

A Meditation on Encyclopedias and the Obsession of Collecting

I present to you herewith the Almighty Finger of God in the anatomy of a louse; in which you will find wonder piled upon wonder...here you will see in a fragment of a line the entire structure of the most ingeniously created animals of the whole universe, as if compressed into an abstract. Which ordinary persons, Sir, are capable of grasping this?

Jan Swammerdam, 1678

Our word "encyclopedia" is derived from the Greek *enkyklios paideia*, "circle of learning," springing from Plato's Academy. Originally then, it referred to a *system* of education rather than actual volumes of collected educational material or information. The first truly encyclopedic *book* was Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, a gathering of knowledge organized into separate volumes, covering astronomy, meteorology, geography, anthropology, zoology, man, botany, metallurgy and fine arts, among other things. Later, followers of the Catholic Church developed a Christian framework for the organization of information, St. Augustine's *On the Trinity* and *City of God* supplying an historical and theological methodology to subsequent early encyclopedists, and St. Jerome's *Chronicon on Illustrious Men* providing the Church its first Christian historical and bibliographic encyclopedia. Later in the Middle Ages mechanical arts began to be included in encyclopedic works, with weaving, weaponry, and navigation described in Hugo of Saint Victor's *Didascalion* (c. 1139.) In the early 1200's Bartholomaeus Angelicus completed *On the Properties of Things* for ordinary people "simpliciter et rudes," and in 1244 Vincent of Beauvais completed his *Speculum Majus*. This enormous and important work served as the Western World's principle encyclopedia for several hundred years. It drew on Latin, Greek, and Hebrew authors, and consisted of three volumes of 80 books, of 9,885 chapters.¹

The fourteenth through the sixteenth century saw rapid changes in encyclopedia making and in new schemes of organizing knowledge. In the early 1600's Francis Bacon

established a tripartite classification of learning (or, some say, a tripartite classification of the sciences,) consisting of History, Poetry, and Knowledge (Philosophy.) These three classifications corresponded to the three human faculties of Memory, Imagination, and Reason. His system would influence Ephraim Chambers (1680-1740) and his *Encyclopedie, or an Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences*, as well as the celebrated French Encyclopedists Diderot and D'Alembert, in the development of their *Encyclopedie ou Dictionnaire raissonné des sciences, des artes, et des métiers*, whose first volume appeared in 1751.

Closer examination of the sixteenth and seventeenth century's encyclopedic efforts reveals a developing humanistic approach to understanding and ordering the world, and the impulse to categorize and contain the plethora of new specimens and information pouring in from the Americas and other newly exploited territories. The encyclopedia was becoming almost a kind of foil of the miniature book (which first appeared in the late 1400's and became widely popular by the early seventeenth century.) Where the miniature book employed an extremely small and compacted format to contain "large" or "deep" texts, (such as the Bible or weighty classic texts like Homer's *Iliad*,) the encyclopedia tended to exploit a large format to enclose a "miniature" of every kind of thing existing in the world. Each entry, each description of each item, recreated a representation of the object small enough to be contained in a book which in turn could be held in the hand. Indeed, in illustrated encyclopedias, actual pictorial "miniatures" of the various subjects were included, tiny versions of the things themselves, small enough to fit on a page. Even abstract ideas were condensed and summarized; the encyclopedia was essentially miniaturizing the world.

It is during this period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that a new chapter in the encyclopedic project is born. The desire to gather, order, and classify the world found a new expression in the collections of early naturalists, men of medicine, princes, and gentlemen of leisure. Called "cabinets of curiosity," or "theatrum mundi," or "wunderkammer," these collections represent a new three-dimensional expression of the

encyclopedists' attempts to represent the order of the universe within a contained space.

The oft-quoted directive of Bacon himself describes the activity:

...a goodly huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form, or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance, and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included. The fourth such a still-house, so furnished with mills, instruments, and vessels as may be a palace fit for a philosopher's stone.²

Here Bacon's instructions are part of a larger prescription of necessities for the learned or studious man. However, the famous cabinets of Ulisse Aldrovandi in Bologna, Athanasius Kircher in Rome, Ole Worm in Copenhagen, and Ferrante Imperato in Naples, among others, not only served as rich research resources for scholars, but also as exotic entertainments for gentlemen and nobility. And in the cabinet of curiosity a kind of miniaturization occurs, similar to that which seems central to the encyclopedia: here, through the collection, selection, and arrangement of objects, the collectors are able to symbolically recreate three dimensional worlds within the confines of a chamber, tiny "model" universes reflective of each collector's understanding of the order of the universe.

