

Introduction

This dissertation considers how a new approach to understanding historic collections will be able to provide fresh perspectives on the significance of such collections in British cultural heritage institutions. It uses the Grand Tour in the long eighteenth century¹ as a point of departure and as an overall framework for presenting this approach. Collections of objects that were enabled by trade through the Grand Tour, or were inspired by the collector's experience of the Grand Tour, form the test-bed of this study. This approach is principally concerned with focusing on the material and ideological significance of collections that sprung from the Grand Tour by constructing their cultural biographies to reveal and explore their multiple physical, sentimental and political contexts.

The quest for new knowledge and understanding forms the keystone of any academic endeavour. The development of a new approach is not only dependent on the questions that are asked of the subject but also the choice of where and how the answers are to be found. In addition, a culturally informed investigation into an aspect of the past or present considers as its objective to ask: *how?* and *from what perspective?* (Kopytoff 1988: 68). In terms of looking at the processes undergone by material culture both historically and contemporarily, the answers to these questions are especially more telling if the full extent of the importance of object systems² in Western society³ is to be understood. Thus the purpose³ of this investigation is to employ a processual approach (i.e. the construction of cultural biographies of collections) to illuminate what it is about historic collections that is meaningful and valued.

The idea of studying processes as opposed to fixed forms in terms of material culture is very much part of the post-modern rubric that has been developed in recent decades, particularly in the field of material culture history⁴. The particular object systems known as collections have also been viewed through a post-modern gaze. Pomian (1990), Elsner and Cardinal (1994), and Pearce (1994 and 1995) have presented insightful studies on the ideological significances of collections, most refreshingly by arguing the importance of analysing the collecting process and

¹In this study, arbitrarily applied to the years between 1700 and c.1830.

²This study uses the term object systems to convey the ways in which people relate to and interact with objects.

³The role of objects vary in different societies and cultures. Therefore this study only considers the efficacy of this approach with reference what is termed as 'Western society'.

⁴ See bibliography for works consulted that have employed post-modern approaches to the studies of their subjects.

attempting to understand the subject within and without the confines of 'history'. The existence of the *Journal of the History of Collections* since the last twelve years demonstrates the increasing importance scholars are placing on the phenomenology of collections. This study is intended to stand amongst these as a contribution to the further understanding of collections, particularly in British cultural heritage institutions. In terms of understanding the significance of historic collections, it will be the collection's life story and the multiple contexts which inform the story that will take precedence.

Elsner and Cardinal wanted to go beyond exploring the history of collecting in terms of taste and the official norms of high culture: public art, museums and "the sacred stations of the Grand Tour" (1994: 4). The approach being presented in this study is intended to encourage lateral, not linear, thinking otherwise things tend to be presented with an air of inevitability surrounding them. The choice of exemplar, the Grand Tour as an inspiration for the shaping of collections, might seem staid, even an unfashionable subject, for the propagation of an alternative theoretical perspective. But it is precisely because representation of the Grand Tour has received so much scholarly attention that it is an ideal phenomenon to pull out of the traditional parameters of high culture history. In this way, the Grand Tour's inspirations can be set in the context of one of its most enigmatic productions: its collections. Cultural biographies of collections are principally concerned with changes in motivations, values and contexts and the means by which those changes took place. For cultural biographies of Grand Tour collections to be meaningful they need to be set in the context of their origins.

The Grand Tour and the shaping of collections

"Foreign travel is knowledge to a wise man, and foppery to a fool"⁵

Investigations into the perceptions and use of collections in history have delved far beyond the realms of the history of art and design. Pomian's study treats sixteenth to eighteenth century collections as histories in their own right or "unique domains" and explores the role of the collection as an intermediary at the cross-roads between several histories (1990: 5-6). Pearce's chapter on 'Classic Modernist collecting' presents a model examining the prevailing cultural psyche of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the context of its collecting activities. She emphasises that the organisation of collected objects contributed to new perceptions of knowledge and history (1995b: 139).

⁵Cradock 1828 in Black 1997: 301.

