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1: COLLECTION: DISPARATE FRAGMENTS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF COLLECTING. WHAT IS A COLLECTION? WHERE DOES IT BEGIN, AND WHERE DOES IT END?

For the first edition of OSV., **Freuchen**, **Major** and **Tenningen** made two booklets. *#3: Zoology* is a visual field guide to the exhibition, while *#1: Collection* is a written account of the collection as a concept. Read the full text below.

§ 1

The collection precedes the object and makes its appearance possible.

§ 2

Every collection is greater than the sum of the objects it contains. The description of the collection is also part of its scope. When it is possible to describe the works individually, it is down to the fact that the collection is already present in them. This goes for existing works, as well as for ones that have been destroyed and works that have not yet materialised. Detaching a work from the collection entails expelling it in its raw materiality. In practice that would mean the annihilation of the object, but not its identity. Since each expulsion carries with it a faint echo of the object's origin in the collection, we cannot speak of a fallen nature. It is typical of the fetishisation of the individual work that it is supported by such expulsion fantasies. Hence the principle: 'Not the work in the collection, but the collection in the work.'

§ 3

A quick glance at the long history of collecting, from prehistoric burial hoards and the temple collections of antiquity to the museums of today, indicates a distinct continuity. Seen from this point of view, the development of early advanced civilizations in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean does not constitute a break with earlier societies of nomads and hunter-gatherers. On the contrary, there is a tangible link between them, something which the numerous accumulations of weapons, jewellery and tools speak to. If we go to the museums of today, we find the same continuity. Indeed, the collections are classified thematically, in such a way that the war museum's grenade supply, and John Singer Sargent's watercolours from the trenches are presented separately. Here a consideration for protocol divides what in times past was stored together.

§ 4

The boom in national collections since the close of the 1700s coincides with the entrance of the bourgeoisie onto the stage of history. Henceforth, the Princely, Imperial and Royal collections move into buildings specifically accommodated for the general public. Around 1730, the last direct heir to the Medici dynasty donated her collections to what would later become the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. In 1828 the collection of paintings belonging to the kings of Saxony was handed over to the state administration and opened to the public. Two years later, Ludwig I's sculpture collection was made accessible at the Glyptothek in Munich. At the same time, the Altes Museum opened its doors, and 1836 saw the completion of the Alte Pinakothek. In 1842, the National Gallery in Christiania (now Oslo) opened, built around Johan Christian Dahl's private collection. Over the course of time, iconic works such as Dahl's Hellefossen and Fearnley's Labrofossen became part of a museum that would help the population to 'visualize nationhood'. In such a perspective, European nation building over the following century emerged as an unintended consequence of a long-standing obsession with collecting.

§ 5

In all collections there are objects that have one or more characteristics in common. When an object without any obvious common features turns up, it is easy to describe it in a way that separates it from the rest. It is this separation that constitutes the collection.

§ 6

The antique temple collections around the Mediterranean have their roots in archaic burial hoards of marble, amber and bronze artefacts. Like the grave goods, the temple treasures were meant to mediate between this world and the world of the gods. As Snodgrass drily observes, the Greek collections were also in a real sense 'war museums', overloaded with weapons and trophies from campaigns and conquests. It is these war collections, which in the Roman Empire are connected with imperial might, that are the precursor to the national museums of today. Like Napoleon and Göring later, the Roman emperors and the generals collected works of art from the provinces. The collections of Pompey, Titus and Hadrian were among the largest in the history of the empire.

§ 7

In scholarly literature a distinction is often made between (active) collection and (passive) accumulation. In the first case, it is the collector who selects the works, while in the latter it is the objects that have assumed the lead role. It is also common to rank unfinished collections higher than limited series (*assortments*). Examples of such assortments are matchboxes of a specific brand, lithographs from a particular artist, sports cars from one German manufacturer, etc. While it is easy to determine the extent and concept of the finite series, collections based on contingent dimensions such as history and taste are far more difficult to fathom. It is this unfathomableness that paves the way for the Collector, who with exquisite discernment and capital can act as the true artist: the *bricoleur*.

