

# Collector frames, cinema and literature

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to review the author studies about the singularizing processes of images and objects according to the biographies of the collectors. The intention is to show the elements that configure the collectors' frames into situational arrangements. After that, three contemporary art works are analyzed because they explore the potential of these frames in the construction of scripts and plots of filmic and literary narratives in order to establish the correspondences among them. From these established correspondences it is argued that the collector frames reproduce situational illusions of contending meanings of reality and action and that these can be also re-signified in collective illusions that open up the sense of reality to new possibilities of action.

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## Collections as objects and biographies

The relationship between collections and biographies is a theme that goes through my life trajectory, since childhood and also refers to the trajectory of the object of investigation that brought me to the topic discussed here. The trajectory of this study began when my grandmother died in 1995. Mrs. Anézia was 84 years old then. She was born in Natividade da Serra, a rural village at Serra do Mar (a mountain range by the sea), at Paraíba Valley, in São Paulo state, Brazil, where she has spent all her childhood and adolescence, before moving when she got married to Taubaté, the main city of the region, where she remained until her death. A very religious woman, devoted to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and to Saint Joseph, Mrs. Anézia was a seamstress besides housewife. After the sorrow at her death, my father conducted an inventory of her few possessions. Among various personal objects he separated, awakened in me an immense curiosity about a huge collection of printed images of saints ("santinhos") that she kept in a box, with the photos of the family, many prayer cards of the popular Sacred Heart of Jesus Calendar and a few books of Catholic doctrine and of divulgation of the life of saints. I asked my father if I could keep the material with me and took it home, where I read, classified and systematized it for a first interpretation of those images and texts.

Considered as an ensemble, the materials allow composing a diary of Grandma's life, notably influenced by an intense dedication to the religious principles of Catholicism. I could realize that all the moments of your life or life cycles as we experience them were accounted and highlighted in prayer cards of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, stored according to the importance of events or texts printed on the verse of the prayer cards. Other events such as births, first holy communions, birthdays, weddings, deaths and 7th day masses were recorded in a multitude of "santinhos" she kept preserved for decades. She offered these prayer cards, 'santinhos' and images to relatives or received these items from them covered with long dedications, with the pictures of some missionaries with whom she kept in touch for many years, during her activities as tithe collector and coordinator of catechesis in the parish of Immaculate Conception, close to her house. The analysis of these prayer cards revealed the process of construction of her religious background and also her place in the network of people where she acted as an intense diffuser of those

very same Catholic principles she professed. Among other findings, I was amazed at the idea that those religious images were a powerful vehicle of mediation of the social exchanges my grandmamma so strongly encouraged. Since this first contact with the meaning of life cycles recorded by Mrs. Anézia on her collection of printed images of saints, I decided to research and reflect upon the relationship among the elements involved. This decision resulted in varied investigation processes on the relationship between imagery and popular religion, where I sought to define the variations of a field of production of meanings that guide the religious ethos in Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

The unfolding of this field of production was opening up and articulating with other spheres of action and reflection and made it possible to elaborate investigations that transited from religious relations to the correspondence of the practices of collecting and cycles of life of the collectors.<sup>2</sup> From this issue, another transit occurred to investigate the cultural formations of collections as encoding individual and collective memory. In this transit, it was evidenced the assemblies that the collectors operate with these repertoires in processes of cultural patrimonialization in the context of contemporary political valuation of tangible and intangible resources. The investigations carried out in these transitions allowed the perception that the collections kept by people, according to personal meanings, were connected with memory registers or registers of the permanence of things, in a chosen cycle of life, as resources for and supports of communication in the interaction processes.<sup>1</sup>

In this view, I realized that people project a sense of attachment or affection to their collections, a sense established in the biographical dynamic that conditions the sense of preservation and the safeguarding of these objects. This occurs because, as we separate certain objects of their "natural" environment, we transform these objects, attributing to them properties that distinguish them from other objects. The attribution of printed meaning to such properties defines and constitutes

<sup>1</sup>We shall consider, for example, the description that Marshall<sup>3</sup> makes of a collecting circumstance observed: "1. In a very humble home in Porto Alegre, through the door, you can see, very well preserved and carefully displayed in frames on the wall, a collection of key chains and, on the wall nearby, a collection of caps, with impeccable work of curatorship, all the objects strictly aligned. Rua Antonio Divan, 178, Bairro Teresópolis, the door always opens." The final phrase of this description indicates the wish for communication inherent in the collections.

