the originator of many currently popular game genres. Although Japanese games have been sold internationally since the 1970s, it is not the case that these games are designed with Western consumers in mind. In "Japanese Video Games: A Model for International Popular Medias?" [sic] the online game reviewer and journalist Kaze Kiri FX argues that "We must recognize…that Japanese companies have traditionally focused almost entirely on their domestic market, and given very little thought or consideration to their non-Japanese consumers, which is to say that their understanding of local (Japanese) taste is what drives production" (J-Fan.com). At the same time, after the market for American-made Atari and other early 1980s home gaming

consoles crashed, it was the Japanese company Nintendo that revived the gaming industry with the Famicom/NES. The first generation to grow up playing video games could be mislead into thinking the games were American-made. Unlike foreign films and *manga* which are shelved in special sections of video and bookstores, Japanese video game titles sit side by side with American titles in game and electronics stores. Even the name Nintendo did not necessarily signal Japaneseness to consumers at this time:

> American consumers thought little of buying systems and games from a company with a name like "Nintendo". [sic] After all, even though Atari is an American company, their name also comes from a Japanese word. The majority of American consumers gave little thought to the fact that what they were consuming was a form of Japanese media. Americans were already used to buying other types of electronics from Japanese companies, so why not video games as well? However, in the case of video games Americans were no longer just buying Japanese hardware as they do when purchasing stereos and television sets. This time, they were also consuming the Japanese media that went with the hardware. In other words, Americans generally weren't buying Japanese movies to watch on their Japanese VCR's or Japanese CD's to play on their Japanese CD players, but they *were* buying Japanese game software to play on their Japanese video game consoles. (FX)

Even though it is not simply the case that Japanese games arrived on the US market unedited (in addition to language translation, cover art and game graphics were frequently altered to specifically appeal to the American market), the gameplay was never changed.

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Once Nintendo allowed third-party software licensing, companies like Acclaim Entertainment were able to release American-made NES games. Other companies such as Brøderbund and Electronic Arts established themselves first by releasing games for home computers and later developing console games for Nintendo and other platforms. However, Japanese games remain popular in the United States even now that American software companies and even specific game designers, like Will Wright, have become globally successful. Now, these games appeal to some gamers specifically because they are Japanese. In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* Henry Jenkins refers to the trend of young Americans becoming fans of foreign media texts as a way to distinguish themselves from their parents as "pop cosmopolitanism." He writes that "[t]his pop cosmopolitanism may not yet constitute a political consciousness of America's place in the world (and in its worst forms, it may simply amount to a reformation of orientalism), but it opens consumers to alternative cultural perspectives and the possibility of feeling what Matt Hill calls 'semiotic solidarity' with others worldwide who share their tastes and interests" (Jenkins 156). Jenkins is interested in the ways fans knowingly seek out Japanese media texts, often translating them on their own. Jenkins' pop cosmopolitans are not seeking to come to a genuine understanding of a foreign other, but to fit into an American social subcategory (the American *otaku*, or fans with a high degree of interest in anime, *manga* and video games). And yet paradoxically they may end up with a better understanding of Japanese culture than the viewer of a film like *Lost in Translation* (Sophia Coppola, 2003) who honestly wants to understand what Japan is like.

For games not released to English speaking markets, fans could nonetheless import Japanese games and either download a translation patch (in the case of computer games), or install a mod chip in their game consoles. However, it was common through the 1990s for

software companies to release Japanese video games to the US market with only a basic language translation, allowing even those games not actively seeking cosmopolitanism to participate in the same global consciousness. The cover art of Japanese games was redesigned to appeal to American audiences, though the rationale behind specific choices made is not always clear. Thus, anyone might choose to buy a Japanese game without realizing that it was, in fact Japanese. Games like *Animal Crossing* and *Katamari Damacy* prove popular sellers in the US specifically because of their inclusion of objects such as *onigiri* (rice balls wrapped in seaweed), *pachinko* machines, *hanako* (signature seals), *geta* (Japanese wooden clogs), *daruma* (wish dolls), *kadomatsu* and *kagamimotchi* (New Year's decorations), and *tatami* floor mats.

In response to the game industry's increasing global market, a specialized field of translation called "game localisation" has arisen to meet the unique needs of video game translation. In "On the Translation of Video Games" Miguel Bernal Merino outlines the various issues that face video game translators. First, digital games are both mass-produced consumer items and artistic creations (similar to Hollywood films). Further, digital games often need translation in four distinct areas: in-game texts (such as any books or letters appearing in the game), art assets (any artistic use of language in the game settings), dubbing and voice over, and subtitling (Merino 29). When creating a product for a global market, the requirements or restrictions of all countries must be met. For example, the content of some digital games must be changed according to the different age rating guidelines in different countries. In the United States, the depiction of blood and sex are acceptable in games rated M (for mature audiences), however German law prohibits depictions of blood or Nazi symbols in games for any age category. The extent of what can be changed in a digital game is greater than in film or other audiovisual material because most digital games lack a clear author – there is no one director or

writer privileged as the author in most cases. As a result, Merino argues that "No other audiovisual creation aims at adapting itself to the customer as much as video games" (Merino 29). For translators, this means that word-for-word literal translation is eschewed in favor of a more creative interpretation of the original text. The term "localisation" is used in the digital game industry to refer to more than just linguistic translation, but to any changes made to a digital game for release to a foreign market. Changing the soundtrack or cover art is also a form of localisation.

Merino missteps when he claims that because video games are a product and not a cultural artifact, "we are not obliged to maintain the source culture identity. On the contrary, we must favor the target culture" (Merino 31). He is right insofar as the purpose of game translation is to make the product appeal to the target culture, however Jenkins' studies of fan culture and studies of the globalization of the film industry have shown that the global market prefers products which exhibit a certain amount of national specificity. Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan similarly argue for an approach to linguistic localisation that adapts cultural references to the target culture. They argue for the term "transcreation" to describe the freedom digital game translators have in their work, combining the traditional understanding of "translation" with the freedom of "creation" to more accurately describe the process used to adapt video games to foreign markets.

*Final Fantasy X* (2001) contains numerous examples of transcreation. It is a narrative-oriented RPG that contains over a thousand different kinds of weapons. As Mangiron and O'Hagan point out, even the name of a fictional weapon can be difficult to translate. In *Final Fantasy X*, "One of the weapons is a blade called *fu-rinkazan*, an expression made up of four Chinese characters denoting 'wind, forest, fire and mountain', and used in Japanese to mean: 'as

fast as the wind, as quiet as the forest, as daring as fire, and immoveable as the mountain'"
(Mangiron and O'Hagan). Space allotted to text translations on the game screen is tightly limited
– translations must not cover important graphic information, and players must be able to read
text quickly during fast-paced action sequences. Therefore, the literal translation of the *fu-rinkazan* was impossible for the English language translation, and instead "The American
translators opted for the name 'Conqueror', completely different to [sic] the original, but a
powerful and evocative choice in English" (Mangiron and O'Hagan). (Puns and wordplay also
abound in Japanese games, but are lost with literal translations.) Transcreation can make up for
some of the loss by creating English equivalents.