§ 8

Even the smallest collection requires administration. As is often the case, it was the Romans who first formalized the task in the form of an office. By now Augustus had appointed a committee to administer the imperial collections and the buildings that housed them. Later, under Septimius Severus, we learn of the appointment of a *procurator a pinacothecis*, a high ranking official with responsibility for the state's collection of paintings. Towards the end of the third century, the collections are governed as a fully developed 'state within the state', supported by procurators, collectors, art historians and advisors. Henceforth the collections are dissolved in step with the empire, before they are scattered across the entire region. Individual works, such as the Laocoön group or the Portland vase, suddenly reemerge after having lain in the ground undisturbed for centuries, attracting maximum interest.

§ 9

Collections are not only historical, but also transcendental categories. Just as we cannot imagine substantive work outside of space, or temporary work outside of time, we cannot imagine an art object independent of its potential to connect with other objects through the collection. The object is detached and independent in so far as it can exist in all conceivable situations. But this form of independence arises out of the collection, and through that displays a de facto dependence. The act of imagining a work detached from any collection, or of thinking of the collection without the individual objects, is as feasible as stating the coordinates of a point beyond the scope of the coordinate system.

§ 10

In the collection, transitory work and work of uncertain provenance is returned to its rightful context. Pointing out an origin outside the collection, or showing contrasts between the collection's current form and the work's creation, is only of historical interest in as much as the individual object first becomes visible in relation to the collection. This point can be easily illustrated with the following recourse: at what point did the Laocoön group become part of the Vatican collections? Upon acquisition and the first public viewing in February 1506? During the unearthing and excavation one month prior to that? Upon Pliny the Elder's description of the sculpture in Emperor Titus' palace in the year 72? Upon the production of the original bronze sculpture on Rhodes two centuries prior to that? At the moment of the idea for this production? At the idea of the idea?

§ 11

Each collection is *temporary*. With the founding of the Royal Society in London in 1660, objects immediately began to be collected for scientific study. A few years later Robert Hooke was named *Keeper of the Repository*. As manager of the collection he sets about acquiring a group of shells and 'natural rarities'. This acquisition marks the beginning of a race towards completion, with the quest for the complete collection resulting in titanic accumulations. Right after the acquisition, members of the society urged that collecting be intensified, and in 1669 they employed Thomas Willisel to scour the British Isles in search of objects for a 'universal taxonomy' of natural phenomena. The goal is nothing less than a *complete* representation of natural history. Twelve years later, in 1681, the botanist Nehemiah Grew published a *catalogue raisonné* of the collection at that point in time. In the preface, he remonstrates with those who seek to limit the collection to 'things strange and rare'. In order for it to invoke universal worth, he writes, it must also accommodate 'the most known and common amongst us'.

§ 12

Grew's inclusion of the most common and known in the notion of the collection constitutes a transition from private cabinets of curiosities to universal collections under scientific auspices. In the long term, this transition is the source of new disciplines, which each describes in its own way the accumulated material. In 1733, Linné made his first large collection of plants from Lapland. Afterwards, the descriptions were published consecutively in books such as *Systema Naturae*, *Flora Lapponica* and *Species Plantarum*. Contemporary with Linné, Winckelmann undertook a series of comparative studies in the public galleries in Rome and Florence. In 1764, his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* was published, a chronological account of the history of art in antiquity conveyed through organic terms such as growth, maturity and decline.