the possibilities of correspondence that the collections express with the events of life and their meanings. This expressive correspondence impels the individuals to dedicate necessary care to the maintenance of the collections. This process creates a familiarity with the objects. It is a way of extracting the object from its context and approaching it to a 'customized' context or environment, morphing its properties according to a sense of familiarity, that, with a perspective afforded through the duration in time, acquires value, is used as a good and as a social marker.<sup>3</sup> This attachment or affection is a form of appreciation due to the familiarity that is established with the collections and constitutes what might be called a collector frames.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, besides realizing that the acts of collecting have a wide variety of stimuli and intentions, it has become important to emphasize that these practices should be thought in relation to the biography of people, as Kopytoff<sup>4</sup> suggests, when analyzing the relationship between the biography of individuals and the objects they acquire as a singularizing process. For this author, the commoditization of objects occurs in a "homogeneous area of goods", whilst a singularizing process occurs in an "extremely varied area of private valuations".<sup>4</sup> Since the establishment of a good as collectible, the transition from one area to another happens as the insertion of objects in biographically determined situations turns them "culturally marked as a particular type of thing"<sup>4</sup> that acquires uniqueness. This implies considering that, in the configuration of a toponymy of collections or of the lived experiences of the collectors, these objects are perceived or thought of in ways in which such singularities are exteriorized. The question raised in this dyad formed by the collections, ranging from forms of goods and cultural property, would then correspond to contemporary conflict between the production and singularizing of the objects, "causing what is perceived as cognitive abnormalities, inconsistency of values and uncertainties for action".<sup>4</sup> In other words, as well as the objects acquiring 'biographies' in the relational singularizing processes they establish with their owners, they also shape the biographies of the subjects, through the channeling of individual impulses that condition them as culturally singularized goods. This dyad operationalizes a social imperative of fulfillment that conditions the performances of the actors when they produce, appropriate or manipulate objects. This puts in a luminal situation the various symbolic elements as well as the social factors involved, that may be followed or transgressed.<sup>5</sup>

## Collectible objects and the formation of collector self: between guarding and exhibiting

In addition to the perception associating collections with the biographies of individuals, the investigation of the correspondence between collections and life cycles of collector's will change. These changes occur owing to the passage from one cycle to another or even to changes of duration within the same cycle. These affect the collector frame, both in updating the identity of a collected object according to new properties, or in diversifying collectible objects

<sup>2</sup>If concepts and paradigms should be understood as models of thought that consolidate the structure of scientific fields, becoming legitimate models according to prevailing and accepted social values, according to Kuhn,<sup>7</sup> the frames better define the set of explanatory elements of a phenomenon that acquire cognitive effectiveness in a particular category of application of senses.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the frames are important elements of distinction of the attitudes or elaborations of knowledge, in subfields of knowledge or societary expertise, normally recognized in the academic literature of anthropology, for example, as re-significations of practices and analytical concepts.

in order to reframe the experienced changes.<sup>2</sup> In the investigations carried out, we found that the collections that are diversified in the form of externalization of collectible objects hold particular histories and affectivities constituted in various interactions, which are mixed with the biographical trajectory of the collectors. On the other hand, collections that have kept the identity between subject and objects limited to a form of externalization keep memories of a cycle experienced by collectors, but also valued emotionally. Extending this perception, my aim now is to emphasize that these forms of externalization and affection diversify themselves as long as the collections enable individuals to constitute social networks and vice versa. Therefore, I understand that the meaning attributed to such a collection extrapolates its correspondence with a life cycle within which it was originated, acquiring new meanings, incorporating new references and maturing with their owners.<sup>3</sup> This is the meaning attributed to various stories associated with objects in the collections, according to the surveyed individuals. In this sense, the perception of the forms of exteriorization is exposed as a discursive resource, as the practice of collecting tends toward communication. However, this resource stifles a perception movement that is opposite, although complementary, that is the internalization of the self in relation to the internalization of the objects. These complementary movements are constitutive of the collector self. According to Mead, the world we live in is a ground of social objects: objects whose existence is implied in our own existence as "self". The constitution of the self-as-object, the identification of the "self" as the center of activity and the object as another center of activity always occurs as identity of response.<sup>9</sup>

