The Sacred Gift: Donations from Private Collectors to Museums*

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Abstract: The phenomenon of gifting from private collectors to museums has not yet been studied in depth. Prestigious art collections usually attract more attention than modest collections, which can also include other objects than artworks. The present analysis is concerned with both elite and popular collections and is illustrated with examples from various areas of the world, including Asia and the Pacific. Constituent parts of collections are seen as "semiophors" or carriers of meaning with a sacred dimension. They are set apart from ordinary objects. Moreover, through collecting, collectors can demonstrate their excellence in a competitive way. They not only rival one another, but sometimes compete with museums, and in such cases they may choose not to donate. On the other hand, museum directors and curators are not always keen to receive entire collections but may prefer to choose the best pieces and, in doing so, may injure the pride of generous donors. Donations to museums differ from bequests in wills to family members or close friends, in that they are given to the imagined community as a whole, which provides a sacred dimension to this kind of gift.

[Keywords: *Museums*, *Collecting*, *Collection Acquisition*, *Gift Giving*, *Sacred*. Keywords in italics are derived from the American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus, a standard nomenclature for the ethnographic disciplines.]

Set of Objects with a Particular Leitmotif

According to the French historian Krszysztof Pomian (1987, 2003), the category of "artifacts" roughly comprises three kinds of things: (1) useful objects, including merchandise, (2) semiophors (i.e. carriers of meaning), and (3) waste. An object can be both useful and a semiophor. When it is neither, it is waste. Pomian defines a collection as a set of objects withdrawn from economic circulation, subjected to special protection in spaces especially enclosed for this purpose, and put on view. Pomian's first characteristic of a collection is that the constituent objects are temporarily or permanently removed from the ambit of useful activities. Thus, the stock of a shop would not be included in this definition, and neither would a set of instruments or tools serving within a production context. Secondly, one has to protect the collection against physical degradation and theft. If this were not the case, then it would appear that the objects had no value at all and would just be waste. We are dealing here with conservation and eventually also restoration. But a well-conserved and protected treasure such as a pot with coins under the ground or some expensive paintings in a bank vault do not yet

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constitute a collection. For this, the third characteristic is necessary, namely that the collection be exposed to view in a specially adapted, enclosed space.[1] When all these requirements are met we may, according to Pomian (1987:296), speak of a collection, as distinguished from an accumulation of objects with another purpose.

However, Pomian's third characteristic hints at the limitations of the universal applicability of his definition. In his view, a secretly kept private collection would not be a collection, at least not until the moment of discovery by others after the death of its owner. Pomian seems to speak here primarily about public collections and about a limited kind of (especially elite) private collections, but not about the popular private collections that appeared *en masse* after the Industrial Revolution. In earlier studies of collecting (Van der Grijp 2006, 2012), I provided a definition that includes both elite and popular (and private as well as public) collections. I defined a collection as a set of objects conserved outside a use context and with a particular motif—which may be personal or not—that determines the collection.

Because of its motif, the value of a collection – at least within the perspective of the collector (private or public)—is many times greater than the combined values of the individual objects. This value can be measured and expressed in cultural, historic, scientific, technical, aesthetic, emotional, or financial terms. The coherence of a serious collection is a construction that may be based on a narrative (fiction), but this fiction corresponds with a reality that is not only individually, but also socially and culturally defined. In my eyes—and this is a critique of postmodernist narrativism—the coherence of a collection is *both* (narrative) fiction and (material) reality. A collector—private or public—not only accumulates objects, but also searches for the backgrounds and meanings of these (the educational motive; see below), and preserves the collection according to a plan. Every recognizable and transportable artifact or product of nature—indeed, one must be able to lift and transport it—may end up (as a semiophor) in a private collection or museum.

I see collecting primarily as a passion, which sometimes develops the characteristics of a cult based on beauty, in particular when it concerns aesthetic objects. Private collecting, however, is also a form of leisure activity. Leisure has, according to Joffre Dumazedier (1972), three functions: (1) recreation, (2) diversion and (3) development of one's personality. Dumazedier considers diversion a "flight in pastime, an escape to another world, completely different from the normal world" (1972:26; my translation). Such an escape may focus on real activities such as sports, games and travel (change of place, rhythm and style) as well as on fictive activities in which one can identify with others, such as in watching films, visiting theaters and reading novels (1972:27). In my eyes, all this also applies to collecting in which the "flight in pastime" and the "escape to another world" often take the form of nostalgia.

This article attempts to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between private collectors and museums in terms of collections? This relation is asymmetrical because private collectors are individuals, sometimes couples, and public collectors are institutions. We could also speak about individual versus institutional collectors, although it is individuals within institutions who make decisions about the disposition of public collections. In the cases of ancient, modern and contemporary art, folk art, tribal art, and other aesthetic forms of material culture, public collectors are usually museums. Other institutional collectors are, for example, botanical and zoological gardens, public libraries, archives as well as universities. There is also an intermediate and overlapping category between private and public collectors in the form of private museums and, sometimes foundations. Characteristic of private collections is the uncertainty of their longevity in relation to the owner's circumstances. Public collections, i.e. those that are open to the general public, usually continue their existence regardless the death, retirement, or transfer of their initiator or administrator (director or curator).

Via a donation of their collection to a museum before or, by will, after their death, private collectors can address any uncertainty about the disposition of their collection and may extend its lifespan far beyond the end of their own life. Such a donation, however, may involve additional uncertainty since museums, in view of accompanying conditions imposed by private collectors, are not always eager to accept entire collections. Although there exists an extensive literature on private collections and collectors as well as on the history of the large museums, the phenomenon of gifting from private collections to museums has not been examined in depth.[2] I discuss here a selection of relevant social scientific perspectives and, in doing so, elaborate a hypothesis of the sacredness—in a non-religious sense—of private donations to public museums.