It is clear that both the cabinets and encyclopedias of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were part of complex and developing attempts to create a vision of the world and all it contains, reflecting the philosophical ideas and debates of the times. However, what happens when we dig deeper than the contemporary philosophical paradigms to look at how the act of collecting itself informs us about the motivations and mechanics of the encyclopedic effort? What other deep-rooted human concerns lie beneath the seemingly irrepressible urge to collect, organize and surround ourselves with objects, which we can trace back to this period of our history?

It seems the human activity of collecting is central to the self, a compelling and intricate activity which takes many forms. From the modern museum all the way to the jumbled accumulation of dolls piled in mysterious yet apparent order on a child's bed, to the thousands of books of lists and catalogs stacked in offices and kitchens and libraries, a network of common desire (and fear?) unites every kind of collection. To get to the bottom of the mysteries and mechanics of this basic human behavior, I turn my attention to a specific period: the encyclopedism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Western World. I will look at cabinets of curiosity and encyclopedias in three ways: 1) as projects of colonization; 2) as gestures towards immortality or attempts to halt the progression of Time; and 3) as reflective journeys of self-discovery, the byproducts of a self-defining inward investigation. These three areas of interest reflect the sources of my personal fascination with the phenomena of collection, classification, and display. Because of the highly personal and speculative nature of my particular interests, this paper is more a meditation on early encyclopedias and cabinets of curiosity, rather than an empirical study of them. (Scholars like Paula Findlen, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, and Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor have already executed excellent historical chronologies of the birth, development and life of sixteenth and seventeenth century encyclopedism.³⁾ However, in placing my focus on more theoretical questions, I still hope to ground even my more ethereal musings with examples from historical collections and texts.

Space, Time, and the Voice Of Authority: the Collection As Colonial Project

"The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it."
Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*⁴

The miniaturization of the world, briefly described earlier, which seems an integral part of collection and encyclopedism, is key to the collapse of space and time which is evident when one looks at encyclopedism as a project of domination. In a collection, object

of colonization is reduced to an accumulation of individual articles which are “discovered” during “exploration,” selected, and removed from their contexts of origin. Once relocated in the space of the collection’s gallery (or, indeed, the pages of the encyclopedia), these objects become significant because of their unusualness (signaling “foreignness”) and because of the fact that they are linked to the colonized territory. Their specialness lies in the fact that they are “really” authentic artifacts from the conquered land. They come to represent that place, to recreate that place; their accumulation spells out the name of their original context, now erased. Yet even while they carry such a huge load of evocative significance, the objects remain objects, manipulatable, manageable, possessed.

And as objects in a collection, by definition they will be moved, arranged and displayed. As he reorders the objects, the collector rewrites the narrative of the object’s origin (literally in the case of a written encyclopedia entry, and figuratively, as in the relocation of plundered princely collections in Germany during the Thirty Year’s War, for example.) And in the process of this rescripting of the narrative, the collector becomes the producer of these objects, the new author. As progenitor of his world, the colonial collector resembles that most celebrated (if least documented) collector of all time, the Bible character Noah. And the example of Noah’s famous collection clearly illustrates another way in which the act of collecting collapses history and context.

Noah’s inclusion of “every creeping thing of the earth after his kind” and God’s subsequent annihilating flood, made the Ark into a kind of floating two-way time capsule. The Ark literally includes every creature of the entire world which historically *had been*, while at the same time carries the seed of every creature which *would be*. Noah’s is a collection of anticipation rather than nostalgia. His collection is the point of departure from which the future theater of the world would spring, a systematized scheme of not only what had occurred in the past (experience), but also of what experience would consist of in the future. The colonial cabinet embodies just this same collapse of history. The rarities and oddities flowing in from conquered lands, arranged and ordered for the viewing of fellow

conquerors, not only encompass (and *contain*?) the perimeters of dangerous unexplored territories, but also hold unlimited promises of the future inherent in the colonial project.