§ 13

Winckelmann's famous comments that the Laocoön group constitutes 'a perfect rule of art' must be read on the basis of the collection as a phenomenon. Not until collecting, juxtaposing and comparing, does it become possible to read the lines of development on history's enormous palm. Long before Lamarck and Darwin, Winckelmann classifies the works of art into sets of Greek originals and their Roman variations. The sets multiply as the written account gradually draws nearer to his own time, right until they break up into a throng of variants with no obvious affinity to the masterpieces of antiquity. In an effort to remedy the broken line of succession, Winckelmann prescribes his classicistic programme of returning to the Greeks and imitating them—not to replicate the origin, but to make ourselves unique (*unnachamlich*). Again, it is the collection that marks the concept of the work with its profound fingerprint.

§ 14

The accumulated meaning of the words uncovers connections which in everyday language are lost under a thick layer of provisional usage. If we take the word thing, it is derived from the Old Norse þing and the Germanic **þinga*, which means both object and assembly. Both **þinga* and the Gothic word for time, *þeihs*, belong to the Indo European verbal subject **ten-k-*, 'to draw together'. In all these instances, *thing* is a conglomerate of assembly, object and time.

§ 15

The notion of the collection that we are attempting to account for here is analogous to the idea of parliament. As an institution, the Norwegian Storting does not only accommodate the National Assembly sitting at any one time. It also has at its disposal the legislation of the preceding assemblies, as well as the infrastructure and procedures for the enlistment of new representatives. Any attempt to reduce the Storting to the current assembly of elected representatives, or even worse, to equate the yellow brick building at the top of parliament hill with the country's legislature, confuses politics with the political, the actual with the potential. Naturally, the power (*potentia*) to pass laws is far more comprehensive than what takes place during question time or during the tabling of new motions.

§ 16

The constitutional sovereignty of the King does not show itself in the constitution's confirmation of his irreproachability and immunity, but in the power to collect. This power nevertheless presupposes that the assembly exists in advance, and that it can simply be brought up to date in the form of a parliamentary meeting. In countries like Denmark, England and France, the head of state also possesses the right to *dissolve* parliament, something which in Norway has been regarded as an unwarranted expansion of authority, in as much as the king only has the power to collect that which already exists: 'When the Storting is not assembled, it may be summoned by the King if he finds it necessary.' (The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway, § 69)

§ 17

The way in which the parts are linked indicates the structure of the collection. It would not be an exaggeration to call this structure the work's cosmos. Even though it is possible to imagine the individual work as a detached object, it is only possible to think of this detachment in relation to the collection as cosmos and totality. For that reason, a collection can only be dissolved by having it pass into other forms. Even historically closed collections, such as the imperial collections in the Habsburg dynasty or Abbot Suger's collections in the Basilica of Saint Denis, would of necessity preserve this openness. We find an Old Testament expression of the open nature of the collection in the *Book of Psalms*, where accumulation stands in contrast to the perishability that characterises the possession of objects: 'In vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.' (Psalms 39:6)

§ 18

The relationship between king, constitution and parliament is intricate and rests on a transcendental notion of the collective authority of the people. The elected representatives both act on behalf of the population and impose new laws, which casts deep ambiguity on their legitimacy. This ambiguity can be described as an instance of Russell's Paradox, where the elected representatives simultaneously find themselves both inside and outside the assembly they personally represent. Eidsvoll Assemblyman, Lauritz Andreas Oftedal, even mentions this in a comment to the Eidsvoll Assembly in 1814, where he depicts the members as both participants and spectators: 'This Assembly, which we also have the Honour to witness, has never been regarded by us as anything other than a Constitutional Committee personally chosen by the People, which upon the Invitation of the Regent should devise and draw up the Provisions by which the independent Norwegian People want to be governed and to participate in the Government. We have never been able to imagine it as a Rigsdag, under which Name we do not know either, that this Undertaking is proclaimed. Nor do we object to entrusting any of the stated Authorities other than to act in the Name of those living within the Borders personally determined by the Prince Regent.' (*Annex to Main Protocol*, No.85, Eidsvoll bakken, 13 May 1814)

§ 19

The promises given to museums and galleries by individual private collectors of the 'perpetual right of disposal' of the works holds metaphysical implications. A collection is either allocated 'in perpetuity' in such a way that it already embodies a piece of eternity here and now. Or else eternity is shifted to a point outside the moment so that the collection's present form refers to what is to come. Tackling the problem from the opposite direction by setting a right of disposal of limited duration on the works does not remove this implication, since the concept of eternity is then transferred to the collection itself. In both instances, there is talk of an understanding of time formulated as *sub specie collectionis*.