An Anti-reductionist or Configurational Perspective

In his ethnography of the art market in the metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri, Stuart Plattner (1996) distinguished three axes needed to understand collectors of high art: psychological, sociological and economic or, in other words, the motivations of ego-enlargement, augmentation of social status and investment. In accordance with this model, I developed (Van der Grijp 2006) a configurational perspective on private collecting in general. Plattner's three axes are important for the implication that in order to understand collecting as a cultural phenomenon, one cannot reduce the motivations of collectors to any one axis. The various motivational axes form a structural set, which is to be understood as a process, a *re*configuration. However, for a full cultural understanding of collecting, it is necessary to add a fourth motivational axis, that of acquiring and transmitting knowledge about a certain category of objects, an axis that I call educational. My four motivational axes are all processual and should be analyzed in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives—hence the complementary notions of configuration and reconfiguration. Here follows a brief explanation of the four axes.

(1) According to Plattner, a psychological motivation can be characterized as ego-enlargement, by seeing one's collection—especially when it is recognized as a "good" and "important" one—as an extension of oneself. I see another psychological dimension in nostalgia—a kind of restoration of a lost world by making it manageable, habitable and emotionally compelling within a sort of microcosm or time capsule.

(2) Sociological motivation may be summarized as a desire to augment one's social status. The direct link between socio-economic background and involvement in "culture" recurs in the sociological literature from Thorstein Veblen (1934 [1899]) to Pierre Bourdieu (1979), to which the latter adds the notion of "cultural capital" as a marker of social status.

(3) Collecting can also be, and often is, a form of economic investment. Collectors can sell some of their collectibles, generate profit and eventually reinvest this profit in their collection or in other undertakings. In so doing, they can accumulate a reserve of personal capital, and may even become dealers. (The notion of profit can also be an economic metaphor that may be applied to the psychological and sociological drives: in that view, ego-enlargement and the augmentation of social status could also be seen as forms of profit.)

(4) The educational motive concerns acquiring and transmitting knowledge about a certain category of objects.[3] Collectors may assume that an increase in knowledge goes hand in hand with the ownership of the objects concerned. According to collectors I have interviewed, daily and physical contact with their collectibles is a precondition for such knowledge. As collectors learn about their objects, many become knowledgeable specialists, and they are motivated to transmit their knowledge to others. (Here too, there is a kind of profit: that of knowledge about one's collectibles.)

The configurational approach proposed here implies that in order to describe, understand and explain collecting as a cultural phenomenon, we should not reduce collectors' motivations to one, two or three motivations only, but rather take all four into account.[4] Below, I discuss hypotheses of relevant authors on this matter, beginning with the psychological motivation. Thereafter, I develop my ideas about the sacredness of donations to museums.

Mono-causal Explanations in Terms of Obsession

Often, psychological or psychoanalytically inspired propositions, such as those of Jean Baudrillard (1968, 1994) and Werner Muensterberger (1994), reduce collecting to individually held values. They search for a mono-causal explanation and belittle collectors' motives, for example, by deeming collecting as childish behaviour. Baudrillard's collector, in Naomi Schor's lucid evaluation, is "a neurotic, unable to cope with the struggles of intersubjectivity" (1994:257). For Muensterberger, "collectors share a sense of specialness, of once not having received satisfying love or attention or having been hurt or unfairly treated in infancy, and through their objects they feel reassured, enriched, and notable" (1995:44). These negative hypotheses (in which the driving motivation behind collecting is identified as a deficiency; Van der Grijp 2006:14-21) embody a mono-causal determinism, diametrically opposed to a configurational approach. Private collecting has been compared with drug addiction and alcoholism (Glasser 1976), whilst various other authors see in it an obsession described respectively as "organized", "passionate", "glorious", "blessed" or "magnificent" (Aristides 1988; Calloway 2004; Rheims 1975; Purcell and Gould 1992; Tuchman 1994).

In a first substantial effort to understand and explain the phenomenon of collecting, Susan Pearce (1992:66-88) distinguished three collecting modes: (1) the souvenir, (2) the fetishist and (3) the systematic. This initial theorizing effort was still mired in a psychologizing mode that says nothing about the cultural dimensions of the phenomenon. In the souvenir mode the collector creates a romantic life history by selecting and arranging personal memory material in order to make a kind of object-autobiography, in which the objects serve the autobiographer. In the fetishist mode the objects are dominant and collectors satisfy their obsessive needs by gathering as many pieces as possible. In contrast to the souvenir mode, here, collectors allow the objects to create the collectors' egos ("the objects are allowed to create the self"; 1995:32). The systematic collection is fueled by an apparently intellectual motive: collectors want to constitute complete sets with the underlying message that they completely control the subject. In many actual collections these three modes overlap each other.

In her second major work on collecting, Pearce sees the phenomenon in what she calls "a passion for possession" (1995:221). The word "passion" implies a certain degree of passivity in which something happens to the collector, and of a certain distress as well as a strong feeling of power, a polyvalence perhaps grounded in the culturally deeply rooted feeling that "sex is a variety of religious experience or, perhaps, indeed, that religion is a variety of sexual experience" (1995:221). The word "possession" has here a double connotation, a material and a sexual one. This is expressed among other things in the excitement of the rare catch, or of the hope to find an important piece:

> The pleasure of this sensation, the sense of being lifted out of oneself into a sharper, brighter, more interesting world of feeling, is the central experience for many collectors, and a large part of the reason why they collect at all. Handling the existing collection then becomes a train of memories of past enjoyments. [1995:221]

Pearce also observes that passionate possession is expressed in anticipation as well as recollection and in disquiet about the continuously passing present. This also explains the recurring hunger and need of collectors to add new acquisitions to an existing collection. I would add that it may also be expressed in a need to create a final place for one's private collection—via a donation – in a museum.