Whether translated literally or creatively, however, texts often retain traces of the original
culture. With digital games, the result is that even those players who are not the "pop
cosmopolitans" Jenkins describes are nonetheless participating in a cultural exchange. Merino
notes that "Many of the texts people read or hear everyday come from a language different from
their mother tongue, and yet, no-one stops to think: 'These are not the "actual" words.' What this
means is that translation is a reality, and that translated texts function as originals in their own
right" (Merino 29). When the origin of a text is not recognized, cultural concepts can become
internalized or naturalized rather than being valued for their exoticism. In a game like *Animal
Crossing*, this means that although the dialogue of the game characters may be changed to refer
to American cultural concepts in the English-language version of the game, the values
underlying the activities remain unchanged because they are embodied in the gameplay itself, not
simply in the dialogue. It is simpler to leave the images of *onigiri*, *hanako*, *geta*, *daruma*, etc. in
the game than to rewrite the software to display the western equivalents of these objects, and so
these are not localised or transcreated. It is important to note that the exchange may not flow

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evenly in both directions. While the rule of thumb is that in general the Japanese like American products, American-made digital games have typically not sold well in Japan. Steven Kent writes that:

> Though U.S.-made games have never done especially well in Japan, until recently, Japanese games dominated the Western market. Companies such as Square Soft, Sega, Namco, and Sony routinely had games on the annual lists of best sellers. In 2003, however, the only Japanese company on the U.S. top 10 was Nintendo, nabbing four of the top 10 slots with "Pokemon Ruby," "Pokemon Sapphire," "The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker" and "Mario Kart: Double Dash." (Kent)

There has been some shift, then, with the growing popularity of US consoles like the Xbox and star game designers like Will Wright, but the long dominance of Japanese content has left its legacy on game conventions and fan cultures.

## 5.5     VIOLENCE VERSUS ACQUISITION: YOU ARE THE COLLECTOR

Because digital games present a radically different side of collecting, the analyses that follow are not centered on representations of collect*ors*, but rather on modes of collect*ing*. In video games, the most frequent use of collecting is as a reward (or a means to one). The very structure of the video game invites the player to be a collector, more so than the structures of novels or films. MMORPGs are particularly fertile for collectors since new content is always being added, and the player is provided more things to collect. *Kingdom of Loathing* is one such game, and a particularly useful example since much of the content is parodic and intertextual in

nature, referencing and commenting upon other games and game culture (as well as pop culture in general).

The game underscores the importance of objects to the genre by mocking their occasional overuse as plot devices: during one of the tasks in the game the player acquires the "Amulet of Extreme Plot Significance," which, the game guide explains, was "probably really important to the plot of one story or another. Y'know, like it turned out to be the key to some generator room in which some final conflict takes place, or maybe it contains the spirit of a dead race of extremely wise and powerful magician people, or something" (*KoL*). The trope of the highly powerful symbolic object has roots that go back to fantasy novels and tabletop role playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, but one of the earliest appearances of such objects in video games is in *Zork 1*. *Zork* is a text-based computer game in which the player (always referred to in the second person) is presented a written description of a scene, and types commands for action based on what he or she reads. A typical sequence might look something like this:

Kitchen                                                                 Score: 15

Moves: 29        >west

Living Room

You are in the living room. There is a doorway with strange gothic lettering to the west which appears to be nailed shut, a trophy case, and a large oriental rug in the center of the room. Above the trophy case hangs an elvish sword of great antiquity. A battery-powered lantern is in the trophy case.

Living Room                                        Score: 15

Moves: 30     >take all

Trophy case: The trophy case is securely fastened to the wall.

Sword: Taken.

Brass lantern: Taken.

Carpet: The rug is extremely heavy and cannot be carried.

Here, the player types the command "west," meaning "go west," and, on entering a new space, receives a description of the environment that focuses mainly on important objects in the room. The carpet that is too heavy to be taken by the "take all" command can instead be pushed aside to reveal a trap door. The lantern allows access to a dark cave in another area of the game. Because the player rapidly accumulates items, this early adventure game already has established the inventory as an important organizing tool of the game. After only thirty-one moves, a player might have amassed a brass lantern, sword, glass bottle, brown sack, bird's nest, jewel-encrusted egg, leaflet, and clove of garlic. The bottle and the sack are capable of holding further items (such as water and a lunch). Eventually, the player is informed that he or she is no longer capable of carrying any more objects, and must decide which to leave behind as the game progresses. Items can be dropped just about anywhere, but there is also a trophy case in the living room that can be used to store things. Putting certain items, such as the jewel-encrusted egg, in the trophy case, earns the player points, and indicates to the player that *Zork 1* is a treasure-hunting game: the goal is to find twenty treasures and place them all in the case.

The trophy case and the inventory of *Zork* are early examples of how collecting objects are of primary importance in digital games. Taking the jewel-encrusted egg from the nest in which it is found gains the player the fifteen points noted above. The goal of *Zork I* is to collect

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the twenty treasures of the game and place them in the trophy case; however, this goal is not explained in the game packaging, but something the player must work out for him or herself. The only clue the player has that an object might be important is the fact that it is described in the narration. The only way to find out what it does is to try doing things with it. If upon entering a room the player is told "Above the trophy case hangs an elvish sword of great antiquity," the player may suspect the elvish sword is somehow important to the game and try out a number of commands ("take sword," "examine sword," "put sword in trophy case," etc.). A player raised on Hollywood continuity films (as most players of interactive fiction would have been since the genre was popular mainly in the early 1980s) might expect the description of objects to function like a close up or insert in a film: drawing the viewer's attention to an object portends its importance to the plot later in the film. However, frustratingly for many players, interactive fiction games reject the Hollywood model: The sword may or may not turn out to have any use in the game. The lack of clues or guides can be discouraging, but much of the pleasure of *Zork I* comes from failing in the search for correct commands. For example, typing obscenities into the prompt results in the response "Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" Not only is the main goal of the game to collect treasures, but very little violence is available to the player to achieve this goal. The player is vulnerable to being eaten by a grue any time he or she wanders into a dark location. The only defense against the grue is light. There are a troll and a thief in the game who need to be killed in order to complete the game, but everything else is a matter of using objects to explore the environment.

