

## Collecting

There is a book somewhere that I once reviewed, on the subject of collecting. The collector's mentality is distinctive and revealing. All collectors, the author concluded, shared the single feature that made them collect compulsively: they believed that their childhood lacked parental love. To a great extent, their collections were "proofs" of what they could not document about the past, that the collection itself is always lacking, that it needs more items to make it perfect, but of course the addition of items only increases the desire for more items.

Lacanianians know this pattern all too well. It is the death drive in its most direct form, where what looks to satisfy a drive actually intensifies this. Žižek has used the example of Coke, where added salt insures that the satisfaction of thirst will always contain a bit of "thirst-increasing" elements. The "it" in "Coke is it!" is precisely this element of silent lack in the guise of satisfaction.

You could do worse by saying that every collection preserves and increases a silent lack beneath the cover of increase and satisfaction, but there's a geometry to this situation that makes it interesting. In the death drive's duplicity, there is a bit of hysteria, which in Lacanese means that there is a resistance to the Symbolic (i.e. living in a shared social reality). Resistance is localized. In the case of hysterics with medical-like symptoms, this localization is somewhere in the body, thus the ancient idea that hysteria was about a displacement of the womb. Because a womb is a *matrix*, and because the binary ambiguity of host/hostile/ghost are involved with the matrix (see Irina Aristarkhova's book on *Hospitality of the Matrix*), we can continue the theme of the binary into the spatiality that Spencer-Brown notes is central to all boundary-making. Specifically, Spencer-Brown insists that when we divide a space into two parts we also *indicate*. The indicative gesture tells the tale. The pointing finger "dispossesses" the pointer and carries the energy of representation to the "inside" of the frame it has made by pointing. Spencer-Brown's dictum, "that there can be no distinction without indication," means that we cannot make a mark of any kind without (1) dividing a space or time or (2) tilting interest in favor of the content of the frame while, at the same time, subtracting interest from the other half of the binary.

Before we had made a distinguishing mark, however, we had made an assumption about the medium. The assumption is critical. If we are (as we really happen to be) on a closed curved surface, a frame can divide space but the spaces on either side of the mark are finite. If we expand the space inside of a frame we will eventually reach a limit where the outside space is extremely small and expansion must stop. This also means that what is inside and outside is relative and conventional. On a closed curved surface there is no permanent inside or outside. Translating this to the world of subjects and objects, it is like saying that there are no permanent things called subjects (or objects) that do not convert into their opposites. Subjects become objects and objects become subjects, since it's only the context that determines

which is which. For proof of this, go to the emergency room to see how quickly you, as a subject, become an object. Of course, the doctors and nurses assure you that they still care about your subjectivity, assuring you they are doing their best to make *you* well again, but unless they treat you as a medical object, detaching themselves in some significant way from your subjectivity, they will not be effective. Their “space” is closed and curved. They make distinctions which are at the same time indications, binaries with one part eclipsed (a “show/hide function”) and reversible (“reversed predication”).

Freud described the autoerotic system of infants and young children in exactly this same way. It was an energy system, he argued, that was finite and curved — a circuit. The fixed amount of energy in the system was kept running by multiple small “switches,” subject/object situations (Spencer-Brown’s distinction/indication marks). Each switch was unstable, in way that on a closed curved surface it is impossible to say who’s surrounding whom, but taken as a whole the system was stable thanks to its “global” accommodation of turbulence (*clinamen*). The dynamic is that any part can work as a whole (metonymy), and here lies the secret of collections. The part (one item in the collection, for example) can be seen as the “key” to the collection and valued as indispensable, but this power comes from the fact that the part *is a part*, and has power as a member of a whole. Here, the logic of the eclipsed binary, indication/distinction, is clear. The frame puts the framer into the shadow and illuminates the contents inside the frame; at the same time it doesn’t do this unless it has cut an originally whole space into two parts, the viewer and the viewed. Metonymy seems to say “look over here” while the frame we must look through, the “*over here*” part, forces the other part of space to darken (I call this “occultation”).