Russell Belk (1995) compares collecting with romantic love, which is another psychological motive. He observes a continuum in the motives of contemporary collectors and those of 16th and 17th century European collectors with their curiosity cabinets: "[They share] the same acquisitive and possessive motivations and the same feelings of delight with objects that are, for the collectors and others of like mind, fantastic" (1995:34). In their desire to complete series, collectors' need for durable goods resembles the need for non-durable goods and the necessity of continuous completion and thus consumption. Ordinary consumable goods are destined for use and do not constitute a collection. In collections, goods are stripped of their use function. They are selected actively and with passion, bought and removed from their original context and integrated into a new context, namely in a set of non-identical objects with a common theme. Belk distinguishes collecting from ordinary consumption, investment, hoarding, possessive accumulation and purchasing. Collectibles are not only luxury goods, but they are also rare in terms of their excellence or difficulty of acquisition. Moreover, collecting is a competitive activity in which collectors can eventually measure themselves according to a self-imposed criterion of excellence. Collectors can show off their superior knowledge and financial means vis-à-vis rivals as well as their luck and ability in making the right decisions, which may result in ego-enlargement.

One of the most important functions of having property is the ability to manipulate the environment, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981). They maintain that collectors have this feeling in a high degree, because only they themselves determine what pieces to select, what to call them, and how to organize the collection. They create their micro-cosmos and time-capsule completely by themselves, and the power they have over that creation is unequaled by any other situation in time and space. Being able to label their pieces is a precondition for the integration of these pieces in their collection. When collectors are unable to name a piece that is still intriguing in their eyes, they would rather keep it separate at first, until they get to know more about it. Naming a piece—like naming people—is part and parcel of the processes of selection, entering into possession, control and power (Rogan 1990). The often explicit analogy of hunting is accompanied by feelings and practices of patience, strategy, cleverness, competition, conquest and success, in particular when one can give a long sought for and difficultly obtained piece—the prey—its "own" place within the collection. This indeed also enlarges one's ego.

In their book *La passion de l'art primitif* (Passion for primitive art; 2008) French anthropologists Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudi-Ballini give an account of their research among collectors of tribal art. They call this "primitive art"—but in their case without quotation marks (*l'art primitif*). Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini interviewed 60 collectors, 90 percent of whom live in the Paris region and only 4 of whom are women. For most of those collectors the value of their pieces is situated more in the emotions they generate than in their actual physical characteristics (2008:57). Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini posed the following research question: If it is not the masterpiece ("*chef d'oeuvre*") that makes the emotion, but the emotion that makes the masterpiece, what then is the source of the emotion? In other words: How do these collectors experience the aesthetic relationship? A first answer is that collectors hope to get in touch, via their objects, with an indefinable "parallel universe" that differs from the prosaic daily reality. A precondition for this is the development of a special eye ("*l'oeil*") in order to recognize the valuable object amidst many others by experiencing the emotion that this particular object is indeed very special and desirable.

With respect to the psychological identity motive (ego-enlargement) Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini (2008:287) stick to a stereotypical dichotomy, as if one *is* what one possesses in "our society", in particular when it concerns valuable objects, in contrast to Melanesia, where valuables mainly serve to circulate and thus to trigger or reinforce social relationships. This reductionist stance is too simplistic and has already been criticized by Arjun Appadurai (1986). Moreover, Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini limit themselves to what they like to call an "analysis of discourse". This methodological choice results in their case in a succession of individual opinions, sometimes with, but often without mentioning a pseudonym, as if the persons behind the opinions do not seem to matter much. The addition of some elaborate biographical case studies and concrete examples of collections could have prevented the impression that the reader only gets dished up a mixture of anonymous personal opinions, which is insufficient to make solid ethnography. Almost a century ago, Bronisław Malinowski (1922) advised anthropologists that they should distinguish between—and confront with each other about—what people do and what they say what they do. It is, however, very difficult to make such a distinction and realize such an analytical confrontation if we only rely on discourse, on what people—here: tribal art collectors—say what they do.

Social Identity Marker that Provides Cultural Capital

The authors discussed in the previous section share a psychological and often reductionist approach of the cultural phenomenon of collecting. Some of them, however, add sociological considerations, which are highlighted in this section. The most frequently cited author in this respect is Pierre Bourdieu, who demonstrated the link between socio-economic backgrounds and the taste for aesthetics, art, and culture (1979:326). His analysis was in keeping with Thorstein Veblen's earlier analysis of the non-working or only symbolically working leisure class. For Veblen, "the occupations of the [leisure] class… have the common economic characteristic of being non-industrial… 'Leisure'… here… connotes… non-productive consumption of time" (1934 [1899]:21, 46).

I argue that the creation of a serious collection equals—or at least represents—the production of culture. A collection is a social identity marker that provides (in Bourdieu's terms) cultural capital and augments the social status of the collector. The successful bond trader Bill Gross, for example, was able to acquire the only known copy in private hands of the so-called "1 cent Z-Grill" U.S. stamp for the equivalent of 3 million US$ (Blankfeld 2010:142). By thus becoming the owner of the only complete collection of United States stamps, his social status within—and even outside—philatelic circles was considerably augmented.