I have found examples of these phenomena in the organized display of the objects of the collections in the domestic and personal spaces of the collectors. A constant occurrence in the cases observed is the fact that the organization of the objects is conditioned by classifications established in the network of the collectors, enhancing the senses seized in these interactions. They are rationalized collections, as described by Marshall,<sup>6</sup> but this rationalization is made possible by the negotiation of meanings initially established among collectors and their significant others (the peers in the interactions around the collections), to a meaning of negotiation of them with a generic other,<sup>10</sup> or organized (those who I recognize as potential peers, based on the meanings of their actions as seen in and through such frames). On the other hand, the collections that are kept without display can be understood as a depletion of the sense of collecting, interrupted by the end of a life cycle to which the collected objects corresponded in action. Without identity of response in relation to these collections, they are absent of the activity centers that constitute the self of individuals in their new life cycles. In such cases, the collections lie in drawers, boxes, folders, or other locations and attachment with or affection established for them can be periodically renewed, as personal memories update or require them. For instance, adults may well want to assert themselves as significant others for their children, as their parents before did with them, but they are not always successful in convincing their children to keep the collection. This happens probably because, for the interests that regulate the activities center of their children, the presented objects do not present as updated references to constitute conceptions and systems of affirmation of a will compatible with the contemporary experience.

<sup>3</sup>In other theoretical conceptions, differentiation would seek to distinguish and produce a good and socially legitimized belief,<sup>16,17</sup> or even as a good, would serve as a ritual support of social tagging.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, we can consider the homology sought since the beginning of this study between images and object collections. The physical “thing” exists as perceived object or manipulated object, never before. As the perceived objects exist in time, they can be distant objects; as manipulated objects are real, they exist, are exclusively in the present. Even though an object be distant from my hand or physically out of reach, its reality can be only experienced by an act, even though it is an act that reaches and builds the future [...] The transition of the distance to the experience of contact occurs when the person assumes a “reflexive attitude” toward his perception of the object.<sup>9</sup> It is an individual process of internalization in the interaction with the order or with the material dynamic of culture that constitutes his/her identity of action. To touch, manipulate and understand objects involves understanding oneself in this interaction. Analyzing this interaction involves recognizing “[...] a key role in the construction and preservation of the reality and, definitely, to observe how the relation of the self with the physical world takes shape as social relation. [...] The objects are relevant objects because they allow the definition of an embodied “self” within a concrete environment”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, this reflexive attitude toward collections allows us to understand the implication of the dynamics of material and immaterial goods in the production of sociability that is peculiar to people's life cycles. From this perspective, I present another prominent variant of previous investigations. It deals with realizing the implication above also can help to understand the ambivalence between presence and absence that characterizes the relationship between the collectors and collected things that are mediated by the modulation of figurative reality<sup>11</sup> that produce interchanges between figurative and non-figurative images.<sup>12,13</sup> In this pursuit, I follow the guidance of Chanquía,<sup>14</sup> who takes the notion of “contracts of visibility” from Jean-Claude Passeron,<sup>15</sup> to express “that something that guides the reception of an image by an audience, offering to the subjects, attached to the contracts, a look and a, comment that impresses the reception of a particular work”.

A situational analysis of this concept refers to the description of three artistic narratives whose scripts or plots are based on the relationship between the selves and the collectors' frames (Figure 1) in interpersonal or public interactions: the movies *Un Cuento Chino*<sup>4</sup> and *The Invisible Collection*<sup>5</sup> and the book *The Private Collection*, by Georges Perec.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 1** Movie poster: *A Chinese Tale*.

<sup>4</sup>*Un Cuento Chino* (2011). Argentine production, dramatic comedy directed by Sebastián Borensztein, starring Ricardo Darín, Muriel Santa Ana and Ignacio Huang.

<sup>5</sup>*The Invisible Collection* (2013). Brazilian production, drama directed by Bernard Attal, starring Vladimir Brichta, Walmor Chagas Rosa and Ludmila.