   *Zork* is one of the earliest games and was foundational in creating the genre, while *Kingdom of Loathing* is a parody of the genre conventions that formed in subsequent years. The emphasis on collecting objects is typical to the more standard representatives of the genre,

however. Andrew Burn and Diane Carr have documented how the collecting component of RPGs arose in "Defining Game Genres." The computer version of the RPG, the CRPG, evolved from American tabletop RPGs like *Dungeons and Dragons*. The tabletop games emigrated to Japan sometime in the 1980s and were then adapted to video game platforms (Burn and Carr 24-5). By the mid-1980s, the CRPG made its way back to the US, where it has enjoyed continued popularity. Collecting in CRPGs derives from the subculture practices of tabletop RPGs:

> The characters [in *Baldur's Gate*, a CRPG] tend to have big muscles, big hair and skimpy clothes, and they accessorize on the go, stocking up their inventories via monster slaughter and dungeon plundering. Besides arms, they accumulate gems and rings, necklaces, gloves, gauntlets, girdles, magic boots, cloaks and tunics. This emphasis on collectibles recalls hobby-gaming miniatures, and cult or subculture practices in general, as well as fantasy's generic tendency to revel in detail. (Burn and Carr 25)

In CRPGs like *Baldur's Gate* and the *Final Fantasy* series, there is typically a troupe of characters (all controlled by a single player) each of whom carries an inventory consisting of various items of weaponry and clothing, as well as amulets, talismans and other objects of power which boost the player's skills and strengths, enabling them to progress in the game. By equipping and managing these items, the player affects the strengths and abilities of the characters, and "the management of the team's weaponry, luggage, skills and experience points might consume a significant amount of the player's time and attention" (Carr 45). There is no single, correct configuration of inventory items necessary to complete CRPGs; players experiment with different combinations, any number of which may be successful. As a result of this flexibility, devoted gamers become interested in not simply completing the narrative quest,

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but in finding every item and learning every secret of the game. The inventory screen thus becomes a visual display of how complete is a player's mastery of a particular game. Although "inventory" and "collection" are not synonyms, digital game inventories are tied to collections, as they are the holding place for digital objects the player "owns." An inventory is a list of possessions belonging to a person or entity, but a collection is a set of objects meant to be viewed as a whole, objects assumed to have been more carefully selected from a larger group than an inventory list (Carr 45). The ubiquitous use of inventories in CRPG games encourages players to "take" whatever items they find in the game world. In *Zork I*, the player quickly learns to attempt to "take [X]" for every object described in the game. Some objects cannot be taken, but it is necessary to make the attempt.

"Taking" frequently becomes a repetitive activity in many games, eventually becoming instinctual in long-term gamers. Leon Hunt coined the term "PlayStation vision" in his essay, "'I Know Kung Fu!' The Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction," referring to the commonly reported phenomenon of game actions become second nature. He observes that "[a]fter playing for a lengthy [game-playing] period, I sometimes find myself dreaming in 'Playstation Vision,' as though digital afterimages of action/adventure remain imprinted on the retina" (Hunt 201). Long, intense game play sessions can result in a visual and behavioral impulse to treat the real world according to the paradigm of the game world. After playing a farm-simulation game like *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life*, gamers may have an impulse to pick flowers in their neighbors' yards as they do in the game. The phenomenon is not well studied, but can be productively understood through notions of bodily memory; for each game to which a player devotes time, he or she becomes habituated to the specific actions required of the game (especially with regard to his or her hands manipulating controls). Similarly, the repeated

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emphasis on collection game objects likely influences some players to collect real world objects (game related or not) as well.

The two Katamari games, *Katamari Damacy* and *We Love Katamari*, dispense with weapons altogether. In these games, the player assumes the role of the King of the Cosmos' son, known simply as The Prince. In *Katamari Damacy*, The Prince is assigned to roll up balls of objects on earth in order to replace the stars, planets and constellations the King has accidentally destroyed. The ball the Prince rolls is known as a katamari. In these games any and every object can and should be rolled up. The katamari starts off very small and unable to pick up large objects, but like a snowball quickly grows in size and can roll up larger and larger objects. In the final rounds of *Katamari Damacy*, the player is able to roll up skyscrapers, giant squid and landmasses. The object of each level is to achieve or exceed a certain size in a certain number of minutes. In "Collecting *Katamari Damacy,*" one of the only studies directly investigating in-game collecting to date, Steven Jones takes the Katamari games as not only the perfect exemplar of the fact that "fan culture—and especially game-fan culture—is collecting culture" (Jones 47), but also a "procedural parody of the whole idea of collecting objects in video games and elsewhere" (Jones 48). *Katamari Damacy* is "a game against interpretation (as such), a collecting game whose meaning is the need to make one's own meanings from what you collect, to make collecting meaningful, to make your own fun" (Jones 51). The act of rolling up stuff in the Katamari games is "a literalized metaphor for a fundamental activity in almost all video games: collecting stuff" (Jones 52).

Jones points out that true completion of a collection implies "a kind of death, " (Jones 57). Thus, as Pearce and others have noted in non-game collecting, completion is not the true goal. Drawing a parallel between gambling, gaming, and online auctions, he argues that, "What

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is at work is a series of emergent reactions to what appears online, creating an 'indefinite' or open-ended 'seriality,' a constantly deferred completion of the series" (Jones 57). Jones posits that the role of the collector has assumed increased importance over time, arguing that "The *flâneur* has in our own time been replaced not by the passive consumer but by the active, meaning-making culture collector whose epitome is the game fan" (Jones 58). Fans collect material objects related to the their favorite texts, but these objects are intertwined with the knowledge and lore that constitute the immaterial side of fan collecting. It is not enough to simply possess the figurines related to a favorite game or show; the fan collector must also possess knowledge about where these items belong in the continuum of fan culture: does the item refer to a particular moment in the character's fiction life? When was it manufactured and how widely was it released? What additional knowledge does it provide about the character or the media text? Similarly, collected knowledge shapes the fan collector's understanding of the material items. Fan collecting is a laborious endeavor, and the more labor involved in obtaining a particular artifact or piece of information, the more valuable it is. As Jones astutely notes, "fan collecting overlaps in significant ways with more respectable scholarly activities: research, sorting, cataloguing, interpreting and reinterpreting" (Jones 59). Collecting in digital games, in particular, is not about possession of material things even if it mimics material collecting. But even non-digital collecting has a strong connection to knowledge and data, since according to Jones, "true collectors collect 'data' or lore as much as they collect objects. The aura surrounding a desirable collectible is arguably, especially in today's culture, made up of information, history, knowledge, like the tag cloud of keyword labels produced by a community of users in a social-software environment and attached to a digital object online" (Jones 60). Thus, "the figure of the strolling *flâneur*, moving along the maze-like arcades past accumulated and surreally juxtaposed

collections of fetishized objects, is, when you think about it, an extremely gamelike figure, an image of what me might call a first-person-consumer game, a game of endlessly stimulated and deferred desires" (Jones 57).