According to Pearce in her second major work on the phenomenon, collecting has three dimensions: (1) practical, (2) poetic and (3) political. Pearce translates "private" and "public" as respectively the poetic and practical dimensions:

> The poetics of collecting is principally concerned with how individuals experience the process of collecting in their own lives, how they report on their relationship with it and how this can be analysed by the investigator… 'Poetics' is a word that stands as the source of the European effort to understand and assess creative activity, and as such it is acquiring a respectable pedigree in contemporary critique. [1995:31]

The poetic dimension concerns the question of the personal experience of collecting processes. The total sum of these personal experiences influences the social practice of collecting. The symbolic dimensions of collecting can only be perceived by persons for whom things are embedded in a world rich in imagination. Here, "poetry" refers to the creative aspect of collecting: a collection as a personal creation. It is also a form of fiction by means of which collectors express imaginary constructions.

With respect to the practical dimension, Pearce primarily thinks of collecting as a social practice within the European tradition. Peculiar to this tradition, conceived in Fernand Braudel's (1966) terms as long-term processes ("*la longue durée*"), is first that the observing individual sees the material world as "objective" and external and, second, that industrial capitalism concentrates on the production of commodities. Thus, there is a double focus on objects: the objects are available for our view—scientific or not—and Europeans have (historically speaking) specialized in the production of objects. In trying to understand collecting as a social practice, as Pearce emphasizes, we must be aware of this particular cultural context.

The political dimension has to do with power and ideology, with the ability to negotiate changes. Crucial questions are: Who recognizes the value of collecting and how are those values recognized? What is the ideal career of a collection? How is our judgment about the material changing?—in short, the kind of questions already posed by Bourdieu (1979) in his development of the notion of cultural capital.

The semiologist—turned—French sociologist Baudrillard is (like Walter Benjamin; see below) of an older generation than most other authors discussed here, but his perspective is an important theoretical reference in the collecting literature (e.g. Belk 1995; Elsner and Cardinal 1994) as well as in cultural studies.[5] According to Baudrillard (1970) consumption goods are signs with which human beings differentiate one from another. Publicity puts pressure on people to pay attention to their ego and create a personality through the purchase of consumption goods. People are held prisoner by consumption as a social obligation and via their consumption they reproduce social inequality and anonymity, because this consumption pushes spontaneous reciprocity to the background. Moreover, we squander our own identity and many of us get confused about our own individual identities, about who we really are, in that what Igor Kopytoff (1986:89-90) would later call a "drama" of "uncertainty of identity." The consumption society reduces people to a set of natural needs, in which consumption is the only right answer to satisfy those needs. Although people are not simply a "product of their society", which would imply cultural reductionism, via their individualism they have lost "direct reciprocity". In "primitive" societies such reciprocity still exists: there is no individuality, and the natural satisfaction of needs (eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.) still implies a symbolic act. To anthropological eyes, sociologist Baudrillard—aside from the ethnocentric conflation of "primitive" societies (and also in his case without quotation marks)—generates here a caricatural and reductionist dichotomy.

In a consumption society, Baudrillard continues, most objects are made in series, cast from the same model with minimal variations. A car is essentially a car like any other one. The difference between brands, engine powers, design and colors forces individuals to choose and allows them to express personal identity in terms of social standing and fashion. Fashion has nothing to do with a natural need for change, but instead it is related to a need for social differentiation in a society that propagates social mobility (Baudrillard 1972:37). A consumption society generates both freedom of choice and coercion: we *must* make choices. Moreover, we can never completely realize the fashionable ideal because that ideal changes all the time. Everybody can follow fashion, but because of income differences and other social and economic circumstances we cannot participate in it in an equal way. This is why there is democratization as well as social differentiation and inequality. We do not consume concrete objects because of a natural need, but we rather consume signs that refer to the social position of the consumer.

Including heirlooms in our home or creating a collection of old objects corresponds, according to Baudrillard, on the one hand to a need for regression to a mythical past, childhood days or a primeval age—what I call nostalgia—and on the other hand to a yearning for authenticity. The integration of those objects in our homes allows us to create a new kind of warmth and thus to compensate somewhat for the chilliness or sterility of the modern interior. Old and antique as well as exotic objects take on this new function and thus obtain a new market value, with which we integrate them in turn into the consumption system. In Baudrillard's view, the collection also serves three specific functions. First, the collector is the owner of his collection and has a complete grip on it, as if it were a perfect pet. Second, the collection only refers to the collector. In Baudrillard's eyes it is mainly a conversation with oneself ("un discours à soi-même"; 1968:147). Thus, collecting can be seen as a narcissistic occupation of a lonely individual, thrown upon his own resources within the consumption society.[6] Third, through his objects, the collector attempts to control time. His collecting activity forms a cyclical structure through which he seeks to overcome the linear period between birth and death.[7] Here, I again add my own hypothesis that the donation of one's collection to a museum may be an appropriate means to this end, on condition that the museum actually accepts that donation – which is indeed not always the case.

Investment Strategies within Collecting Realms

The third component of my configurational approach of collecting as a cultural phenomenon is the economic or investment motive. Financier Bill Gross for example, already quoted above and depicted in the business magazine *Forbes Asia* as "worth $2.1 billion", explains his investment strategy within the collecting realm of philately as follows: "I researched the hobby from an investment standpoint, much like I researched bonds… Rare stamps are like fingerprints: You can trace them as they've traded in auctions back almost a hundred years. So I traced pricing patterns and related them to growth rate of stocks and the economy" (cited in Blankfeld 2010:142).