## Art and collector's frames: between the visible and the invisible

The film *Un Cuento Chino* is about the unusual meeting and coexistence of Roberto and Jun. Roberto, owner of a hardware store in Buenos Aires, who has rigid and compulsive habits. Lonely, he wakes up every morning, takes some coffee with cored bread and get to work, where he deals with unscrupulous suppliers and neurotic and annoying customers. At the end of each day, he goes to his home, nearby the store, to eat the same dinner and to start reading newspapers from several Spanish-speaking countries. He looks for absurd news and when he finds examples of this, he cuts them out to arrange them in an album. Usually, he then has something to drink and goes to bed at 11 p.m. In the house there is a courtyard filled with trinkets of which he cannot get rid of.<sup>6</sup> Besides the habit of looking for, cutting out and arranging newspaper items, Roberto also orders and collects small glassware objects that he displays in a cabinet with a picture of his deceased mother, whose grave he visits and offers flowers every week. Jun is a Chinese man in Argentina. After the sudden death of his bride, caused by the shock of a cow that fell from the sky exactly on the boat where they were in a lake in the province of Tsuchen, the young man decided to abandon his life as painter of handmade toys in China and move to Argentina in search an uncle (ta pao) who lived there. Jun has his uncle's address tattooed on his arm. One afternoon, as Roberto had taken some time off to watch plane takeoffs and landings at the airport, Jun is suddenly thrown out of a taxi, after being robbed by the taxi driver. Without money and without speaking a word of Spanish, Jun approaches Roberto asking for help. The tumultuous relationship between these two men has just begun. Roberto is a man full of obsessions, who has just one friend, the one who brings the newspapers in Spanish and has a sister (Mari) who, after her husband's death, fell in love with Roberto, but is always politely rejected by him. Roberto has no way but to admit Jun at this house. However, to share the same space is unbearably disturbing to Roberto, although he's a good guy and would not have the nerve to abandon the young Chinese alone. So Roberto does all he can to help his new friend to find his uncle.

While the uncle cannot be found, the coexistence of the two men will expose problematic situations, owing to the lack of dialogue and cultural differences. At one point in the film, Roberto and Mari find in a delivery of Chinese food the opportunity to communicate with Jun. Thus, some aspects of life of both men are uncovered by the mediation of a deliveryman. Almost at the end of the film and after living out very serious crisis, Roberto invites the deliveryman to dinner with them and asks him to translate his conversation with Jun. In this last conversation, Jun asks about the habit of reading and collecting news from newspapers. Roberto explains that he collects absurd stories that confirm how life is for sure absurd and meaningless. Jun responds, then, that for him everything in life has a meaning, even the death of his bride. At this reflexive moment of the film, Jun asks why Roberto had started his collection of absurd news and this question made the latter talk about his life. Getting away from the horrors of World War II, his father had moved from Italy and settled in Argentina, where he started working at the hardware store. Roberto was already a young man when the Falklands War started and he enlists in but without telling his father. After “the humiliating defeat of the Argentines” (sic), Roberto returns home to discover that his father had died soon after reading a news item in an Italian newspaper that he used read,<sup>6</sup> A maximum of every collector, according Aleixo Dischinger, “who guards what does not need always has what needs” (quoted in Marshall 2005: 17).

which provided a picture of Roberto on the battlefield. This incident is the cause of the bitterness of Roberto, since, to him, life (obviously) has no meaning.

To 'prove' that life has no meaning at all, on contrary to what Jun believes Roberto shows him the news on the album and begins to read some of the more unusual ones. By chance, he starts reading exactly the news of the death of Jun's bride caused by falling cow from heaven. The cow had fallen from a plane loaded with cattle which was being kidnaped by cattle thieves. On the run, shot by armed peasants, in order to stabilize the plane, the thieves release the load and, absurdly, one of the cows reached the two grooms who strolled romantically on a boat. After hearing the story, Jun said that it was exactly his story. Roberto was stunned, not believing in coincidence. After this scene, the film heads towards a redemptive ending for both men. In the case of Roberto, it opens the possibility of a romantic relationship with Mari and a life with fewer obsessions. Here, it is worth mentioning that the collecting habit of Roberto begins with a critical event the father's death after he sees the picture of the son on the newspaper--, when he (Roberto) was 19 years old. Despite being almost 50 years old, Roberto still is tied to incident that probably caused his father death and was the great reason for him to start the collection of newspaper articles as well as the collection of glassware that reminded him about his mother. Both collections have distinct and complementary purposes: a collection of news serves his purposes--or maybe, to his insistence in showing that nothing in life has a purpose--while the crystal objects are collected in honor of his mother. No wonder that the most serious episode in disturbing the relationship with Jun is when the Chinese man, unintentionally and clumsily touches the cabinet loaded with memories and glassware, reducing it to pieces. All of Roberto's manias are revealed and released at the end: the trauma caused by the loss of his father, which triggered a circular logic and pessimistic perception of reality as something purposeless. His collections had then the paradoxical effect of 'evidence' and reinforcement of his view of the senselessness of reality. Enclosed in his collections, Roberto kept himself, by the same token, closed to the possibilities of reality, as his home and routine showed (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Movie poster from collecting amazing stories from the world.