Imagine a circuit that is cut in two by a single line. At the top, energy crosses the line from minus to plus, at the bottom from plus to minus. This is like having two doors, an entry and exit. Remove one of the doors/gates. If we experience one cross (minus to plus) then another we can imagine we are exiting or going into a deeper space, where our plus status had, without our noticing, had gone back to a minus. This is the familiar condition of the space-within-a-space, time-within-a-time, story-within-a-story. We know that when we read a novel with more than two stories insides stories we can get lost and forget which is the “mimetic” level of the main story. The effect is the same as barber-shop mirrors. Because all causal/signifying chains that constitute reality are basically successive enclosures, each new element eclipsing or containing the last, the memory based on the imaginary constructs mental maps to keep things straight, anchoring events to places, people, plans, etc.

Just so, each collection is a succession that the collector attempts to stabilize by a typology ordering the items. It is not necessary to collect, for example, stamps starting in any temporal or spatial order. There is a system of categories that allows a “hopscotch” method of filling up the matrix. This is the “hospitality” aspect of the matrix: its ability to locate every *next* addition within a pre-existing framework. The distinctions are “ready-made.” But, now you see how close we are to the “autoerotic” circuit that Freud

described! There is a clinamen, a pervading tension or agitation, that energizes the collection. Like Freud's autoerotic circuit, it pulls the issue of inside/outside into the circular flow of energy that maintains the collection. Every part of the collection is a potential center as well as a periphery, and we think of Borges' use of Pascal's expression, "God is an infinite sphere, with a center everywhere and circumference nowhere." So is a collection, because its individual items work like independent reverse-predication switches, able to interiorize whatever externally defines the collection as a collection.

The death drive — how is this related? Think of the collection as something that is fundamentally autoerotic (any single item is capable of being a POV defining the whole collection) but which can only be represented in a conventional way, i.e. by ordering the parts in terms of an external system defined temporally (the history of each part), spatially (where the items come from, how they were influenced by things "near by," etc.), or functionally (developmental traits, primitive to sophisticated, etc.). This conventional ordering allows the collector to collect "at random," finding one piece here, another there. The order of collecting/finding is independent of the order that defines the space, time, or function of collection. The death drive runs counter to the "pleasure principle" of attraction and pursuit. If we think of it as a "dark energy" accompanying every instance of attraction and pursuit, it's closer to the idea. It's the element of masochism in every positive pleasure, but when things reverse, i.e. when we experience pain, it's the component of pleasure that turns the dark energy into a positive form. It's the reversibility factor, not so much the elaborated idea of any one state resulting from reversal.

So, the "switches" or "marks" or "frames" in the closed circuit, the circulation of energy in the closed, curved surface populated by binaries (Freud's descriptor was "polymorphous/perverse") are really just this reversibility factor. The collector has to describe his collection objectively, to other collectors or non-collectors, and this curved closed space has to be "flattened" into a conventional stable space of representation. "Over there" is the collection, in relation to the "here we are looking at it" of the point of view. There can be collections-in-collections, just as we might think of ourselves being in some kind of collection (geographical, social, temporal, etc.) so that the causal arrow goes inside (in the containing direction) infinitely just as the "contained" of the POV can be "infinitely contained," unless we terminate it in some arbitrary or theological way (this was the function of God).

With flattening, we are able to represent concentricity as an accumulating set of enclosures, going inside or outside. But, at some point, we will have to recognize that the conventional flat space of representation cannot be sustained. The outside is really the same as the inside.  $J = \sim J$ , so to speak. Our flat, representational concept of identity,  $J = J$ , gives way to the reversibility of the mark/frame. The "pleasure seeking" logic must eventually reveal its other form of pleasure, the *jouissance* invested in the death drive, which of course is "death" only in relation to the apparent "life" of pleasure-seeking. The point is that every transaction or mark or frame has a conventional aspect that requires the construction of a flat

representational space/time, while there is a counter-flow of “dark energy” that maintains the energy of the circuit in the closed curved space/time.