Although Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini claim to have some interest in the economic motive (2008:267, 273), in their analysis they dismiss it lightly.[8] Neither do Baudrillard or Pearce say much about it. Kopytoff (1986), for whom objects have a "social career", is more subtle and informative regarding this important matter. In non-Western societies, he says, it seems easier to recognize discrete spheres of exchange than in Western societies, probably because the exotic stands out and we consider the "normal" as self-evident.[9] At the national level there are objects such as national heritage, public parks and monuments, that are considered unsalable—and thus sacred and singularized (I return to this point below). Within professional groups, particular objects are tied to special rules. For instance, Kopytoff discusses the collecting of African art by (North American) Africanists, an example that fits well the key theme of this article (he did not, however, include Orientalists and Oceanists in his consideration). Somewhat more than half a century earlier (as from 1986), Africanist scholars conceived the artworks that they "happened" to encounter in the field and had taken home as having sentimental, aesthetic, or scientific value. This latter value was linked to the knowledge about the objects concerned and their ethnographic context, a knowledge those Africanists were believed to possess.[10]

They explicitly did not consider those objects commodities, and information about buying them simply in an African market, let alone from European or American dealers, would not have been mentioned. Through such a purchase the object would be considered as deprived from any scientific value. It would have been contaminated by its monetary value and commodity status. The most appropriate way to acquire an object was to receive it as a gift, either from an informant in the field or from a Ph.D. student returning from the field and bringing it to his or her supervisor. These were two discrete exchange circuits: one between a fieldworker and informants and another between a professor and Ph.D. students. The latter relationship implied a patron/client relationship. For such a professor, the only morally acceptable sale—involving money—was one against cost price to a museum, a kind of semi-donation.

Since then, the rules have changed. For a fieldworker it is no longer inappropriate to buy indigenous art from a dealer, and money does not seem to contaminate the scientific, sentimental or aesthetic aura of that art.[11] The monetary value even seems to have an attractive side, in Kopytoff's view, since several media emphasize the collecting value of (this kind of) objects obtained through purchase. The sentimental value, if they do not have a scientific value, is now usually seen as an individual choice. At the same time, some purists loudly proclaim that the circulation of African—and other tribal or "primitive"—art should be restricted to the producing societies (De l'Estoile 2007:460-470). Within the professional culture of American Africanists the rules have been relaxed anyway and the judgment about what is appropriate is left to individuals, according to Kopytoff. Since this change—and if indeed Kopytoff's evaluation is correct—the door for economic motives is open again. For young anthropologists and archaeologists with master's and Ph.D. degrees, but without much chance of a career in academia, becoming a tribal art or antiquities dealer may be just one option among many others (see Wohlschlag 2007). In that case, the investment and profit motives would clearly come to the fore.

Acquiring and Transmitting Knowledge

The fourth component of my configurational model of collecting, in addition to the three-dimensional approach of Plattner (1996), is the educational motive: acquiring and transmitting knowledge about one's collectibles. The house of Remy Carbayol on the outskirts of Pape'ete, for example, is full of glass cases crammed with Polynesian adzes, pounders, and other Neolithic tools. Carbayol's important collection also covers other parts of the South Pacific and contains among other things wooden statues from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and artworks in wood and stone from Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and New Zealand. The collection also includes a war club in the form of a paddle from the Marquesas and tapa beaters from Tonga and New Guinea. Since 2002, the Musée des Iles (the Museum of the Islands) on Tahiti had been exhibiting pieces from Carbayol's collection. These are not yet gifts, but loans, some of which eventually may turn into donations (personal communication Carbayol, Pape'ete, 2008). Giving parts of one's collection on loan to a museum may be motivated by the educational drive.

Tribal art collectors who lack a university background may claim an opposition between their own emotional-aesthetic attitude as connoisseurs and the erudite and supposedly distant attitude of academics. Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini (2008) refer in this respect to Jacques Maquet (1993 [1986]:33), who considered an aesthetic consideration of art incompatible with an analytical attitude—this, I might add, corresponds with Alfred Gell's (1998) stance. Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini (2008:95) see in Maquet's point of view a continuum with the philosophy of Jerome Stolnitz that aesthetic perception and critical evaluation of an artwork are "radically opposed". Most of the interviewed collectors see their relation to tribal art as deeply emotional and far removed from contemplation. Those who have invested themselves more in the study of traditional cultures, however, find that such knowledge increases and legitimates their taste for the object. Knowledge of the object would then be a precondition to partake in its universe.

Nevertheless, most collectors of tribal art, although not deprived of knowledge, claim some kind of ignorance or, rather, prefer to leave an important part of their emotional engagement untainted by knowledge. This observation echoes Sally Price's remark that "many connoisseurs of Primitive Art [*sic*] – particularly those involved in collecting—characterize academic knowledge as interfering with spiritual communion between viewer and object" (1989:106).

According to Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini, among these collectors the equivalent of what I call the educational motive, learning about one's collectibles, is expressed in the development of "an eye" ("*l'oeil*"), although profound knowledge about the societies of origin of the pieces often excites envy. This idea about the development of "an eye", of connoisseurship within the realm of tribal art, has already been developed by Price in discussing "The Mystique of Connoisseurship" (1989:7-22; see also De l'Estoile 2007:366-368). By referring with approval to the views of Maquet and Stolnitz, Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini seem to legitimize this positivist opposition between aesthetic appreciation and (academic) knowledge among these collectors. Tribal art collectors look for objects every day and want to explain the world in an aesthetic way. Their collection represents *their* view of the world, a view they are proud of aesthetically and that perhaps promises a certain degree of immortality. This dream of immortality is shared among collectors to a high degree, but many of them distrust museums in this respect, in particular when they are seeking an eventual promise on the part of museums to connect their personal name to their objects in a lasting way. In my eyes, this research result is probably related to the lack of biographical cases in this study. In contrast to, for example, Rolande Bonnain's earlier study (2001) on the same subject, Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini seem to limit themselves to opinions of their informants, as expressed in their "discourse". It is evident that many active collectors have an ambivalent relationship to museum institutions, an ambivalence that I think may change over time, especially when collectors reach an old age and may become increasingly preoccupied with the fate of their collection after their own death.