The film *The Invisible Collection* shows the search for a famous collection of prints and drawings undertaken by an antique shop owner. Beto is almost 30 years old and is the son of a couple that owns a traditional antique shop in Rio de Janeiro. His life is carefree and he spends most of his energy going to parties and nightclubs with his friends. One day his father dies and the family discovers that the antique shop is near to bankruptcy. Beto is obliged to take over the

store and look for alternatives, although he does not consider himself to be the right person for it. In this quest, he and a store employee review the business records held by his father and discover sales receipts of a collection of prints and drawings by a Brazilian artist, made thirty years ago for the collector Samir, a wealthy cocoa farm owner in Itajuípe, Bahia. The artist who produced the prints became very famous and the collection, as a result, now became valuable. Beto remembers the stories his father told about Samir, a rich and spendthrift countryman and plans to buy the collection back to resell it and then make enough money to escape the crisis. Beto then travels to Bahia. During the journey, Beto gets to know about the countryside, with its characters and social deprivation generated by the decaying cocoa-based economy. In this context, he approaches a local young man who guides him through the region. This young man ends up presenting him to Saada, the only daughter of Samir, who runs her father's farm. Beto discovers that the farm is very far away from the town and is also decaying because of agricultural pests. Samir is still alive, but very old and blind and then reclusive in the farm.

Beto tells Saada about his interest in the collection. She reacts with, variously, indifference and contempt, accusing him of being one more of the hundred speculators interested in profiting from his father's collection, as he became an old and sick man. She asks him to get away. Faced with the resistance of Saada, Beto decides to get to know to the farm, trying to find Samir by himself. He has no success in this but he happens to know Samir's wife, who reacts with the same indifference and resistance as her daughter and prevents him from meeting the collector and the collection, arguing that it was the last thing of value left. The wife tells her daughter what occurred and Saada tells Beto again to get away from the farm, this time brandishing a weapon.

Disheartened by the failure of his enterprise and reported that his mother was sick; Beto goes back to Rio de Janeiro. Without finding another alternative to the family financial crisis, he decides to launch a new trip to Itajuípe. This time, the strategy he used to find Samir is to get to know Saada better. She is a lonely and beautiful woman, whom he starts to visit on a regular basis. The dialogues with Saada unveil new insights into local life, but she still is very suspicious about his interest in the collection. On one of his rides across the farm, however, Beto meets Samir by chance. Beto takes advantage of the moment and introduces himself as the son of an old friend of his, an antiques shop owner. Samir reacts with sympathy, saying he thought he was dead to the world and there a situation of empathy begins between them. During the conversation, Samir's wife appears and questions the presence of Beto, but the contact is already established and Samir sympathized with him. They talked about the prints and drawings, acquired by the collector; Samir invites him to dinner to familiarize him with the collection.

The night of the dinner on the farm is driven by nostalgic dialogues on Samir relationship with Beto's father during the years the collector was acquiring prints and drawings. Samir tells that during his trips to Rio de Janeiro to acquire pieces, he has developed a sensitivity to appreciate the artistic expressions in the works of art and now even being blind, he is able to describe them by memory. At this point, he asks his daughter to bring the collection to be shown to Beto. Saada then returns to the dining table with a great album that Samir offers to Beto, asking him to open and fan it slowly. The old man starts describing all the details of each piece. For Beto's surprise, the album is filled with white sheets. The scenes that follow clarify the two

senses of the narrative. The first sense emerges from the complicity between Beto, Saada and Samir's wife. While Samir describes the traits, motives and the sublime compositions printed on the aesthetic expressions of each item in the album, they glance at each other without saying a word, so as not to denounce the emptiness of the album. The second meaning emerges from the admiration that all of them have for Samir, especially Beto, for his ability to remember every detail of the engravings and drawings that are no longer there, but that still marvel and sensitize him as if they were. The final sequence of the film shows Beto, Saada and Samir's wife talking on the farm. Saada explains that the prints and drawings have been gradually sold to pay off the debts of the farm in crisis. They thank Beto for the silence in order to save Samir from great disappointment and say goodbye. Beto leaves, touched by the story and able to start new searches.