James H. Bunn looks at it in slightly different terms in his analysis of an "aesthetics of mercantilism" which he locates in Britain between 1688 and 1763. For him, collecting and (re)categorization also has the ability to transform history into objects of consumption.

From within this aesthetic of extraction and seriality, Bunn describes the cabinet of curiosity thus:

in a curio cabinet each cultural remnant has a circumscribed allusiveness among a collection of others. If the unintentional aesthetic of accumulating exotic goods materialized as a side effect of mercantilism, it can be semiologically considered as a special case of eclecticism, which intentionally ignores proprieties of native history and topography.⁵

For Bunn, the erasure of "native history and topographies," allows the object to be placed "within the play of signifiers that characterize an exchange economy."⁶ Thus the collection achieves its authority not only from the "authenticity" of the objects themselves, but from their reclassification as commodities. The obsession with ownership and accumulation of goods is evident in the emphasis some collectors placed on the sheer *numbers* of things (rather than *quality* of things) in their collections. According to Paula Findlen, the famous naturalist and collector Aldrovandi,

was obsessed with the size of his collection; not a week passed without his recounting the total number of "facts" he had accumulated. In 1577, he possessed about 13,000 things; in 1595, 18,000; at the turn of the century, approximately 20,000...Like Pliny, Renaissance encyclopedists took pride in the length and quality of their literary productions; if the number of "facts" seemed large, the number of words produced in response to those facts was even greater.⁷

So it seems clear that we can look at encyclopedism as a mechanism by which the colonizer could realize his fantasy of ownership, establish authorship, and regulate the

territories of conquest through manipulation of his miniature recreation of that conquest. And, more interestingly, the act of collecting itself seems to inherently involve distortions of history, space and context which serve to further these endeavors. However I would resist reading the cabinet of curiosity (or indeed the encyclopedic effort as a whole) as purely a simple "paradise of consumption" as Susan Stewart suggests in her thus-titled chapter about collections and collecting.⁸

Encyclopedism and the Long Arm of Death

It seems impossible to not think of the march of time when contemplating a collection, whether it is Imperato's gallery of wonders or the box of your baseball cards ensconced safely in the attic. Even modern grocery store *encyclopedia britannicas* have an air of musty defiance about them, the entire breadth of human experience trapped between the cheap blue covers of their diluted volumes. Collecting, ordering and containing things seems to be all about the ticking of the clock. For me, one of the most compelling aspects of collecting involves the ways encyclopedism deals with the challenges of the fourth dimension, and indeed seems locked in an ongoing arm-wrestle with Mr. Death himself.

When we look at Time and the encyclopedia, again we return to the aspect of the miniature. For even as the world at large is compacted, concentrated and (re)placed by tiny replicas in the pages of an encyclopedic volume, so Time also is compressed, squeezed in similar proportion, wrenched from the scale of everyday life. When we move into the miniature worlds of the encyclopedia and the *wunderkammer*, we move into Other Time. In *On Longing* Susan Stewart describes a recent experiment conducted by the School of Architecture at the University of Tennessee, which demonstrates how this works:

...researchers had adult subjects observe scale-model environments 1/6, 1/12, and 1/24 of full size...The subjects were asked to move the scale figures through the environment...then they were asked to imagine themselves to be [of that scale] and picture themselves engaging in

activities...Finally, they were asked to tell researchers when they felt they had been engaged in such activities for 30 minutes. The experiment showed that "the experience of temporal duration is compressed relative to the clock in the same proportion as scale-model environments being observed are compressed relative to full-scale environments." In other words, 30 minutes would be experienced in 5 minutes at 1/12 scale and 2.5 minutes at 1/24 scale.⁹

In a sense, Time becomes one of the many things captured and shrunk and held between the lines of an encyclopedia's entries, or behind the glass of the Wunderkammer's vitrine.

And what about the physical set up of the curiosity cabinet? Cabinets, cupboards, glass bells, drawers--these modes of display all serve to isolate the object, create little islands of separateness. The object is protected from contamination with lived experience, while the glass through which we view it allows a kind of transcendent vision, the gaze of one outside looking *in* and *down*. We look from out of our experience of chronology and into a vacuum where time is absent. The object is tamed, domesticated, and protected; it becomes "pure," inorganic, static. In his essay "Why We Need Things," Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discusses our need for Things in light of the ever-changing nature of our consciousness. Objects, he tells us, stabilize us. While we are caught in a state of ever-transforming reality, the object serves as a marker to give us our bearings. He quotes Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*: "against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world...Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement..."¹⁰ On the other side of the glass partition, time and motion stop.