Where *Zork 1* is a US game, the *Katamari* games are produced by the Japanese corporation Namco, and thus can be read through their pop cosmopolitan appeal in the US. Jones notes that "Fan collecting is a self-generating and self-rewarding phenomenon that fans pursue defiantly, in the face of the devaluations of the high/low cultural divide and even of moral disapprobation, for the pleasures of making ephemeral connections, meanings at the surface level of everyday material existence, like punks making fashion out of trash culture" (Jones 67). "Like textual scholars, fans are experts at making meanings out of what they collect, navigators of material conditions, surviving objects, and chance discoveries that determine the combinatorics by which meaningful 'texts'—or whole constellations of texts—can be made and remade over and over again" (Jones 67). The western gamer's knowledge of Japanese games also functions as subcultural capital, that is, knowledge and experience that increases social standing within a subcultural group.

> This context of Japanese arcade machines, within which it is possible to understand collecting in *Katamari Damacy*, like the sometimes un-Western representations of nubile sexuality that are hinted at in the "Virgo" level and elsewhere, and like the somewhat more familiar aesthetic of *kawaisa* or "cuteness" of many of the objects themselves, are all attractive to the cult audience for the game in the West but are also likely to be misunderstood or mistranslated even by those who value their "foreignness." Just to name one example, *Katamari Damacy*'s apparently weird or surreal mixture of the live

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animals, snacks, and toys and other objects is in fact perfectly normal inside the

Japanese arcade, where UFP catchers may grab a plush toy, a plastic game-based

figurine, a bag of chips, or—as one website reported complete with posted

picture—a live lobster! It's not hard to see this as the inspiration for the crabs

waving their claws around from within the katamari of the Cancer level of

*Katamari Damacy.* (Jones 62)

What makes the Katamari games more than a simple race game is the amount of detail provided

for the objects available to be rolled up. As an item is obtained, its name and size is displayed in

the lower left hand corner. Between rounds of katamari rolling, The Prince can visit an area

designated the "collection." In the collection area, there are five subdivisions: "Objects",

"names", "photo album", "size chart" and "locations." Choosing the "object" section reveals all

the objects the player has rolled up in the game so far, organized into further sub-categories such

as Japanese food, trash, games and necessities. Blank spaces indicate items the player has not yet

located in the game, challenging the player to not only complete the quest of returning the stars

to the sky, but also to try to find and roll up every one of the hundreds of items available in the

game. The objects collection also indicates which items are rare, lists how big the katamari must

be in order to roll the item up, and provides a statement about the use or importance of the item.

About the *takoyaki* hotplate, for example, the collection blurb says, "People from Osaka always

have one of these. Great for making octopus balls!" The Names section of the collection

indicates which characters the player has rolled up in his or her *katamari* (people and animals

can be rolled up as well as objects).

At a certain point in the game, The Prince obtains a camera that can be used to take

pictures of any rolling location. These photographs are stored in the photo album. The size chart

area lists the percentages of objects of different size categories the player has found so far. The locations section sorts the same items listed in the objects and names section by the location in which they can be found. The collection area is thus a way of extending a player's enjoyment of the game as well as a tool to assist in the search for any objects the player has failed to locate in the game. James notes:

> The visual tabular array itself is accessible at any stage, with placeholder question marks for kinds of objects for which one has no instances—empty sets. Browsing the database of objects in one's collections feels especially integral to gameplay when the gameplay is all abut collecting in the first place. The formal transition from the chaos of the katamari—in which individual objects are only imperfectly distinguishable from the rolling, twitching mass of dada incongruity—to the constellations in the cosmos, ancient symbols of the human imposition of meaning on chaos, is simultaneously a transition into an ordered database: neatly arranged columns and rows of the Cool Collection, where all that stuff gets sorted, classified, counted, and statistically accounted for…which only enhances the sense that collecting is meaningful in itself—if you make it meaningful. (Jones 56)

These are just two examples of games where collecting substitutes for killing (as in the first-person shooter game). Many of the games that I will next discuss also fall into the non- or less-violent category, however I want to shift focus to the way collecting influences the value of digital objects.

## 5.6    WHAT ARE DIGITAL COLLECTIONS WORTH?: *PIKMIN 2*

Though it is a standard feature of the RPG, collecting is by no means limited to that genre, or to genre games at all. *Pikmin 2* is an adventure game featuring an inventory-type collection. As Captain Olimar, an employee of an intergalactic shipping company, the player seeks to collect treasure in order to repay a company debt. Olimar discovered a new planet in the earlier game *Pikmin* (2001), one that is inhabited with small creatures called Pikmin. In the first game, Olimar's goal is to find the pieces of his wrecked spaceship and escape. In *Pikmin 2*, however, the Hocotate Freight company president sends Olimar back because the company is in danger of being taken over by unpaid lenders, and the planet is full of treasure.

Treasure, in this case, consists of things like bottle caps, floppy disks, doll heads, and fruit, detritus scattered across the Pikmin world in a *Planet of the Apes*-like post-apocalyptic landscape. As objects are brought back to the spaceship for storage, Captain Olimar writes journal entries about each one, while the ship's computer (which has a distinct personality and functions as a character) names the objects and catalogues them into thematic sets (all the fruit forms one set, all the marbles another, etc.). There are a total of 201 treasures in the game that are organized into twenty-five series, and each treasure is worth some amount of pokos (*Pikmin*'s in-game currency). The "Modern Amenities" series, for example, contains eight items: the "Sud Generator" (a bar of soap), the "Dimensional Slicer" (a manual can opener), the "Time Capsule" (a locket with a picture of a dog inside), the "Lip Service" (a tube of lipstick), the "Mirrored Stage" (a makeup compact) and the "Behemoth Jaw" (a set of falst teeth). All of the items appear to be used or discarded – they are not in any kind of packaging, and the lipstick is

missing the cap. Put together they are worth 580 pokos toward the 10,000-poko debt of Hocotate Freight.