Between two worlds, the collector intensifies the contrast between flat and curved. She/he is more duplicitous, more incapable of adhering to the conventional, flat account of the collection. This becomes the desire that drives the need for “one more item” to “perfect” the collection, although the collector knows this will not be the end of it. It’s the “one more” aspect that brings us to the important part played by sorites, the logic by which the idea of the whole (necessity) emerges out of a successive accumulation of parts (contingencies — literally “things that touch each other”). The pile of sand grows grain by grain but once we realize it’s a pile, we apply this realization retroactively. The pile must have been a pile “already,” but when we try to subtract grains one by one to see at what point the falling grains constituted a pile, we can’t identify any single grain as the “tipping point.” It’s a switch that, once thrown, transfers to the entire sequence of falling grains of sand. Think of it as a “past-future machine.” It comes out of nowhere (“emergence”) and then goes everywhere. Back to theology, where the center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.

The collector, between the two worlds of flat and curved, must *localize* a zone in order to resist the Symbolic (flat conventionalized definition of the collection). The psychoanalytic hysteric uses a zone on her body, the collector uses a zone called “the collection.” This should be familiar, since all museums and libraries are, in essence, zones of the hysteric’s resistance to the Symbolic. What does hysteria tell us about such localized zones? First, there is no real “outside” of the collection. Resisting the Symbolic, there can be only a conventional “apology” that functions to conceal more than it reveals. The wrapper of the zone is a code that contains/preserves the enigma-aspect of the collection. Just as the hysteric’s symptoms are not symptoms about real pathological aches and pains but about “phantom” pain (Lacan had to invent *sinthome* to talk about this), whatever seems to emanate from the zone is like a cipher. It is not about contents — what the collection has to offer — but rather about desire: what the collection *lacks*. It is about the relation of the collector to this lack, and we know that in the closed curved circuitry of desire that is collecting that this relation is self-sustaining, autoerotic, and negative in relation to conventions of the Symbolic. Where from the outside it appears that the collector is *acquisitive*, in reality the collector is driven to *collect Nothing* — an energy or value that accumulates silently with every “positive” pleasure-seeking acquisition of “one object more” for the collection. The collection is the sorites that accumulates thanks to the negating function that conceals (occults) within every positive acquisitive desire a negative energy that will at some point “explode” the collection in a moment of intense emergence, the “pile” that suddenly is realized and re-organizes time through a retroactive motion coupled with a sense of Fate/future.

I have just defined the system that runs the logic of Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, where by "Rebecca" we mean the system of accumulation that has filled the mansion of Manderley with precious objects, many of them marked with an ornate "R" or "R de W" for Rebecca de Winter. In contrast, the "new Mrs. de Winter" is never named in the film. She is permanently cast in the shadow of the POV. She belongs to the audience sitting in the dark theater auditorium. She is a "growth" that protrudes from the margin, the edge of the screen, just as Cary Grant's silhouette emerges from this frame-edge at the beginning of *Notorious*. Her status as ghost/Geist/host/hostile is established at the beginning of the film, where she glides through the gated entry of the drive that leads to the ruined Manderley. Like the camera, which has been granted access to the private lives of the characters, her identity is tied to the fourth wall of cinematic production. She is our "looking glass." Her lack of a name is a lack of a distinguishing mark, her anonymity is her "occultation" as one side of the binary that frames the action of the film.

The film is a collection, an increasingly large/long "pile" of scenes. At some key point, we will recognize the identity of this pile as a pile, and that point will retroactively identify an original loss, a *paradise of ad æquatia*, where every need is supplied. This is Manderley, where servants have brought Rebecca everything she had wanted. But, Rebecca is dead, *missing*. Our retroactive realization is of Rebecca as negative absence. We see the action of the collector in Maxime, the cuckolded husband who has, in his "desire" for Rebecca, actually been accumulating her negative energy, her continual predication reversal, her dark energy. The Maxime System reached the sorites point in the boat house, where Rebecca provoked him to anger and fell, hitting her head, to her death. Maxime's "outward-conventional" flat conception was that he had killed Rebecca. He puts her body into her sailboat, opens the storm cocks and drills holes in the hull so that it will appear that she has died in a boating accident. Rebecca's reverse predication has been to transfer her guilt to Maxime as an "efficient cause," not just an outward effect or representation. Her death is now *his idea*, an active autoerotic energy force that animates Manderley with its dark energy. Maxime is an automaton who is unconscious of his essential role in powering this death circuit. Rebecca seems powerless in the way that a dreamer feels powerless to intervene or, sometimes, escape (e.g. dreams of running through water, or running "in place").