This dynamic might explain the popularity of one of the demonstrations frequently enacted for visitors by collector Francesco Calzolari in the mid-sixteenth century. Calzolari would take a quantity of asbestos,

placing it in the flame of a burning candle. It lit up as if in flames, so that everyone thought that it had turned to ashes. Nonetheless, once cooled, its substance and appearance remained the same as they were before being placed in the fire.¹¹

By the seventeenth century asbestos experiments had become elaborate entertainments for visiting dignitaries. The most famous were those of Manfredo Settala, who had made a purse from asbestos which "was thrown many times on a great quantity of lit charcoal in the presence of many signors and princes, in particular the Most Serene Archduke of Innsbruck and the Most Serene Grand Duchess of Tuscany...Nor was anyone wounded."¹² Thrown onto the fire, it burns. But returned to its pedestal it cools and is restored to its original state. Time is undone again and again.

(Or so it seems. Contemporary museums pour millions of dollars into measures towards the conservation and preservation of their collections. This emphasis, its direct link to the present economy of collecting, and the technologies which have developed in response to this mania is worthy of its own deep analysis.)

The written encyclopedia seems to achieve a sense of permanence even more than the *wunderkammer's* objects under glass. For although the physical aspect of the book can decay, there is a parallel understanding of "the Text," the literary work itself, which somehow stands outside time, exists in an even a more elusive and impregnable zone than the collected object behind a vitrine. It exists without a physical body, or rather within multiple bodies, as a text can be reprinted or copied any number of times. So the encyclopedia itself has the ability, metaphorically at least, to erase the corporeality of known things, and provide a new body for all that exists, a body not subject to Decay, Death, or (perhaps most importantly) Forgetting. Encyclopedists often collected things both ways: Aldrovandi, for example, maintained a collection of at least 20,000 actual objects, yet took care to document and meticulously describe his collection in no fewer than 187 volumes in folio, and more than 200 bags full of loose papers.

The physical arrangement of these complex *theatrum-mundis* also demonstrate a very literal theatricality. When I look at engravings picturing Imperato's museum or Ole

Worm's collection *Wormanium*, I am drawn not only to the sheer volume of information packed in them, but also to the proximity with which diverse objects are arranged. The arrangement of the collection is a central part of the encyclopedic project, perhaps *the* most important and contested aspect. The objects, loaded with multiple significance (due in part to the erasure of their original contexts as mentioned previously), develop relationships to one another. Divorced from their native environments, they develop new ones within the structure of the display unit. One is not looking just at a series of shelves with a bunch of disparate things on them, one is looking at a *collection* of things. The objects form tableaux of new meanings. The dagger on the velvet pillow next to the fern leaf under a glass bell, the rows of fossils in line below the stretched skin of the alligator, almost seem to work as rebuses, pictures which spell out a message. These little theaters don't move, their messages are distillations of experience; they are not acted out through time, they exist always.

This is perhaps most poignantly evident in the collection of Frederick Ruysch. In Amsterdam Ruysch gathered one of the most important anatomical collections by the end of the seventeenth century. Beyond storing the usual assortment of anatomical ephemera in the usual way, Ruysch composed intricate preparations consisting of human organs, the skeletons of children and other items, meant to represent allegories of death. He had engravings made of these arrangements, and included them in his *Opera Omnia*. Dr. Antonie Luyendijk-Elshout, Professor of the History of Medicine in the University of Leiden succeeded to analyze these emblems, with reference to Ruysch's own texts. One of his descriptions of a Ruysch creation is worth quoting here in full.