The game justifies the value of these items in two ways. First, the ship's computer writes advertising copy for each object as it is brought back to the ship. For the "Flame of Tomorrow" the computer writes, "Is this the flame of hope that spawned humanoid civilization? Hocotate needs new energy sources, and this could be a fine candidate. Will machines like me be powered by this someday?" However, the value of these items is not solely linked to the advertising hype. Captain Olimar records his thoughts on some of the treasure items in his personal journal, and often he feels an attraction to certain of them that is separate from the computer's assertions. He writes of the Flame of Tomorrow that, "From the beginning of time my people have searched for a perfectly clean, endlessly renewable energy source. Unfortunately, we've never found anything close to it. Rubbing these two objects together seems to produce fire. Maybe this is the long-lost energy source we've always been searching for?"

The value of objects and advertising hype is not clearly associated with either game character, however. Sometimes the computer seems to write its pitch based on Olimar's interpretations of the objects, such as when Olimar finds the Abstract Masterpiece (a Snapple beverage lid) heart-wrenchingly beautiful. Olimar writes, "I've never been this moved by a piece of art. Every time I view it, I can't stop crying. The ship mocks me by squirting engine coolant at me, but it's obviously just jealous that it can't shed any tears." Although Olimar suspects the ship of mocking him, the ad copy it writes is, "This is something that machines cannot comprehend... The heart of art, the soul of creativity. If you understand the appeal of this design, your heightened senses are at space-pilot level!" On still other occasions, Olimar distrusts the computer's assessment of an object's worth. In the case of the Pondering Emblem (YooHoo

bottle cap), Olimar claims that, "There are many things I've encountered on this planet that defy explanation. According to the ship's analysis, this object is extremely valuable. Maybe I'll buy it. I'm not sure though. I get the feeling that the ship is swindling me. Nah...the ship would never scam me. I'm the captain!" The computer writes, "One glance and you will sit for hours trying to decipher the ultimate purpose of this item. Therein lies its value. It is actually a guide to the world of deep thinking."

*Pikmin 2* oscillates between two poles in it assessment of the value of things. On the one hand, the objects are easily recognizable as worthless junk: cheap plastic rings, broken toys and food packaging. There is a gentle criticism of consumer culture in the gap between the player's recognition of such items as garbage on an abandoned world and the computer's enthusiastic advertisements promoting the same items to the people of Hocotate as great treasures or products with amazing capabilities. On the other hand, the game asks players to see these junk items in a new light, to try to see them from an outsider's point of view. In doing so the players sees that these objects *can* have meaning (and not just in terms of currency)

## 5.7    DIGITAL MUSEUMS: *ANIMAL CROSSING* AND *KINGDOM OF LOATHING*

In addition to putting players into the position of collectors, a number of digital games include museums in their game worlds, including the Vesper Museum in *Ultima Online*, the American Museum of Natural History in *Parasite Eve* (1998), the Liberty State Natural History Museum in *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008), the National History Museum in *Escape the Museum* (2008), the Smithsonian in *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian The Video Game* (2009), the Sunset Institute of Modern Art in *The Sims 3* (2009), the Farway Museum in *Animal*

*Crossing* and *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (2005), and The Cannon Museum in *Kingdom of Loathing*.

Nintendo categorizes the *Animal Crossing* games as "communication games" presumably because much of the gameplay consists of talking or writing letters to the characters in the village. It is set in a town of animals and the gamer plays a human(ish) character that interacts with the town and the animals as he or she pleases. There are talking dogs, cats, eagles, tigers, octopuses, and others who move in and out of the village. If the player does not interact with a particular character it will eventually move out of town. Although there is no recommended age range, the game is relatively simple and perhaps intended to appeal primarily to children (it is rated E for everyone). However, the game has a notable appeal to teens and adults. The game differs from most digital games in that it operates in real-time, meaning that not only does an hour of game time take an hour of real time to play, but time continues to pass in the game world even when it is turned off, and the seasons change accordingly. In addition to walking through the village and talking to the characters, the player is often asked to perform certain tasks, such as returning a borrowed item or finding a certain kind of insect. Upon completion of the task, the player receives a gift of either bells (the in-game currency of *Animal Crossing*), stationery, clothing, or furniture. The variety of clothing and furniture in the game is surprisingly vast, and the players to whom this game appeals enjoy finding new clothing designs or new kinds of furniture. There is no way to win *Animal Crossing,* and the game is potentially never-ending. Dedicated collectors can buy *Animal Crossing: Prima's Official Strategy Guide*, which includes a checklist of all the items available in the game to help players keep track of which items they have yet to acquire. Another task the game provides is to find specimens for the town museum, called the Farway Museum.

The curator of the Farway Museum is an owl named Blathers, a stereotypical academic wearing glasses and a vest. On the first visit to the museum he tells the player, "Our main purpose is to provide a place for the exhibition of items we feel have some significant paleontological, artistic and/or zoological importance, the collection and classification of which– Oh, dear me! I went rambling on again with some awfully painful explanation again, didn't I?" If pressed, he elaborates that "Through our efforts, we hope to expand the boundaries of both knowledge and culture in [town name]."[32] The museum has four wings devoted to displaying fish, insects, fossils, and art. There are forty different insects and fish in each set, twelve different fossils (which are found in fragments), and fifteen paintings, each of which resemble a famous work of art, including Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Sharaku Toshusai's *The Actor Otani Oniji III as Yakko Edobei*, and Thomas Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*. The museum's purpose is primarily to provide another way to showcase interesting game items. Because the player's character cannot die and the game never ends, the main activity in the game is exploration. Players can seek to find all the fish, or find the complete modern furniture set, or complete all four wings of the museum (there are other non-collecting activities available in the game as well). It  In return for completing the museum's collection, the player receives 1,111 points from the Happy Room Academy – an organization which rates the quality of the player's home decorating skills and overall quality of life in the town. Completing the museum makes the town more attractive to visitors and helps increase the number of animals willing to live there.

The paintings can be obtained in several different ways. First, in return for doing a favor, the town residents may give the player a painting as a gift, or they may offer to play games with paintings as the prize. Second, paintings may appear for sale in the town store (run by a raccoon

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[32] The player chooses a name for the town when the game is first set up.

called Tom Nook), which carries one to four random new items per day. Third, a traveling antique dealer, a fox called Crazy Redd, will occasionally appear in town and sell rare items from his tent, including paintings. Fourth, if a player has found a particular painting he or she can send it to a friend by exchanging a code unique to each item. Fifth, paintings can sometimes be found discarded in the town dump. And finally, once a player has bought or received a painting in one of the previous ways, the painting can be ordered from Tom Nook's mail order catalogue. The paintings are categorized as "furniture" in this catalogue. This categorization suggests the paintings are nothing special – they are mixed in with chairs, desks, lawnmowers, bonsai trees, toilets and trashcans. Even the prices of the paintings are undifferentiated from everyday items. Tom Nook's catalogue sells the paintings for 1,960 bells, slightly more than the birdbath, which sells for 1,450 bells, and slightly less than a stuffed bear, which sells for 2,200 bells. The queen from a chess set, on the other hand, sells for 23,200 bells. In this sense, *Animal Crossing* is similar to *Pikmin 2* in that the usual distinctions between what is valuable and what is worthless do not match up to lived experience. Trash and common household items are valued on par with fine art. The only thing that sets game items apart is rarity and thus collectability.