So, isn't it clear that the collector is a more general "functionality" within the play-out of the autoerotic circulation of energy in relation to the Symbolic? This is indicated by the empirical status of collectors as hysterics and their behaviors in relation to the "one object more" of collecting desire. If we represent the Symbolic as  $\langle \dots \rangle$ , where what lies within the brackets is a causal, temporal, or logical series — what Lacan generalized as a "signifying *chain*" — it is clear that *it is a collection*, and as such it takes place within the general context of autoeroticism. It is the point of emergence from the sorites of occulted "negational signifiers," the dark energy that has taken place as the "death of each day's life" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II, ii). Vico makes it clear that human culture makes just such an emergence

out of broadly polymorphous symbolic exchanges, when the thunder causes a sudden *reversal* (*apotrope*) of positive pursuit. Symbolic interaction has provided the vocabulary, so to speak, but before this point language proper has not existed. The interaction could be defined in terms of phonemics, Mladen Dolar argues, without getting to the essence of the *acousmatic* voice that makes language function as a vocalic aspect of the death drive. Language from this point on operates in two distinctive registers, a register for conventional coding, and one for implicit ideological instruction. The acousmatic voice will be associated with a variety of “Others” who, as voice, seem to speak from behind the curtain, /S1 in the discourse of the University (Lacan), for example, or the S1→S2 of the Master’s *matheme*, Vico’s “heroic age.”

The hysteric operates independent of the formations of the Master/heroic and the modern University, because from the beginning the emergence of the Symbolic’s collection, < ... >, has been a hysteric *moment* that, producing a concrete revolutionary shift to a new symbolic modality (Vico’s ages of gods, heroes, and men), is itself a catalyst that creates a reaction without being integrated into the results (e.g. the hysteric resistance to the Symbolic). Vico identified with the hysteric and portrayed himself as such in his *Autobiography*. Žižek calls Hegel (following Lacan) *the most sublime of hysterics* because Hegel gives thesis and anthesis without synthesis, showing how antithesis “contains its own resolution” inside it. Containment? This is the logic of collection, the logic of the joke form known as the *Witz*, where the last line of the literal joke silently contains the punch line that the audience must “hear without hearing” and “know without knowing” (*kenosis*). If we could use yet more terms from Harold Bloom’s sextet of critical functions, we could say that hysteria is a *daemon* who frightens us, with apotropeic thunder, into *askesis*, retreat, a retroactive realization of our fallen state from Paradise, our state of Lack. In this lack, we are ascetics. We have needs regulated, like those who are in monasteries, to preserve Lack as a dark energy working in the background of any positive pursuit. The *clinamen* of this closed curved system is the turbulence that, like the pulse of blood in the body, communicates to every part a pulsion that is also a cipher, a “word as wind” (*afflatus*) that is in real monasteries the chanted prayer that must be maintained continually.

More Bloom terms: the double register is *tesseræ*, the split token. A conscious (literal) register shadowed by an absent half, the polymorphous perversity of multiple binaries distributed throughout the circuit to maintain the proper turbulence. The voice? *Apophrades*, and in this acousmatic voice of the Other — nowhere as powerfully present as when embodied as a “voice of the dead” — we here Hades speak and realize that it is the model of all of the zones of resistance to the Symbolic. Thereby are we able to “hear without hearing” and “know without knowing” — *kenosis*, the final term of Bloom’s set of six. Symbolic = collection = binary (death *in* life; self-generating lack) = < ... > = ...>< ... [extimacy; the closed curved surface that is the circuit of autoeroticism].