Now, it is useful to make some comments on these narratives. They are both arrangements formed from the key role of objects for the construction and maintenance of reality, as emphasized by Domenéch, Iñiguez & Tirado<sup>9</sup> and they set the frame collector as a situational arrangement of a self that is incarnated or assumes corporeality in a concrete environment through "contracts of visibility". On the film *Un Cuento Chino*, the collections of absurd news (non-figurative images) and crystal objects become important factors for setting the 'collector frame'—formed by the understanding of the sense of reality of the protagonist and the mnemonic processes that guide the organization and representation of the environment—and for the structure of the self of the collector. The recursion with which such objects are updated and presented becomes another important element to understand these processes, since they are gradually overcome and their representation becomes liable to exposure (communicate) by the presence of a non-collector with his disastrous interventions that nevertheless give a sense of reality about the same processes. In other words, the Roberto's collections are a recursive representation of the supposed meaninglessness of events and relationships in life, originated by critical events. By accepting an exogenous presence to "his world" and being obliged to (not) welcome the otherness of Jun, a new structure of self is projected as a possible opening to new directions. Thus, the influence of an exogenous element dismantles the collector frame arrangements that were imprisoning the protagonist, thus releasing him to new possibilities of interaction. On the other hand, the film *The Invisible Collection* shows that the same pattern of recursion of collectors' frame has the ability to affect (or infect) the self of an exogenous protagonist who gets involved in the arrangements of the collector, strengthening them simultaneously: the collector who thought himself as a dead man to the world and the art dealer who thought himself as capable of managing his own business.

However, the way the "contracts of visibility" of the collections are disposed in these situations are quite the opposite. By expressing what guides the reception of objects, in the interactions of the persons, the collections offer different ways of seeing and talking about them. And following the guidance of Chanquía,<sup>14</sup> there still remains an open question, namely to understand how collectors' frames present and guide the public perception of the images as objects that can be organized and presented as a collection. The book *The Private Collection*, of Georges Perec,<sup>7,18</sup> presents the elements that allow

<sup>7</sup>French writer (1936-1982) Since 1967, Perec participated in the Oulipo group of experimental literature that highlighted writers like Raymond Queneau and Italo Calvino. He wrote an extensive work, including autobiographical accounts, poetry, experimental literature, essays and novels. *The Private Collection (Un Cabinet d'Amateur)* was first published in 1994 by Editions du Seuil.

to compose a broader understanding of this perception, as the author develops a narrative that exposes the publicity processes of art collections, in which "visibility contracts" subvert the ways of seeing and saying something about them.

## Collections and visibility of contracts in the publicity of art objects

Perec's book, at the beginning, sets the tone of a plot developed in details in order to attract the reader's attention. Perec describes the fictional environment of a large German-speaking festival held in 1913 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. Among the festival events, there occurred an exhibition of painters, in which stood out a work, *The Private Collection*, painted by an American artist of German origin, Heinrich Kürz. The picture was exposed in a room which brought together works of the private collection of a wealthy local brewer, Hermann Raffke also a German immigrant to the USA. This context is narrated from the standpoint of the impact of the exhibition in the press, based on the description of specialized notes published in several newspapers and magazines. These on one side highlighted the political and business personalities in the exhibition and, on the other, the works of art displayed.

Among the press reviews, what stands out is the impression the Heinrich Kürz caused. A short note explains that the painting was commissioned by Hermann Raffke, who is portrayed "sitting in his collector studio, in front of some of his favorite paintings".<sup>18</sup> Another note, much more descriptive and analytical, presents the picture details and effusively praises the painter's skill in reproducing over one hundred pictures that were distributed in the depicted collector studio, detailing three of them. The author of the note praises the painter's ability to reproduce the paintings in the collection, so that it becomes difficult to decide which would be more sublime, the original or reductions. He ends his note with a compliment, surprised to see that Heinrich Kürz had included its own picture in the painting, in a sequence of six reflexes, without losing accuracy: The private collection is not just anecdotal representation of a private museum; through this set of successive reflections had an almost magical charm that these increasingly tiny repetitions activate, the work oscillates in a properly dreamlike universe in which its power of seduction is extended to infinity and in which the exaggerated precision of the pictorial matter, far from his own end, suddenly flows into the Eternal Return of Spirituality.<sup>18</sup>