Once obtained, the player can choose to display the paintings in his or her house, sell the paintings to Tom Nook, give them to another character or player, bury them in a hole in the ground, or donate them to the Farway Museum. The only reward for contributing to the museum is the ability to visit the exhibits and view all the types of fish, etc., whenever the player likes, plus the 1,111 points if all wings are completed. Collecting for the museum is thus an activity to pass the time, and a way of measuring progress in a game that does not require progress. Blathers provides some commentary about each item as it is donated. On donating the Worthy Painting, for instance, he says, "So, this is a Worthy Painting! Hmm…well…It's…There's a certain sort

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of…I'm sure it's just me, but I don't see why they say it's a Worthy Painting." Interestingly, *Animal Crossing* obscures the identity of the fifteen paintings by renaming them the "famous painting" "scary painting," "basic painting," etc. The logic behind some of these names is obvious – the *Mona Lisa* certainly is a famous painting – but others are not. Is Klimt's *The Kiss* really any more rare than the others? The mystery behind the renaming functions as an invitation to treat the paintings as more than background scenery.

It is unexpected to find da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* in a non-educational video game in light of concerns voiced by cultural critics regarding the museum as an elitist institution of power and knowledge. The paintings in *Animal Crossing* are not photographic reproductions of the original paintings, but images created to resemble them. The *Animal Crossing* paintings can only be reproductions – even if they were not modeled on famous paintings but original images, there can be no original of a mass produced digital image. As John Berger writes in "Ways of Seeing," "when an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art" (Berger 108). The museum has typically been the institution which decides (at least symbolically) what is and isn't art. Berger argues that museums have removed paintings from their historical meaning and turned them into abstract representations of value. This is demonstrated in *Animal Crossing* in some of Blathers' comments. When the player donates a Rare Painting, for example, Blathers says "I say! So, this is that rare painting I've heard so much about! We meet at last! The original in all its glory. I've only seen reproductions until now, and I must say, it's always struck in my craw. Words fail me, truly! I suppose all one can honestly say is that it's…a rare painting." Here, Blathers is in awe of the "original" painting (that "original" is in scare quotes here since there is no original in the game), but he makes no mention of *why* the painting is so glorious, and finds

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that all he can say is that it is in fact a rare painting. There is no discussion of the image itself – it is Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* – or what it means or represents. The subject matter, a kiss, certainly isn't rare. Only the painting as original work of art is rare. And this, for Berger, robs people of their connection to history. Instead of belonging to everyone, art becomes a matter of privilege and education, a development Berger laments because, "When we are prevented from seeing [the art of the past] we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us" (Berger 108). Berger thus advocates that viewers confront paintings rather than revering them.

Within the algorithms of the game, this is difficult to do. The changes obscure the history of the images, and although the player can zoom in for a closer look at the paintings, the image quality is poor and they remain somewhat indistinct renditions of the originals. The suggestion is that traditional European art (the one non-European example being the reproduction of the Toshusai painting) is something to be fixed in place in a museum, preserved for no particular purpose other than, perhaps, to please the authority figure Blathers. Furthermore, more than one copy of each painting exists in *Animal Crossing*, and they are all identical copies - there is no original version of each painting in the game. *Animal Crossing: Wild World* added a distinction between originals and reproductions in the game. The player cannot see the difference between the paintings, but must have Blathers analyze it at the museum. If the painting is an original, Blathers accepts it as a donation to the museum. If it is a reproduction, he rejects it. A Famous Painting displayed in the player's house is visually the same as the one in the Farway Museum (and just as graphically indistinct). There is a tension worth exploring here in relation to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility." Benjamin argues that "In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of

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art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of history to which the work has been subject" (Benjamin 103).

*Animal Crossing*'s paintings have certainly been dislodged from any historical specificity and dropped into an imaginary, intangible location. Enshrined in a museum and vetted by an authority figure, they are presumed to have some intrinsic value that makes them worth donating to the museum. Since the images are small and indistinct, the game appears to value them simply for existing, and not for the meaning expressed in the images. Each one is simply another object among thousands that the player can encounter and possess. In spite of their lack of aura, history or materiality, their existence as game objects is not entirely bleak. Any player who recognizes one of the paintings will be led to suspect that the other paintings have real world counterparts as well, and the inclusion of the *Mona Lisa* ensures that most people will recognize at least one. A dedicated player can then research the other paintings and thus see more distinct reproductions (if not originals) and learn more about them. Benjamin's dilemma still exists, since the reproducibility of the paintings has indelibly inserted them into a new context for players of *Animal Crossing*, but the historically located meaning of the paintings is not completely effaced. The reproductions become puzzles to solve in the context of the game in a way they are not in museums and other locations. Because the paintings are not given their real titles, but names such as Rare Painting and Famous Painting, the player is led to question them. Why are these paintings important enough to merit a wing in the Farway Museum? Why is one painting rare, another famous, and another dainty? What are the true names of the paintings? Who painted them? Doing the work to find further information on the paintings reproduced in the game is a kind of active meaning production often lost in the impersonal and forbidding setting of the real world museum.

Although *Animal Crossing* lacks the kind of confrontation with the image Berger argues for as a remedy for what is lost when work is mechanically reproducible, the game nevertheless invites players to confront the paintings in the way most characteristic of digital games: as part of a quest, in this case a quest for knowledge. In doing so, *Animal Crossing*'s renamed paintings are a gesture toward a new relationship with art, if not Berger's "new language of images" fully realized. *Animal Crossing* has a fan site devoted to both it and its sequel, *Animal Crossing Wild World*, with an active fan base that shares game playing tactics and fan art and carries on discussions about all aspects of the game – including a brief provenance of the paintings. Each of the *Animal Crossing* reproductions with their proper titles, artist names and current location of the original can be found on the *Animal Crossing Ahead* website. Because of the small number of paintings included, one can only see originals in Amsterdam, San Marino, California, Paris, London, Florence, Vienna, Tokyo or Chicago, preventing some gamers from following the quest as far as actually seeing the originals. The page of painting information further directs players to respective museums and museum websites for further information about the paintings. The structure of the quest, with information as the reward for completion, encourages an active relationship to the paintings, rather than passive acceptance that they are fine works of art worth millions or dollars. To be a true fan, or in other words, a true player, of *Animal Crossing*, one must master every aspect of the game. One must know every cheat code,[33] understand every reference and allusion to other works, and find every game object. In *Animal Crossing*'s case this sends fans on a hunt for information about classic European paintings they might otherwise only glance at in passing.