British country houses in the eighteenth century were vast repositories for Grand Tour collections. Arnold (1998b) argues that objects displayed in country houses were used to construct the social and cultural identities of collectors. They were a form of nostalgia for a mythical past, particularly for Classical Antiquity⁶ (Arnold 1998b: 103 and 113). Interest in Grand Tour collections has also formed the inspiration for museum exhibitions. Norfolk and the Grand Tour. Eighteenth-century Travellers Abroad and their Souvenirs⁷ (1985) brought together collections in Norfolk that had not been seen 'together' since the Grand Tour era (Moore 1985: 9), highlighting the impact of the dispersal of collections on the county's own cultural heritage. Grand Tour: The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century⁸ (1996) was the first attempt to present the concept of the Grand Tour holistically through collections it inspired. It analysed the impact of the Grand Tour on the cultivation of various themes such as 'the Antique' (Bignamini and Jenkins 1996: 203-205) as opposed to focusing on particular collections, institutions or collectors.

The fascination with classicism and classical forms was the underlying impetus for Grand Tour collections. The Neoclassical movement in Britain contributed to the political ideologies of the British élite and influenced notions of a national identity⁹. These ideologies, that harked back to a mythical past of the Ancients, informed the taste for the objects that were collected (Arnold 1998b: 106-107). Collections displayed in country houses were intended to signify the status and taste of the owner to others of similar rank, who understood the measure of 'good taste' (Arnold 1998b: 116). The early thinking of the British Museum was also concerned with acquiring examples of Greek art objects that embodied their concept of 'ideal beauty' (Jenkins 1992: 10). The Grand Tour enabled collectors to gain a direct experience of classical forms that reinforced their own cultural ideals and values.

Collectors did not just acquire pieces from 'Antiquity'. They collected contemporary objects from casts and models to *objets d'art* that nuanced the classical-antique such as sculptures and ceramics often through their own patronage e.g. the 3rd Earl of Egremont's patronage of John Flaxman, the neoclassical sculptor in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries. However, in amongst the Grand Tour collections on display in museums and country houses are myriad other collected items such as natural history specimens, minerals, metalwork, coins, porcelain, as well as

⁶Classical Antiquity as manifested by the perceptions of Augustan Rome.

⁷Norwich Castle Museum, 1985.

⁸Tate Gallery, London, 1996.

⁹Britain was a relatively new nation, formed by the Act of Union in 1707.

antiquities from all over the ancient world e.g. Egypt and Persia. Nevertheless, in terms of a 'collection hierarchy', classical objects were valued above all else. 'Non classical' objects tended, at first, to be valued for their intrinsic curiosity value. By the turn of the nineteenth century, their value in providing knowledge about the past became increasingly important, especially so when objects were understood in terms of classification schemes determined by the collectors (Quirke 1997: 261). For example, Sir John Soane's purchase of the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Seti I¹⁰ upon the British Museum's rejection of its offer bought initially for historic curiosity (Bolton 1927: 371-372) then formed the focus for the arrangement of his classical objects under the Dome area of the museum.

Some collecting was, no doubt, for reasons of fashion and to boost status. Curiosity motivated many British collectors of the seventeenth century, however by the eighteenth century, connoisseurs of art objects, or dilettanti, were promulgating the virtues of taste and aesthetics as the new norm for collecting (MacGregor 1985: 158). Connoisseurs desired objects that were 'complete'. Restored and retouched objects were preferred to fragments that did not demonstrate the perfection of form that the collectors desired. Dealers in these objects like Gavin Hamilton and Thomas Jenkins were regarded as knowledgeable connoisseurs and can be seen to have shaped the collector's motivations in this vein as well as to have enabled the acquisition of fine examples. The archaeological excavations in Italy and beyond in the latter half of the eighteenth century aroused the interest of many Grand Tourists. Those that collected antiquities were beginning to identify themselves not as dilettanti but as antiquaries – collectors in pursuit of history and scientific enquiry. By the turn of the nineteenth century, collectors were keen to 'buy into' the idea of gaining historic and scientific knowledge through their collections. Through this emerged the thought that there were desirable and undesirable reasons for collecting, dependent on the amount of scholarship involved (Crane 1999: 189).