With eye sockets turned heavenward the central skeleton--a foetus of about four months--chants a lament on the misery of life. "ah Fate, ah bitter Fate!" it sings, accompanying itself on a violin, made of an osteomyelitic sequester with a dried artery for a bow. At its right, a tiny skeleton conducts the music with a baton, set with minute kidney stones. In the right foreground, a still little skeleton girdles its hips with injected sheep intestines,

its right hand grasping a spear made of the hardened vas deferens of an adult man, grimly conveying the message that its first hour was also its last. On the left, behind a handsome vase made of the inflated tunica albuginea of the testis, poses an elegant little skeleton with a feather on its skull and a stone coughed up from its lungs hanging from its hand. In all likelihood the feather is intended to draw attention to the ossification of the cranium. For the little horizontal skeleton in the foreground with the familiar may fly on its delicate hand, Ruysch chose a quotation from the Roman poet Plautus, one of the favorite authors of this period, to the effect that its lifespan had been as brief as that of young grass felled by the scythe so soon after sprouting.¹³

Ruysch's tableaux defy Death while taking Death as their subject, eloquently revealing the poetics of collection and arrangement in a dialogue with Mortality.

And while death-defying collectors like Ruysch worked in the three dimensional realm of the curiosity cabinet, encyclopedists like Athanasius Kirscher were also striving for immortality in the two dimensional realm, via a search for a universal script. Kirscher was fascinated by hieroglyphs, which he felt represented the archetype of all knowledge. His search to unlock the secret of the hieroglyph was a search to discover the "script" of individual pictures, to locate and restore the emblems which would connect all past knowledge with the present and future world. Not exactly a complete denial of Death, the discovery of archetypal emblems would allow men to experience Time not as a destroyer but as a life force flowing *through* a unified and complete knowledge. While he never exactly succeeded in this effort, Kirscher was able to amass quite a collection of Chinese scrolls, Etruscan tablets and the like in his museum.

Finally, the work of Ruysch and Kirscher conjure, ironically, the literary invention of surrealist author Raymond Roussel. In the novel *Locus Solus*, Roussel describes the curiosity collection of his fictional scientist Martial Canterel. Canterel, through the invention of the substances *vitalium* and *resurrectine*, is able to reanimate corpses kept frozen by him for this purpose. The two substances in contact with one another in the brain of the corpse,

overcame its cadaveric rigidity, endowing the subject with an impressive artificial life. As a consequence of a curious awakening of memory, the latter would at once reproduce, with strict exactitude, every slightest action performed by him during certain outstanding minutes of his life; then, without any break he would infinitely repeat the same unvarying series of deeds and gestures...¹⁴

In Roussel's museum these dances of death occur in rows of small glass-fronted chambers, set up for convenient viewing by loved ones and strangers. In these miniature "theaters of life", corpses perform pivotal moment of their lives again and again, and Roussel's literary metaphor points directly to the hopes inherent in encyclopedic efforts.

Speculum Majus: Encyclopedism and the Self

In the development of the structure of categorization of in early encyclopedias, we can see an interesting progression in the location of Ourselves as subjects in the known universe. During the course of the encyclopedia's development, "Man" as a subject moves from subtopic, to topic, to fountainhead of learning. In Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, Man serves as only a single item sandwiched in among many subjects of knowledge. In Varro's encyclopedia Man moves to the top of the list, standing at the head of a hierarchy of assorted classifications. But it is Bacon's new structuring of the world which positioned all branches of learning as aspects of man, springing from the self, rather than simply including the self as one of many topics to be understood. Every branch of learning corresponds to one of the human senses; in Bacon's universe, even the most far-flung corner of the kingdom refers back to a human faculty. The outward looking gaze is turned back upon itself, and the encyclopedic effort begins to look a lot like an elaborate multifaceted mirror, a mechanism of self reflection.

How can the efforts to read, classify, and order the universe (a project focused upon the enormous space all around us) also function on an incredibly specific and personal level

of self-exploration? Part of the answer lies in the intimacy of the structures which contain a collection. Drawers have locks and keys, chests are all about their interiors, the "cabinet" itself conjures a place where we keep the personal belongings of everyday life--linen or crockery, or even underwear. Bachelard describes the dynamics of these spaces most persuasively in *The Poetic of Space* :

who doesn't like both locks and keys? There is an abundant psychoanalytical literature on this theme.... For our purpose, however, if we emphasized sexual symbols, we should conceal the depth of the dream of intimacy...Chests, especially small caskets, over which we have more complete mastery, are objects *that may be opened*. When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects; it takes its place in exterior space. But it opens!...The outside has no more meaning. And quite paradoxically, even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension--the dimension of intimacy--has just opened up.¹⁵