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[33] A cheat codes are sequences of button commands or textual commands used by game developers to efficiently test games. The cheat code provides an advantage not intended as part of normal gameplay (such as unlimited money, extremely powerful abilities, or the ability to skip levels) to the developer. Though originally intended for developers, cheat codes are often shared with players.

Though the Farway Museum collections encourage interaction with the objects in the collection, it remains a somewhat limited experience of collecting since the objects and specimens in the collections are predetermined by the game. The museum does not allow the player to choose which items to display or how to display them. However, *Animal Crossing* encourages collecting to an even greater extent with the objects that cannot be donated to the museum. Each player has a house which can be furnished with any of the objects bought, traded or found in the game. There is even an organization, the Happy Room Academy (HRA) which judges the player's arrangement of furniture each day, and assigns the house design a certain number of points (from zero to 100,000). After achieving a house design of 70,000 points, the HRA gives the player a "House Model," and on reaching 100,000 points, a "Manor Model" (these are miniature models of town locations which can be displayed in the player's house if there is any room left). There are hundreds of different furniture and home items in the game, and it is unlikely that most players ever unlock[34] them all. Prima's video game guide to *Animal Crossing* includes a checklist at that back to help players keep track of those items they have and haven't found. With literally thousands of items available at intermittent times, such detailed notes are necessary if the player is to have a hope of completing the collection. The house can only accommodate a small number of the available objects, however, leaving it up to the player to decide which objects to choose and how to arrange them. The HRA encourages matching items by color, but there are also "luck" items and *feng shui* items. Luck items like the "Mario trophy" bring the player good luck during game events when displayed in the player's house. By

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[34] "Unlocking" is a common gaming term. In the case of *Animal Crossing*, once the player finds or is given an item, it them appears in the town store catalogue, allowing the player to buy the item again later. Until an item is unlocked, it cannot be bought or used.

arranging items according to a simplified version of *feng shui* philosophy[35] the player will have

better luck attaining bells and items.  Items can be obtained in a number of ways, often without

spending game currency.

Zack "Jick" Johnson and Josh "Mr. Skullhead" Nite created *Kingdom of Loathing* in

2003. *KoL* has an estimated 140,000 regular players, making it one of the smaller MMORPG

available, but it is notable for the facts that Johnson and Nite are able to employ a small staff and

turn a profit without charging players a monthly fee (they rely on donations and merchandise

sales), and also the fact that in many ways the game is a parody of gaming. *KoL* contains "The

Cannon Museum." This museum houses several plaques displaying information from notable

events in the game's history (such as a list of the first one hundred players to complete the game

cycle), a mock natural history exhibit called the "Knott Yeti Habitat," and, most significantly, the

"Collection Collection," a space where players can purchase a shelf and display game items to

other members of the *Kingdom of Loathing* community (consisting of everyone with a *KoL*

account, whether or not they choose to play the game). The museum also solicits donations from

players, since "the Cannon Museum is supported solely by the generosity of patrons like you"

(Kingdom of Loathing). Although elsewhere players can donate US dollars to the game

designers, the Cannon Museum only accepts "meat," the name of the in-game currency used by

players to buy and sell game items and services. The Cannon Museum lists the most active

patrons' character names on its main screen, just as significant donors to real-world museums are

publicly acknowledged.

Since *Kingdom of Loathing* is an online community, players interact with each other and

there are a number of ways players can make their character name well known even if no one

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[35] Essentially, placing something orange in the north side of the house, something green in the south side of the
house, something yellow in the west side of the house and something red in the east side of the house.

shares a gamer's physical space. This is Aarseth's point about why digital games are different from other visual entertainment media: game play is not a solitary experience, but a group activity. Part of playing *KoL* is about demonstrating *how* you choose to play the game to other players. The first step in playing the game is to set up an account with a unique avatar, or personality, through which the player will interact with the game. For beginning players, this amounts to choosing a name not already in use in the game, and then choosing a gender and class for the avatar (the classes determine which skills the player will have access to. The Seal Clubber class is composed of warriors with great brute strength, for example, while the Accordion Thief class's strength is based on cunning and deviousness.

The Collection Collection is a visible marker of what each player has done. Having an interesting display case at the museum or being one of the active donors are both ways to attract attention and define one's identity. Notoriety has no specific function in the game, although it may garner the player an invitation to a clan (a group of players who pool resources and help each other play the game), give players more to discuss in the chat forums or enable the player to be written into one of the game history sites currently under construction. In many MMPORGs, veteran players are venerated for their first-hand knowledge of past game events new players cannot access. An example of a typical collection in the Cannon Museum is Mysticlaura6,[36] who has a display case consisting of twenty-two shelves. She[37] uses each shelf for a different self-chosen category of items: "stuffies" (such as the "stuffed angry cow" and "stuffed can of asparagus"), "Balloons," "Trading Cards," "Necklaces," "Bracelets," "Hilarious Items" (such as

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[36] This account has been deleted as of August 19, 2009.
[37] Because there is no way to know an online player's gender, I will use personal pronouns according to the gender of the character. It should be noted, however, that *Kingdom of Loathing* features a "Sleazy Back Alley" location where players can have their characters' sex changed, which may cause the gender of specific examples to change at a future date.

the "fake fake vomit" and "wind-up chattering teeth"), "Cakes," "Disguises," "Weapons," "Pies," "Crimboween" (an in-game holiday event), "Flowers," "Sneaky Pete's Day!" (another in-game holiday event), "Nice Necklaces," "Stuff For Your House," "Shrooms," "Snowcones," "Lucky Stuff," "Miscellaneous," and "Balls." MysticLaura6's Crimboween items show how far she advanced on that quest and which years she participated since the obtainable objects change from year to year. Other than providing titles for her shelves and arranging items on them, Mysticlaura6 has nothing to say about her collection.