As value in taste of an object's intrinsic aesthetic qualities declined, though not displaced by an object's knowledge value, heavy repair and restoration were not considered to be necessary or in good taste e.g. a visitor to Petworth House in 1784 commented about the 2nd Earl of Egremont's antique sculpture:

A singular circumstance attending them is, that a great many, when the late earl bought them, were complete invalids; some wanting heads, others hands, feet, noses, etc.... so that in some respect this stately fabric gives

¹⁰Discovered in 1817 by Italian collector and archaeologist Giovanni Belzoni and bought by Soane c.1825 for £2000 (Thornton and Dorey 1992: 59).

us the idea of a large hospital... for wounded and disabled statues.”¹¹ (Rowell 2000: 81) . As a consequence, dealers were replaced by art critics and historians as the most knowledgeable connoisseurs (Pomian 1990: 168). The knowledge value of collections was also increased by their publication. Publication of collections enhanced the reputation of the collector and the impact of the collection was substantially broadened e.g. Baron D’Hancarville’s publication of Sir William Hamilton’s first collection not only provided proof of the collection’s Greek not Etruscan provenance (Burn 1997: 241-252) but was also used as a source of inspiration for manufacturers such as Josiah Wedgwood.

The arrangement of collections in country house galleries such as at Petworth House, Holkham Hall and Newby Hall was largely decided by aesthetic design to give an illusion of the classical-antique. This was contrasted by their arrangement by classification and hierarchy in institutions such as the British Museum. Taxonomic representation of collections created a kind of “historical sensation” (Crane 1999: 195). In the eighteenth century the idea of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ was used to describe the taxonomy of the world in which they lived (Jenkins 1992: 9). Taste determined the status of one type of object against another, with classical pieces considered to be the zenith of artistic form, whether originals or copies (Haskell and Penny 1981: xiii). This justified the collector’s or institution’s own historical narrative e.g. Sir John Soane’s arrangement of part of his collection at his self-styled museum has been interpreted to represent the idea of the Great Chain of Being, thereby ranking objects in a vertical plane according to their perceived place in the evolution of societies (Sidlauskas 1993: 63). The idea of taxonomy and classification, as a framework for gaining knowledge through objects, still forms the basis of museological organisation today. In this way, the arrangement of objects can be used to give the impression of human progress.

As historic collections became more widely valued for the knowledge and inspiration they provided, the potential for their administration in public institutions increased. Private collectors who wanted their collections to survive for posterity recognised that institutions were able to ensure this to a greater extent than their heirs (Hunter 1985: 159). Institutions themselves believed that collections in private hands were no more than useless curiosities whereas *they* were better placed to interpret the objects and present new knowledge for the public benefit (Crane 1999: 188-189, 198). Despite criticism and satire of the Grand Tour and connoisseurs

¹¹Originally in Walpole, G.A. 1784. The New British Traveller.

throughout the period, even the government joined the debate about public access to historic collections with the motive that exposure to fine examples of art was for the betterment of society at large. This sentiment was most notable when the Parthenon marbles were offered to the British Museum in 1816:

The finest antiquities... should serve artists and the public, not the connoisseur, and they should therefore not adorn the collector's private gallery but be displayed publicly, where they could educate artists... and 'inform the public mind what is dignified in art'.¹² (Brewer 1997: 285)

Although the idea of making private collections publicly accessible was well established, their transition to, and maintenance in, the public domain was not inevitable or straightforward e.g. the Royal Society and British Museum were both poorly equipped to administer their growing collections (Hunter 1985: 167) which in turn restricted access to the collections. Country house collections were also open to the public at certain times often as a way of creating an "illusion of inclusion" to the lower orders of society (Arnold 1998a: 22). However, access to these collections was not easy especially when fees were introduced and restrictive hours imposed (Arnold 1998a: 28-29).

Cultural biographies of the collections presented in the case-studies attempt to illustrate how these cultural shifts impacted upon contemporary and later perceptions of them, their use and influence. Chapter one will explain the approach taken in this study by outlining how a cultural biography of an historic collection can be constructed. The case-studies will concentrate on three-dimensional collections of objects as opposed to paintings, drawings and prints. These are: the classical and neoclassical collections at Petworth House, West Sussex, collected by the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Egremont; Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London; and Sir William Hamilton's collection at the British Museum with particular reference to the Graeco-Roman antiquities therein. These case-studies were chosen to illustrate a range of collections inspired by the Grand Tour. They were also chosen to be representative of the different types of cultural heritage institution in Britain.¹³ Finally, the conclusion will evaluate the validity of this approach and will propose further avenues for its use.