As enclosures of intimate space, the drawers and chests and display cases of the cabinet of curiosity fit the objects of the large world into a landscape of the interior. Enclosed spaces emphasize the dialectic of interior and exterior, private and public, the personal and the social. Common linguistic metaphors even link these kinds of containers to parts of the body: the heart as a treasure chest, for example, the brain or the faculty of memory as a filing cabinet, our secrets as locked drawers. And indeed boxes of collected items can be looked upon as repositories of memory, in more ways than one.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, marks a direct link between early collections, curiosity cabinets, and a medieval mnemonic system of memorization, called "the art of memory." This technique involves creating an imaginary location, best if easy and familiar, and filling the space with imagined objects which signal the central themes of the thing to be remembered (such as a speech or text, for example.) When it was necessary to recall the speech, the orator would mentally move through the location, and encountering the individual images placed along the way, he would be

reminded of the different points in his oration, in the correct order. For example, in "the Abbey Memory system" invented by Johannes Romberch in *Congestorium Artificiose Memorie* in 1533,¹⁶ the Abbey, a building familiar to many, is chosen as the locus in which to place the mnemonic images. For Hooper-Greenhill, the cabinet of curiosity sometimes functioned as a three dimensional material manifestation of the imagined locations and objects of the "art of memory," an extension of its practice. She says, "The "cabinet of the world" presented physical things whose identities, links, and connections would be articulated and interpreted according to their visible surface signatures...the "cabinet" on the scale of a single piece of furniture...operated as a memory theater."¹⁷ According to Hooper-Greenhill, the cabinet could be "read" like a script whose text would reveal the identity of the collector.¹⁸

Interior cavities of emptiness which need filling, the drawers of the cabinet also serve as a means of private display (reverie.) As the collector fills each one with objects which he then carefully arranges and re arranges, he is creating an extension of another kind of interior, his own. As a mortal vessel containing the self, the body will never be big enough or beautiful enough to satisfy us. The act of collection and arrangement extends our corporeal boundaries. In *Principles of Psychology*, William James compares the collecting activities of rats with those of mentally insane patients. He sees the behavior of "Hoarders," or "Misers" as an exaggeration of the instinct of ownership. This uncontrolled activity of incorporation, multiplies the body of the collector, shattering the self while simultaneously extending it into a borderless, continuous whole.

One of Kirscher's favorite inventions in his collection were catoptric devices, machines of multiple mirrors. In one display, mirrors combined to produce an infinite number of images of the Pope. Not only a powerful statement on the far reaching power of the papacy, this exhibit characterizes the relationship of the collector to the collection. While identity is splintered into tiny reflections of itself, it achieves continuance. The depth of

multiplicity extends away from the original endlessly through time. Indeed, which portrait *is* the original? There is no first or last, the starting point of the optical illusion is unlocatable.

Another prominent Italian collector, Ferdinando Cospi, also featured mirrors in his collection. Cospi's mirror perched high above the objects in his Bologna museum, so that the spectator, upon looking up, saw himself from above, a small figure among the crowd of objects on display. Here the exhibit facilitates the orientation of the self in space, among a fixed landscape. In relation to the collection, the subject gains a "God's eye view" of himself and his position in the universe. Heidegger's concept of *Representatio* explains an aspect of how this works on a theoretical level.

...representatio means to bring that which is present before one as something confronting oneself, to relate it to oneself and to force it back into this relation to oneself as the normative area. *Representatio* entails the assembling of the world and the presentation of it to the assembler, such that the character of the existent is graspable and controllable. Thus man puts himself into the setting of the world picture, the site from which the view of the world must be objectively constituted. In the same process that constructs the world as a view, man is constructed as subject.¹⁹

This drama is played out again and again in the ongoing reinvention of hierarchies and classifications and organization occurring in the development of the encyclopedia. And it is also evident, for example, in Aldrovandi's prominent display of portraits of himself and his family as an integral part of his collection.

Paula Findlen's description of the funeral of collector Manfredo Settala reveals the depth of the connection between the identity of the encyclopedist and his material collection.