The player Meatpie, on the other hand, introduces his collection by stating "This is my display case. There are many like it, but this one is mine. I must master my display case, as I must master my life. Without me, my display case is useless. Without my display case, I am useless." Given the absurd nature of the objects in *Kingdom of Loathing*, Meatpie's claim that he is nothing without his display case must be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, the collection does define the *character* Meatpie if not the real person behind the avatar. Meatpie had only four shelves in 2007: "The Steve Irwin memorial Shelf" (which contains one thousand copies of the "Helmet Turtle"), the "Tiny Plastic Collection" (containing items such as "tiny plastic blood-faced volleyball," and "tiny plastic levitating potato"), "Weapons," and "Combat Items." By August 2009, he had increased his collection to sixteen shelves.

Players can put pretty much any game object on their Cannon Museum shelves, but there are some common choices, such as displaying all thirty-two of the first series of Tiny Plastic items. Obtaining all these otherwise mostly useless figurines entitles the player to the Tiny Plastic Trophy. There are around forty-five trophies to be earned in the game (some are as yet undiscovered and the game designers will likely add others over time), such as the "Disgusting Cocktail" trophy, earned by drinking five in-game tomato daiquiris, and the "Reindeer Hunter"

trophy, acquired by beating up one hundred reindeer with a "Unionize the Elves" sign. Since

none of the trophies are necessary to ascend the game, they function as amusing side quests to

the game and status symbols that can be displayed to other players. Trophies cannot be displayed

in the museum, but instead appear on the player's biography page and in a special display case in

the player's home base (called the "campground"). The requirements for earning a trophy are not

provided by the game designers, and much of the appeal of playing after ascension comes from

trying to discover new trophies or game items.[38] Some trophy quests exist for only a short period

of time. The "Reindeer Hunter" trophy, for example, was only available during December of

2005 when a "Crimbo Town" reappeared (Crimbo Town appears every year around the

Christmas holiday, but it takes a slightly different form each year). When new or seasonal

locations appear in the game, players try to complete as many of the quests as possible before

they are removed from the game. The only records that Crimbo Town ever existed are in player-

constructed collections (such as Weyr's "Crimbo Memorabilia"), trophy cases, and player-

created *KoL* documentation sites such as the KoL Wiki (kol.coldfront.net).


## 5.8   CONCLUSION


In *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Susan M. Pearce writes that "we

can control our own collection in a way in which we can control little else in the world," (Pearce

56) and the same could be said of video games in general. Although video games always present

a new challenge, they always present a beatable challenge. In real life players may be children

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[38] Once a player has discovered a new trophy or item, the information on how others can achieve or find the same item is usually shared. Information in this dissertation has been obtained from both personal experience and The KolWiki, a player-compiled database of *Kingdom of Loathing* information.

subordinated to their parents or environment or adults subordinated to their boss or economic circumstances. In game worlds players embark on complicated quests and battle inconceivably powerful monsters. Thus, while completing a collection sounds like a far less glamorous activity than restoring the constellations to the sky (as in *Katamari Damacy*) or preventing the great sorceress Ultimecia from compressing all time into a single moment (as in *Final Fantasy VIII* [1999]), collecting has evolved into an important element of many video games. In addition to providing an in-game fantasy experience of power and control, the video game collection provides an external measure of power over the game itself. Players who can complete game collections have not only won or finished the game, they have mastered it. Even in the new genre of MMPORPGs which continually add new objects and collecting possibilities to their game worlds, the experience is one of further control: the player chooses how to define his or her collection parameters, how to arrange the specimens, and even how they want to obtain them. Collecting fuels the desire needed to maintain players' interest in an activity for which there is otherwise little reward.

## 6.0    AFTERWORD

In *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer devotes a small section to the role of inanimate objects in live-action film. He points out that early filmmakers like Ferdinand Léger saw film as the key to unlocking "the possibilities that lie dormant in a hat, a chair, a hand, and a foot" (Kracauer 45). Film has the ability to focus attention on small details, to make an object the center of attention. Others, like Louis Delluc, had a vision of the cinema as a place where objects would overshadow human subjects (Kracauer 45). This vision was arguably never fully realized as technological and social developments took mainstream film in a different direction, one emphasizing human subjects more often than inanimate objects.

Now we are witnessing the maturation of digital games. They too seem to have a particular ability to focus our attention on inanimate objects. It is too soon to predict that digital games will usher in a new era of objects, but it seems clear that the ubiquitous use of collecting directs attention to the immaterial objects manipulated onscreen. If there can be such a thing as immaterial materiality, digital games are full of examples of it, some mundane, some fantastic: jewel-encrusted eggs (*Zork 1*), cheese sandwiches (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), watering cans (*Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life*), sulking antennas (*Pikmin 2*), tents (*Final Fantasy VII*, *Kingdom of Loathing*, *Ultima V*), rocking chairs (*Animal Crossing*), ghost pickles on a stick (*Kingdom of Loathing*), a surprising variety of mushrooms (*Super Mario Bros.*, *Pikmin 2*, *Katamari Damacy*, *We Love Katamari*, *Harvest Moon*) and countless weapons, jewels, and

talismans, with or without magic powers. This dissertation is part of what I hope will be a larger project examining the role of material objects in entertainment media.

Interesting work remains to be done on the figure of the collector appears frequently in television as well, especially in crime dramas. A partial list of TV episodes with collecting as a central element includes:

- *Rocky and Bullwinkle*. The second story arc of the first season involves Bullwinkle's collection of cereal box tops in a time when box tops have unexpectedly become the basis of the world's currency.

- "Treehouse of Horror X." *The Simpsons*. For this Halloween special, the nerdy Comic Book Guy intends to seal the actress of one of his favorite television shows in Mylar to complete his collection.

- "Chinoiserie." *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. NYPD detectives investigate a murder involving a smuggling ring dealing in Chinese antiquities.

- "Trash." *Firefly*. The bandit crew of the spaceship Firefly engage in a mission to steal a priceless earth antique.

- "Collective." *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. NYPD detectives investigate the death of a vintage toy collector.

- "The Collection." *30 Rock*. Fictional NBC executive Jack Donaghy hires a private detective to make sure his background is clean for an extensive reference check in anticipation of a promotion, and the investigator discovers his cookie jar collection.

Several of these episodes involve crimes committed in order to obtain a desired collector's item, and several either imply or state directly that collecting is an activity for eccentrics and geeks. However, television is also the home of PBS's *Antiques Roadshow,* a non-fiction program that

assesses the value of any objects participants bring in from their homes. With its emphasis on

unearthing rare and valuable objects in the homes of everyday people, *Antiques Roadshow*

provides a collecting-positive counterpoint that is lacking in live-action film. However, further

research is needed to for a fuller picture of collecting in post-1980 television shows, and to

include the depiction of museums on television. Additionally, the research should be expanded to

include the seventh generation of video game consoles, the Microsoft Xbox 360, Sony

PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii.

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