¹²Summary of report made by the parliamentary Select Committee.

¹³Southern England may be more appropriate a term to use to indicate the geographical spread of these case-studies but the term Britain is used to allude to the political entity in which the institutions are situated.

Chapter 1: Constructing a cultural biography of an historic collection

Historic collections

colligere – to gather together, to assemble¹⁴

For a collection to be considered of historical importance certain value judgements have been made. Historic collections have to have ostensibly survived over a period of time since their assemblage by their original owners. The objects that comprise the collection have themselves to be valued to be collected in the first place, whether for their intrinsic qualities, rarity or knowledge value. In Western society, much of a nation's cultural heritage is in the form of collections that have moved from private to public spheres because of the over-riding sentiment that it would be for the benefit of society at large. This movement symbolises the collection's status as an inviolable bastion of cultural heritage by transmuting the initial motivations, values and intentions of the collector into the cultural idiom of the institution. The institution acts as a guardian on behalf of the public, sometimes, as a requirement of law. It is the institution's purpose to ensure the collection's physical integrity as well as to maintain and extol its historical-cultural value to its publics, in perpetuity.

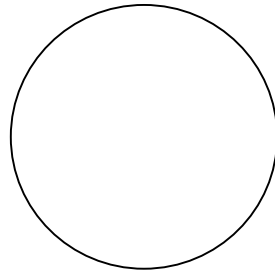


Diagram 1: Historic collection

Cultural biographies

The idea of object biographies was first introduced by Kopytoff (1988).¹⁵ It assumes that the subject of the biography to be a culturally constructed entity (Kopytoff 1988: 68). In this way, a collection can be understood as a dynamic rather than static entity that can be used to shape the cultural ideals of society beyond its own 'original' time and space. Similarly, the symbolic meanings collections can represent are shaped by the culture in which it is situated. The multiple contexts of historic collections (physical, sentimental and political) inform their biographies and

¹⁴ Latin root of the word collection.

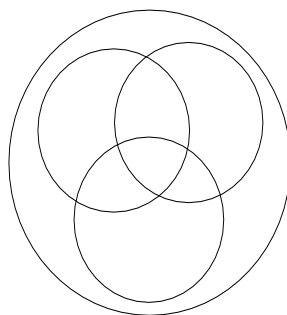
¹⁵ First published in 1986.

can help reveal the reasons for the many meanings that they have come to represent.

Historic collections are beyond the realms of the sphere of commodities. Kopytoff believes that it is culture that dictates this status (1988: 64) through defining and redefining the collection's meanings and value (1988: 67). Culture also controls the collection's movement between spheres of influence thus what is created is a 'moral economy' (Kopytoff 1988: 64). An historic collection's integrity is ensured so long as the prevailing moral economy requires it to be so and it is up to those who have a 'stake' in the collection – collectors, institutions, scholars, publics – to participate in this moral economy to ensure the collection's survival. Close observation of how cultural shifts in attitudes take place reveals aspects of the collection's cultural biography.

To construct a cultural biography of a collection requires the collection to be considered as a singular entity in its own right. To avoid the limitations of inevitability for the subject, a cultural biography of an historic collection will not be formed linearly, through a systematic treatment of events in its chronology, but instead will take the form of a matrix. A matrix can allow all aspects of the cultural biography to be cross-referenced and the interplay between them analysed. The six aspects of the cultural biography matrix are: perceptions, contexts, agency, movement, values, and uses. To ascertain these biographical aspects, certain questions are asked of the subject (Kopytoff 1988: 66-67).

Diagram 2: Shape of cultural biography matrix



Perceptions

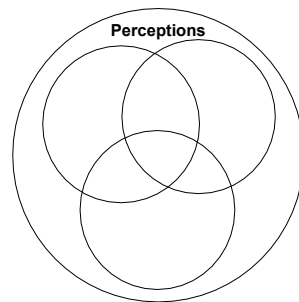
What are the biographical possibilities inherent in the collection's 'status'?