The following example from my Polynesian fieldwork supports this hypothesis.[12] Paul Yeou Chichong, a descendant of the Chinese diaspora on Tahiti and now an important businessman, owns a collection of about 300 artworks by famous, mainly French, modern painters. His collection also included six paintings of Gauguin, which he used to give on loan to the Gauguin Museum on Tahiti, until the local government cut in the museum budget weakened security in the museum to such a degree that Chichong had to revoke the loan for insurance reasons. The Museum of Gauguin has no Gauguin paintings of its own and lacks the funds to purchase one. At present, Chichong is negotiating with the Tahitian local government to donate his entire collection, including numerous Impressionist painters, on condition that the government provide an appropriate museum building (personal communication, Pape‘ete, 2008; see also Van der Grijp in press). In 2008, Chichong was 75 years old, and very conscious that he had to arrange all this before his own death. He claims that he already received an offer of a museum building in Paris for his donation, but he wants his collection to stay in Tahiti in order to educate modern art to Tahitian youths.

In the preceding discussion of perspectives on collecting, we have seen that many theoreticians limit their analyses to one or two dimensions only. Apart from Plattner and Pomian, none have developed a multi-dimensional approach of this cultural phenomenon. Pomian (1987) indeed distinguished a geographical dimension (the spatial distribution of collections), a social dimension (collecting being only accessible to certain categories of persons), an economic dimension (the circulation and exchange of objects), and a historical dimension. But in Pomian's model, which concerns not only motivations but also circumstances, the psychological and educational dimensions are missing. In my approach, the historical dimension is not conceived at the same level as the social and economic dimensions, since *all* dimensions are processual and should be analyzed in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives – hence the complementary notions of configuration and reconfiguration. In my view, in order to understand collecting as a cultural phenomenon, we should focus on the combination—configuration—of psychological, sociological, economic as well as educational motivations of its principal actors within the setting of increasing globalization. In the next section, I develop my ideas about the sacred aspect of private collectors' gifting to museums.

On Sacredness and Donations

In the 1930s, the German critical essay writer Walter Benjamin (1992b [1936]) had theorized about the impact of rising mass production within the realms of lithography, photography and film. Benjamin observed a threat to art in a loss of authenticity and "aura", a kind of magical force that radiates from an original artwork. In his discussion, Benjamin emphasized the socially constructed character of aesthetic authenticity in which a collector might be somewhat like a fetishist who, through ownership of an original work, seeks to share in its magical force. When an artwork becomes more common, in the eyes of Benjamin it loses its aura and magical force. This resonates with my argument that donating to a museum an original creation in the form of a private collection implies a transfer of magical force that then radiates especially on the donor. Benjamin himself collected books, in his case industrially produced goods.[13] Even rare books are, as material objects or "things", not original works—apart from handwritten books from the time before the printing press—and thus lack aura but, as Belk (1995:61) correctly observed, "their ardent pursuit, passionate acquisition, and worshipful possession in a collection can provide one." And my point is that a donation to a museum can be the result of this process, with eventually an effect of sacred radiation, aura and magical force.

Pearce defines collecting essentially as the keeping apart of selected objects, which one then considers sacred.[14] Within processes of the constitution of value, collecting occupies a special place because values are generated in an important degree through imagination rather than through needs. Collectibles are powerful actors within the play of imagination. A collection is a particular accumulation with a special social and psychological role, a role that the society of the collector considers suitable (Pearce 1995:33). Pearce also formulates it in the following words: "a collection is a group of objects, brought together with intention and sharing a common identity of some kind, which is regarded by its owner as, in some sense, special or set apart" (1995:159).

An important ritual in collecting is the auction, which transforms commodities into sacred collected items (Smith 1989; Van der Grijp 2006: chapter 9). In an auction paying "too much" for an object that is going to be part of a collection marks the sacralization of that object which, once integrated in the collection, is transcended beyond any price. According to Belk (1995) giving a personal name to such items accentuates their individualization, their anthropomorphization and their conscious de-commoditization. It is like a possession ritual in which one completely takes possession of the object, as parents provide their children with names and thus recognize them as their own. The relationship between person and object is thus also transformed into a personal relationship, between person and person. Collectibles are also clearly carriers of memories—what I call nostalgia. According to Belk, in the course of Western history the focus of the sacred has moved from religion via science to consumption. This move has not diminished the continuing need for the spiritual and the magical. For many, collecting as a ritual can meet this need. The collector becomes a kind of sacred priest who integrates normal use objects into the collection and thus sacralizes them via the aforementioned possession ritual. Belk also uses the metaphor of collecting as a sacred ritual. From my part, I again add a second stage of sacralization: the sacred gift of the collection, or a part of it, to a Temple of the Muses, a museum.

Here, I will give some more examples, this time from my recent fieldwork on museums and collectors in Taiwan. The National Taiwan Museum has about 7,000 artifacts of Taiwanese aboriginals, which is the largest collection in the world in this respect. This museum also holds the partial facial skull of the Tsochen Man, with an estimated age between 25,000 and 30,000 years, the oldest human remains in Taiwan known until now. This was a gift from a private collector who used to look for fossils in the riverbed of the Tsailiao, which flows through the town of Tsochen (or Zuojhen), in Tainan. Between 2003 and 2006, the National Palace Museum obtained a collection of some 450 antique bronze vessels from the private collector Peng Pai-dong, of Taiwanese birth, but living in Japan. This bronze collection consisting of Buddhist artworks from India, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Korea and China has been exhibited in the National Palace Museum in a special room with Peng's name in front. In 2010, a selection of 70 pieces from the Peng Collection was included in the Fifth Prefiguration Exhibition of the Museum of Asian Arts and Cultures in Chiayi. I can also refer to the collection of South Pacific artifacts and artworks donated by the Taiwanese painter and writer Liu Chi-wei, which became the basis of the permanent Oceania exhibition of the National Science and Technology Museum in Taichung. Another important Oceania collection was donated by the Japanese scholar Yoshichika Iwasa to the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung. Initially, Iwasa intended to build his own museum in Japan, but the recent economic crisis made this impossible. Next, he negotiated with the Ethnology Museum in Osaka and the National University in Tokyo, but they only wanted to take a selection from his collection. Finally, and more or less by chance, his entire collection, 20,000 pieces, found a definitive home in Taitung, where the National Museum of Prehistory made a nice catalogue (Chang 2011) with reproductions of dozens of Tongan and Fijian painted bark cloth or tapa, and where several exhibitions of parts of Iwasa's collection have already taken place.