All the objects in his museum were carried in procession by the rectors and students of the Jesuit college from his home to Brera College where they participated in an elaborate funeral ceremony. Personified by the members of the college, his inventions recited Latin epigrams in competition with the various muses under which Settala had worked...The moral pageant commemorating Milan's greatest collector opened not with the traditional blast of a trumpet, but with a resounding

bellow by "fame" from Settala's speaking tube. Settala's exequies were a form of Jesuit theater in which his objects, family, and friends all participated in the collective rehearsal of his life.²⁰

Not only a rehearsal of his *life*, this funeral, featuring every single object in his collection, is perhaps more accurately described as a rehearsal of his *self*, a reconstruction of his identity. In this fantastic ceremony, elements of his collection are given a voice by the accommodating performers. And the subject of their speech--the collector himself of course.

CONCLUSION

Encyclopedic efforts saturate our modern lives. The museums we visit, the filing cabinets next to our desks, the rows upon rows of reference volumes in our libraries, the clusters of boxes in our attics--all are descendants of those early cabinets, and evidence the deep human impulses which continue into the present age. And each marks the ongoing activity of miniaturization, assembly, and reclassification, as we struggle to remake the world and ourselves.

Encyclopedic efforts, then, can be understood as more than just an addiction to materialism, more than the source or a symptom of rampant consumerism. Even as consumption of objects is a basic step in the creation of any collection, the dialectics and desires of collecting in encyclopedic projects are far more complex than just a straightforward exchange of meaning for ownership. Encyclopedias are mirrors. Like the ones in a funhouse, they multiply, stretch, and compact what they reflect; the visions in them drop away into great distance and magnify a thousand fold; they transport us through time and their reflections are timeless; sometimes they even reflect what isn't there. Encyclopedias are time capsules, multiply coded scripts of power, and testaments to the collective fear and fragility of humanity as well as to its arrogance. Our modern encyclopedic forms are continually evolving under the influence of the greater forces at work in our society, just as the encyclopedias of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were reflective of those in

theirs. One way of understanding the American museum today is to keep in mind that we are looking at an encyclopedia and all that it does, under the rubric of American Capitalism.

–Clare Dolan, *Chief Operating Philosopher, Museum of Everyday Life*

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Footnotes

¹ Of course the non-western world has a rich encyclopedic history as well. About 630 AD in China, Yü Shih-nan produced the *Pei t'ang shu chao*, a work of 160 chapters and 19 sections. the *Ch'u Hsüe h chi* "entry into learning" was completed about 700 by Hsü chien, and in 801 Tu Yu completed the *T'ung tien*, a nine section encyclopedia including Economics, Examinations and degrees, Government, Rites and Ceremonies, Music, The Army, Law, Political Geography, and National Defense. An early Arabic encyclopedia, the *Ktab 'Uyun al-Akhbar* was divided into ten books, beginning with Power, War, Nobility, Character, Learning and Eloquence, and ending up with Food, and lastly, Women.

² Francis Bacon, *Gesta Grayorum* (1594) quoted in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: the cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1.

³ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1985.)

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 edition) 151.

⁵ James Bunn, "The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism", as cited in Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993) 153.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 62-63.

⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, chapter 5, part 2, *passim*.

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 66.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, as cited in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds., *History from Things; Essays in Material Culture*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) 23.

¹¹ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 223-224.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Dr. Antonie Luyendijk-Elshout, quoted by Scheurleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosity" in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums*,. 119.

¹⁴ Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1983) 118.

¹⁵ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 84-85.

¹⁶ Hooper-Greenhill, 93.

¹⁷ Hooper-Greenhill, 102-104.

¹⁸ "The 'script', the 'universal' or 'encyclopedic' aim, varied in each of these cabinets according to the position of the collecting and representing subject. Where the prince wishes to represent to himself the world of imperial and political power through material things that constructed the entirety of the world-that-may-be-dominated, the scholar/physician wished to represent to himself the world-that-may-be-known...In each case, these representations also constituted specific subject positions, in that the scholar/physician made the cabinet, but equally the cabinet made the scholar/physician." Hooper-Greenhill, 126.

¹⁹ Heidegger, 1951:12, as cited in Hooper-Greenhill, p.82.

²⁰ Paula Findlen, p.333.