§ 20

A psychoanalytic interpreter could not help but see the idea of the completion of the collection as the fetishisation of the unattainable object of desire. Here the missing object becomes both the reason for the collection and its possible terminus. Should one acquire the object, collecting would cease immediately. The same applies in instances where in the end reality gets the upper hand. Typically, La Bruyère has portrayed the unfortunate collector Democedes among his many *characters*. As a collector he has devoted his life to graphic print, and even though the holdings have over time managed to fill several halls, Democedes despairs over the absence of a single part: 'I labour under a very serious affliction which will one day or other cause me to give up collecting engravings; I have all Callot's etchings, except one, which, to tell the truth, so far from being the best, is the worst he ever did, but which would complete my collection; I have hunted after this print these twenty years, and now I despair of ever getting it; it is very trying!' (La Bruyère, *The Characters*, XIII. Of Fashion).

§ 21

The difficulties of separating the imperial collections from the state's property remain a recurrent theme throughout the history of the Roman Empire. The plundering that followed the conquests resulted in vast importations of works of art and treasures to Rome. Also, in the provinces, governors and lower statesmen acted as zealous collectors. According to Cicero, the most reckless of them, Gaius Verres, took the collection to a 'manic and fierce level'. As the governor of Sicily, Verres seized jewellery, silver and Hellenic bronze statues whenever he came across them. In the trial against Verres, Cicero relates how his insatiable zeal (*studium*) for objects rapidly transformed into disease (*morbus*), rage (*furor*) and insanity (*amentia*). Rather than bridle the desire, Verres sought to give it free rein, something which for Cicero became a moral *exemplum* of corruption, a lack of moderation and fraud.

§ 22

'I said just now, O judges, that there were many censers, in almost every house in fact; I assert also, that now there is not even one left. What is the meaning of this? What monster (*monstrum*), what prodigy (*prodigium*) did we send into the province? Does it not appear to you that he desired, when he returned to Rome, to satisfy not the covetousness of one man, not his own eyes only, but the insane passion of every covetous man (*omnium cupidissimorum insanias*), for as soon as he ever came into any city, immediately the Cibyratic hounds of his were slipped, to search and find everything. If they found any large vessel, any considerable work, they brought it to him with joy; if they could hunt out any smaller vessel of the same sort, they looked on those as a sort of lesser game, whether they were dishes, cups, censers, or anything else.' (Cicero, *Against Verres. Second pleading*, Book 4, ch. XXI)

§ 23

In recent times, differing degrees of autocracy or democracy have also been established through the administration of public collections. In the autumn of 1933, Göring set about planning his private Carinhall estate in Brandenburg. Concurrent with that development, his own collection of art also grew. The wealth and abundance were overwhelming, even for those who have daily dealings with the collections in the Rijksmuseum and the Louvre. At its height, the collection encompassed 1,375 paintings (including the work of Cranach, Poussin, Velázquez, Titian and Tintoretto), 250 sculptures, 108 tapestries, 200 historical pieces of furniture, 60 rugs, 75 stained glass paintings and 150 other objects. Most of the works came from Dutch art dealers or from the Jeu de Paume in Paris. To make room for the art, Göring ordered the building of a large banqueting hall with pillars made of Verona marble. Here, the tables are covered with silk, the chairs upholstered in white leather, and Gobelins marked with the letter H encircled by laurels in gold embroidery. Hanging on the walls are tapestries with allegorical depictions of Youth, Health and Joy.