The reviews about the picture generate a great public commotion and, in two weeks, queues of curious people are formed to see it. First, people appeared interested in recognizing the expertise of reproductions in miniature mirrors. Then they appeared to have the curiosity to measuring the dimensions of the main frame and its reductions, setting calculations to justify the mastery of the painting technique. Finally, specialists detected the introduction of variations in the details of each picture of the portrayed collection, following the mirrors painted by the artist. This peregrination of crowds does not stop until an exasperated visitor bursts into the room, throws ink on the painting and then runs away. On the following day, the pictures of all the artists, as well as the collection of Hermann Raffke, are removed and exhibition ends. The press highlights the grotesque event and establishes a public network of solidarity with the artist and the collector. Two weeks after, while the public repercussions of the attack on the painting are still burning, a long study of the

picture is published in a “confidential aesthetics magazine, the Bulletin of the Ohio School of Arts”.<sup>18</sup> The article was entitled “Art and Reflection”, written by an expert named Lester K. Nowak and exposed the author’s theory that “Every art work is the mirror of another one”: “a considerable number of paintings, if not all, only assume its true meaning because of previous works that are in it or just reproduced in full or partially, or even in a much more allusive way or coded”.<sup>18</sup> The author also sustains his theory alluding an artistic tradition that, “born in Antwerp in the late sixteenth century, it has continued uninterruptedly through the major European schools until the mid-nineteenth century” and then describes how several famous paintings follow the principle of configuring private collections, in the “act of painting a ‘reflexive dynamic’ that drew its strength from others’ paintings”. Comparing the various figurations of the pictures of private collections, he also establishes some inferences about the personalities of its collectors, including Hermann Raffke. In the end of his long study, Nowak praises the qualities of Heinrich Kürz picture, comparing it to the work of other admirable painters and defining it as “an image of the death of art, a specular reflection of this world doomed to endless repetition of their own models”.<sup>18</sup>

One year after the exhibition, Hermann Raffke is found dead. The family embalms his body and dresses it as he appears in the portrait painted by Kürz and the corpse is buried in a grave that reproduces the studio in which he was painted with the picture The Private Collection at the bottom. Raffke is buried sitting in a chair, facing the picture, having behind him another picture of himself, painted forty years before, when he traveled through Egypt. After the collector’s death, his heirs hold two auctions of the paintings he had owned. The first, held a few months later, brought together 116 paintings, the majority of American painters and a few Europeans in a catalog that did not include the pictures portrayed in Kürz’s painting. In this auction, a subsequent one had already been announced, with ancient European works whose catalogs demanded a long elaboration.<sup>8</sup> The second auction, however, only takes place much later, because of the anti-German feelings that hovered in the USA. In the meantime, the heirs moved to Canada, along with the brewery. Here, Perec’s narrative establishes a gap between the auctions to describe at length the publication of two books. The first is an autobiography of Hermann Raffke, published in New York in 1921. Organized by his children from a set of writings and documents left by the collector, the book recounted his childhood and adventures in Germany before migrating to the USA at age 16, where would become a ‘self-made man’. Interested in painting, but recognizing that he was unable to paint well, he begins to collect paintings. The success of their enterprises makes him rich when he was 45 years of age, the age at which leaves the business to his children and starts to travel regularly to Europe, between 1875 and 1909, acquiring paintings and expanding the collection. As he knew little of art, he acquired the paintings on the advice of some thirty different European experts described in Perec’s narrative through correspondence Raffke sent for his wife and children. Of the nearly 200 paintings he acquired in these travels, Raffke kept a diary, with detailed notes of travel, itineraries, ship and train tickets, daily accounts and even catalogs of auctions that he

<sup>8</sup>Perec details several parts of the catalog of the paintings in his narrative about the auctions, exposing the authorship of paintings, features of the works, its initial value, receptivity of the dealers and the final sales value. In this precise account, some pictures are posted, deserving a more detailed description, which includes the history of the work or the painter, the context of execution of the work, aesthetic particularities printed on the works (as used in the methodology of artistic analysis exposed by Chordá<sup>19</sup>) and some curious details that would influence the final value of the sale