According to Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini (2008), the relationship between tribal art collectors and their objects is one of dialogue and reciprocity as well as bewitchment and submission, of magical charm and conjuration. Collectors tend to personalize such objects. The references to ritual, magic, and sacredness imply a mixture of primitivist stereotypes and a refusal to accept certain aspects of Western societies. Moreover, there is nostalgia for the direct links between man, nature and cosmos, which have been interrupted by modernity. The societies of origin of the objects could be characterized by secrecy, closeness to origins, and authenticity. It is not perfection that makes the masterpiece, but the fact that the artwork generates a thought, metaphysical or not, a (completely) new view of the world. It is not the beauty of the objects that makes the collector dream, but it is the fact that it makes the collector dream and generates another view of the world that gives the object beauty. Beauty is thus not an intrinsic quality of the object, but a product of the interaction with the collector. Some collectors of "primitive art" cherish the idea that their pieces have kept the original sacredness and potential danger ascribed to them in their society of origin. These collectors see a confirmation of this in any eventual misfortune in their own life, and because of this inference they sometimes decide to eliminate one or more pieces temporarily or permanently from their collection. They see the sacred as something that was already there before their own existence and that will still be there after their own death.

Kopytoff (1986) observed a need for sacralization of objects in what he calls "complex societies". Old cars, for example, rapidly lose their value, but when they are older than thirty years, their value rises again, because then they are considered to be antique models. The value of old furniture falls and rises with their age, though the timespan is longer. Now, only the furniture of the generation of one's grandparents or earlier would fall in the category of antiques. In museums, artworks may be considered beyond any price, since they no longer have the status of commodities. Museum art, however, must be insured against fire and theft and, in this case, "priceless" art must be provided with a price. In my eyes, the latter is also true for the sacred gifts by private collectors to museums. Once integrated in a Temple of the Muses, these sacred gifts too have to be insured, and for that occasion one has to attach a price label to them, which implies an act of temporary de-sacralization.

The Appropriate Sacrifice of Collectors to Society

Recently, the notion of sacredness has been theorized in the following way. Maurice Godelier (1999:171) sees the sacred as a typical human relation with the origin of things in which real humans disappear and are replaced by imaginary replicas. That what disappears, according to Godelier, is man as a co-author, next to nature, of his own social existence. Human beings indeed not only live in society, as do animals, but in order to live together they also produce their society. Throughout the world this role has been ascribed to imaginary beings who are seen as more powerful than human beings, but who do not really exist. In this view, there is an inversion between cause and effect—analogous to Claude Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the inversion of binary oppositions in myths, although Godelier does not say this here. Godelier, however, does say that myths explain the origin of things and thus legitimize the order of the universe and of society. In myths, the real human beings who once domesticated plants and animals and who invented tools and weapons are replaced by imaginary beings who did not invent all these things themselves, but received them from the gods or from culture heroes.

According to Godelier, those objects are sacred that are full of meaning—Pomian's semiophores—and that are moreover sublime in beauty and surpass all other objects in this respect. These objects must be preserved and must not be given away (or exchanged or sold), because their ownership provides power and distinguishes the owner from all other members of society. In my view, the latter also holds for private collections in the heads of their owners. The collection should not be sold by one's descendants or (other) heirs after one's death, but should be preserved in a sacred environment, a Temple of the Muses, preferably with the collector's name in big letters on the door of the exhibition hall, or at least on the cover of the catalogue. The most spectacular donations are those in which private collections are transferred by their owners to museums that are open to the general public, such as the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aboriginals in Taiwan and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich, East Anglia.

Collectors donate to museums because the latter represent the imagined community (in the sense of Anderson 1983) as a whole. Here, we may with Godelier (1999:180) refer to Marcel Mauss' fourth obligation (after the first three of giving, receiving and counter-giving): gifting to the gods or, in Melanesia for example, to the spirits of nature or to the spirits of the dead, because they should be the real owners of all possessions in this world. The recurring theme in my interviews with wealthy, donating collectors is their acknowledgement that they owe their personal fortune, which was the precondition for their collection, to society: the monopoly that they could obtain in their respective branch of business for the most reputed among them, the Mitsubishi empire of Safe Lin (the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aboriginals in Taipei), the television and computer screen empire of Shi Wen-long (the Chimei Museum in Tainan, Taiwan), the first insurance empire in combination with the monopoly over the importation of certain French car brands by the modern art collector Paul Yeou Chichong in French Polynesia, and the supermarket chain of the late Lord Sainsbury in England, to mention only some examples.

In all these cases, the collectors concerned admit and even emphasize that they owe to society the important capital that they earned with their business—in these examples the imagined as well as real societies are Taiwan, Tahiti and England—and, thus, they would like to do something in return.[15] This "something" that they want to do in return must of course be in proportion with the amount of wealth that they received previously, their "debt" to society. Shi Wen-long, for example, is one of the 40 richest persons in Taiwan, and is characterized by *Forbes Asia* as worth US$ 890 million (Flannery 2012:87). Confronted with the question about his motivations for founding a museum of Western art in Taiwan, which also holds the most important collection of violins in the world including eight Stradivariuses (Chen 2012:80), his rhetorical answer was: "What would you do with your money if you were very rich?" (personal communication Shi Wen-long, Taiwan, May 2013).