§ 24

Archaeologically speaking, the landfill is of equal importance as temple collections and royal tombs. The discovery of antique papyrus fragments at a landfill in the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus in 1896 encompasses more than 500,000 bits, including some of the oldest preserved gospel texts. The fact that these fragments are not stored with regard to preservation, but rather are compiled from the extensive *mémoire involontaire* of a collective author, makes it natural to question the conservation regimes of today as well. Here, recycling centres like Smestad, Grefsen and Grønmo stand out as seasonal versions of Oslo's *salon des refusés*. At the other end of the scale, we find the public collection pampering to the collective memory through selection and preservation. At both ends there is a steady flow of people who want to deposit their collections in public depositories.

Oslo Collected Works OSV. booklets

§ 25

The ensemble of objects, together with their description, form the collection's totality. Destroyed works also belong to the notion of the collection. The same applies to the description, and to the destroyed description. To reduce a collection to its current holdings is to make an inventory. While it was previously held that the documentation of transitorily realised works was what ensured their belonging in the collection, it is natural to make an about-turn: it is not the documentation which is due to the collection, but the collection which forms the basis of the idea of registration, portrayal and description. In individual collections there is also a concurrence between objects and documentation, such that the collection becomes a material register of itself.

§ 26

Luhmann's notion of self producing (*autopoietic*) systems can easily be applied to that of the collection. The significance of what the Germanic hordes deposited in the ground three to four thousand years ago can be discovered today in public galleries and archives. 'Princely' graves like those in Bornhöck, Helmsdorf and Leubingen are not merely the sites of historical events of past significance. On the contrary, the graves point the way forward to the systems of collection and accumulation of today. As Pearce notes, there is 'a clear and unmistakable line of descent which runs from the hoards and graves of the Bronze Age, through the shrines and temples of the Iron Age and classical world, and the royal halls and churches of the medieval world, to the royal collections of early modern times, and so to the museums of the past three centuries.'

§ 27

The monastic collections of the Middle Ages are a cross between the Germanic princely graves and the Greek temple treasures around the Mediterranean. A new element can be glimpsed in the advancement of relics, where the mortal remains of holy women and men are sold for vast sums. The trade in relics gradually grows into a specialised market, where increasing demand is served by a steadily growing supply. The supply of remains seems unlimited and forms the basis of a heavily taxed *necronomy*. The collection of Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg is significant in this respect; over the course of his life he made five pilgrimages to Rome on the hunt for relics. In time he was granted the right to mint his own coins, and in the year 958 using self issued currency he paid for a gold reliquary with the remains of Saint Maurice. After Bishop Ulrich's death and canonisation in 993 his own remains were enshrined, and a chapel raised over the reliquary. Later, Emperor Otto III's entrails were also buried next to Ulrich's grave.

§ 28

The relic has its roots in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, where the wine and the bread are transmuted into the body and blood of Christ. In the pursuit of highly treasured memorabilia, it is also common for the collector to cannibalise the person being collected. Through the sweatband of John McEnroe or the compact of Eva Braun, the collector does not merely seek to honour the deceased, but to possess a bit of their life. As in every collection, here there is talk of a pars pro toto mentality, where the part represents the whole. Nonetheless, with surplus production in the trade in relics, determining which totality it refers to is not straightforward, and in an indictment from 1543, Calvin writes that accumulating has reached a level such that each of the apostles has three or four heads, six or eight legs. The multiplication of the individual apostle is nevertheless little compared to the monstrous collection of human remains, which the church oversees, and which in total far exceeds the sanctuaries they are meant to incarnate: 'What would it be if we were to pile up the whole multitude contained in three or four thousand dioceses, in twenty or thirty thousand abbacies, forty thousand monasteries, nay more, in the whole multitude of parishes and chapels?' (Jean Calvin, *An Inventory of Relics*).

§ 29

The museum is to the collection, what the mausoleum is to the dead body: here time is frozen, but not in immortality. Instead death is drawn out like mummified infinity.

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