participated.<sup>9</sup>

The second book, written by Lester Nowak and published in 1923 by the Bennington University Press was a thesis devoted to the work of Heinrich Kürz.<sup>18</sup> Nowak tells that he had become a friend of Kürz when writing his article on The Private Collection and that after his friend’s death in a railway disaster in 1914, his sister asked him to help to classify the immense material found in the artist’s studio and organize a catalog. This material was the basis of the thesis, plus a critical apparatus. The content of the thesis is extensively described by Perec in thirteen pages, showing how Nowak would be poring over 1.397 drawings and sketches drawn by Kürz to perform his famous painting. This narrative also compares the main paintings depicted in the portrait with their replicas, deepening his earlier thesis and enlarging it, when debugging historical accuracies of copyright assignments of those paintings, in dialogue with other works of art history experts. After this more descriptive interval, the narrative of the auctions is taken up by Perec. The second auction occurred in 1924 in Philadelphia, with pomp and circumstance, for four days. The fame of Hermann Raffke collection had spread, attracting famous collectors and directors of large American museums for the acquisition of 358 items on display in an exquisite catalog. Following the narrative strategy of the first auction, Perec highlights the main works--and their authors--put up for sale, grouped by art schools, day by day: American painting, modern European painting, the German, French and Flemish, Dutch and Italian schools. After eleven pages of description of the card catalog of the auctioned works, Perec ends his narrative with a short and sudden cut in the plot:

A few years later, the directors of public and private organizations that participated in the acquisition of the works of the second Raffke auction received a letter signed by Humbert Raffke [collector’s nephew], in which it is reported that most of the works they had purchased were false, he is the real author.<sup>18</sup> Hermann Raffke’s nephew graduated in Fine Arts in Boston. As a student, during his trips to Europe with his uncle, Humbert had taken a teacher to see the paintings he acquired in the first few journeys. The teacher examined the works and said that they were false or of little value. Hermann Raffke tells him of the falsehood and the collector decides to take revenge. So, all the detailed narrative of Perec acquires a new meaning by demonstrating how a coordinated plan among the collector, his children, his nephew painter and some accomplices, as Lester Nowak, “which allowed him during many years and even after his death deceive collectors, experts and art dealers”.<sup>18</sup> In the other trips to Europe, Hermann and Raffke select evidences to forge the authenticity of the paintings done by the nephew, having in mind all the plot in The Private Collection: a painting that portrays other paintings, as copies of real paintings but that are copies of illusory paintings. As well as the paintings of Raffke’s collection being false, Perec’s account details<sup>18</sup> are also “designed solely for the pleasure, the pleasure of deceiving”.

And here, the Perec narrative subverts the construction of meaning that publicly arranges the production of “authentic” records of artistic works. The “contracts of visibility” that direct and guide the public reception of the images are gradually formed through a network of actors and institutions that give visibility to them, but such training produces models and not determinisms. Thus, the events described seemed to register legitimization processes of authorized

<sup>9</sup>Perec also details records left by Raffke when participating in auctions and observations on the works acquired in dialogues with his counselors.

models of artistic expertise,<sup>20</sup> but they were subverting these models, manipulating them from the inside. The final Perec sentence is symptomatic of these subversive strategies, since its narrative does not produce illusion, it handles an existing illusion in order to show us how the collectors' frames present and guide the public perception of figurative images as objects collectibles and non-figurative, as in the public personalities of collectors.

## In conclusion, the illusion of collectors as support frames

The narratives considered here sought to circumscribe the arrangements between objects and biographies of individuals in the configuration of collectors' frames and their interactions with the self of the collectors. The collectors' frames in the first narratives recursively guided the containment of a sense that guides the interactions of individuals in relation to an identity of action established in a lifecycle. These frames are formed from senses originating in critical events (disruptions of or sudden changes in the life cycle) and the contention they operated is then broken under the influence of exogenous factors. The correspondence between the collectors' frames of the initial accounts, however, indicated that "the contract of visibility" established in the interactions of individuals with non-collectors produced inversions in the different ways of seeing and saying something about the collections. The Perec's narrative, on the other hand, elaborated on the principle of subversion of these agreements, introduces the illusion as support of the senses that are arranged in collectors' frames collectors, guiding the public perception about them. But now reviewing the film narratives, it is clear that the context of interpersonal relations is overcome when the attachment generated in singularizing the collections falls apart by the impact of a deception or the emergence of a new illusion in the form of an exogenous change, one that propels individuals to other possibilities, or cycles of life.

Thus, when interpersonal arrangements are broken, the collections can also overcome the situational illusion established in the collectors' frames to be re-signified in collective or social delusions. And if this happens in the narrative of Perec is also because exogenous influences cause breaks in the action plans once projected by collectors.<sup>21</sup> It is because they produce a sense of detachment from collections that these new meanings can happen.

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