In social scientific theories we have seen various hypotheses about contemporary substitutions for religion, which has a long tradition. For Auguste Comte (1830-1842), for example, religion was replaced by science, positivist sociology in particular, for Pearce—as we have seen above – by sexuality, and for Belk by consumption. I hypothesize that for collectors, the substitute for religion may be their personal collection. According to Mauss (1923-24) and Godelier (1999, 2009), the gifts that humans used to make to those imaginary beings to whom they are indebted from the outset, such as gods and spirits, consist in prayers, offerings, and sacrifices by slaughtering an animal or, sometimes, a human being. I propose that the proper offering or sacrifice from collectors to society consists in the gift of their own collection which, in symbolic perspective, may be seen as the equivalent of their own life (their extended self).

The theorists discussed in this article converge in their interpretation of the collecting process as sacred, not in a strict religious sense, but as something set apart, with connotations of seduction, love, and sexuality, as a superior form of communication with the material world. In line with this, but going further in the argument, I suggest that the donation of one's collection to a museum is, from the collector's point of view, a sacred gift that transcends the collector's lifespan and implies a superior form of communication with the rest of the world. The difference with common wills and bequests to one person or a few family members is that such donations are given to the imagined community as a whole. Moreover, gifts are not restricted to the period after the collector's death, since many donations are given by collectors while they are still alive and well. In all these cases, the point is that they find a supreme solution for coping with the idea of their own mortality.

Notes

1. It concerns, as Pomian argues, a circuit of non-utilitarian exchange in which others confirm or contest the value attributed by the owner to his objects. This is accompanied by practical problems such as the presentation of the objects, the lighting, and the circulation of the visitors. Moreover, the enclosed space has to fulfill a similar function as the frame of a painting: to allow seeing a number of objects belonging to the same whole. This imposes requirements to the architecture and the layout.

2. For an elaborate example of a donation to a museum see Ice (2009) and, for a discussion of this, Van der Grijp (2011). Art historians, such as Distel (1989), Higonnet (2009) and Macleod (2008), generally limit their examples to historical cases. For a critical study of more contemporary interventions—including massive money gifting—by private enterprises in cultural institutions in Great Britain and the USA, see Wu (2002). A recent book on museums and donors with the promising title *To Give and to Receive* (Smith Theobald and McCarthy 2011) is actually not an analysis of gifting, but a series of guidelines for candidate donators and receiving curators and museum directors in the USA.

3. Previously (Van der Grijp 2006:13), I labeled this drive the "cognitive motive". I now prefer the adjective "educational" in order to better distinguish it from the psychological motive.

4. In choosing these four categories of motivations, I do not exclude the existence of others, such as political or power seeking, for example, in the collecting activities of paramount chiefs, princes and kings in early state-formation processes. Moreover, the various motivations and mutual relationships can change over time; they can *re*configure. This is why I consider the biographical method combined with extended case studies as an appropriate method within this research field (Van der Grijp 2006, 2009, 2014).

5. Derlon and Jeudi-Ballini keep the social prestige associated with the possession of a tribal art collection (the sociological motive) consciously – but in my eyes erroneously – outside their research (2008:272).

6. Earlier (in Van der Grijp 2006:14-16), I criticized this strongly reductionist perspective on collecting, evidenced mainly in the first two points. In my view, Baudrillard seems not able to

understand collecting as a cultural phenomenon. Moreover, as Naomi Schor (1994) correctly pointed out, Baudrillard only seems to recognize male collectors.

7. In this aspect I also see a parallel with the author of a diary (Braud 2006): someone who writes leaves a trace, even if only for oneself.

8. The tribal art collectors in Derlon's and Jeudi-Ballini's book (2008:249) prefer others to believe that their first purchases were not expensive and that, in the degree that their taste and insight developed, they made good finds for relatively small money. All this is meant to say that they constructed their collection because of their personal merits and not because of their wealth. This does not alter the fact that they *now* do pay considerable sums of money from time to time.

9. In Western societies we keep the spheres of exchange of persons and material objects strictly separated, according to Kopytoff. Money gifts to universities may be suspect, unless they are transformed for example into a university building that carries the name of the donor.

10. In France, for example (but more recently), Paulme (1956) and Laude (1966).

11. For a concise case study of a professor-fieldworker-collector within an Oceania context, see Van der Grijp (2009:64-65).

12. With thanks to Bruno Saura, who brought me in contact with Paul Yeou Chichong and also (see above) with Rémy Carbayol.

13. A cultural contextualization of Benjamin's collecting activities is to be found in Van der Grijp (2006:61-65). Benjamin was, for example, conscious of the fact that book collectors are not primarily interested in reading books, but in acquiring and possessing them (1992a [1931]:63-64).

14. "Collections are sets of objects [which] are an act of the imagination, part corporate and part individual, a metaphor intended to create meanings which help to make individual identity and each individual's view of the world. Collections are gathered together for purposes which are seen by their possessors as lifting them away from the world of common commodities into one of special significance, one for which 'sacred' seems the right word" (Pearce 1995:27).

15. This discourse of acknowledgement may paradoxically be accompanied by the current discourse of successful (capitalist) entrepreneurs that they *make* the economy of a society and, consequently, that the wealth circulating within the society is owed to *their* entrepreneurial activities, thus occulting the contribution by the workers as well as the consumers of their products to the constitution of that wealth.

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