Foremost is the perception of the collection as transcending time and space, suspended in

perpetuity. The process of collecting itself (relative to the objects that are collected) displaces, even abolishes, time (Baudrillard 1994: 16). In turn, the collection acts as an intermediary between the visible, corporeal world and the invisible world that is beyond physical space (Pomian 1990: 24-25). The collection is therefore a constant source of nostalgia and acts as a cornucopia of memories. By virtue of occupying timelessness, historic collections in particular are accorded a unique position outside normal spheres of exchange. They are sacred and untouchable and therefore have a role in maintaining society's cultural security. This perception has become especially more poignant for collections that have moved into the public domain where the ethos of British institutions has constitutionally cemented their inalienability.

The sanctity of the collection enables it to be a safe-haven for the embodiment of ideals and desires. However the sanctity of the collection may be threatened if certain players in the moral economy reject the notion that it *should* have been collected in the first place. Collections are also metaphors of experience (Pearce 1995: 33). When the collection is viewed as experience its capacity to be a rich source of knowledge becomes apparent. For experience to translate to knowledge, it needs to be mediated by the collection's agents who have the power to control how knowledge is disseminated. Similarly, if history is the fruit of power (Trouillot 1995: xix) then historic collections are susceptible to represent a sanitised past, dependent on the intentions and actions of their agents. Biographically speaking, these perceptions give the collection its aura. The aura ensures that the authenticity of the historic collection is always made paramount, for if the aura disappears, the integrity of the collection is made vulnerable and the moral economy discards any pretensions of the historic collection being culturally valuable. Perceptions are maintained if their associated values are eulogised by the collections' agents i.e. the stake-holders of the collection.

Diagram 3: Perceptions in cultural biography matrix



Contexts

How are these possibilities realised?

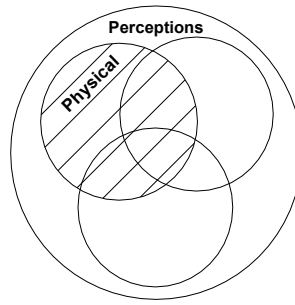
The biographical possibilities of the collection are realised through its multiple contexts. Pearce believes there is a paradox inherent in collections: “They are wrenched out of their own true contexts and become dead to their living time and space in order that they may be given immortality within the collection” (1995a: 24). However, the issue of the ‘true context’ of collected objects may not necessarily be seen as an obstacle. If it is accepted that collecting is a decontextualising process and a recontextualising process, then the collected objects, by virtue of their enshrinement in collections, can have more than one true context. At least this becomes apparent when constructing cultural biographies of collections when the possibilities that are afforded by time and space are examined.

Physical context

The physical context of collections reveals how knowledge is presented. Firstly, it addresses how the physicality of the collection is presented. This is the mutual dependency of its objects grounded in the physical proximity of one object to another. It also gives the opportunity to explore the implications of the physical movement of the collection from private to public spheres. In private hands, collections are less accessible to the public but does enable a more intimate relationship between collector and/or owner and collection. Whereas, in public hands physical and intellectual accessibility increases but the collection’s audiences are somewhat distanced by the ‘glass case – red rope’ syndrome in cultural heritage institutions.

However the most fundamental gauge of the physical context of collections is taxonomy and the collection hierarchy. The collection’s capacity to be a source of knowledge relies on the taxonomic framework imposed on it by its agents. The arrangement and display of objects by a classification scheme also enables it to be presented *as* history. The juxtaposition of the many, varied types of object in the collection hierarchy homogenises the agent’s discourse so it can tell a coherent ‘story’. Therefore the manipulation of the physical context can allow agents to proffer their own agendas of knowledge. The nature of the classification system e.g. thematic or chronological will depend on what common codes exist between the producers and receivers of the signifiers (Bal 1994: 98). Such cultural aspersions are dictated by the prevailing values and desires of the moral economy in any given time and place.

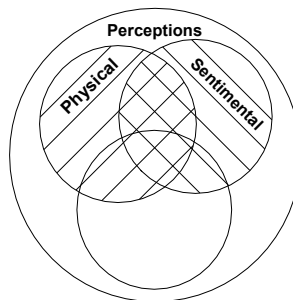
Diagram 4: Physical context in cultural biography matrix



Sentimental context

The sentimental context frames how collections can shape cultural ideals, perceptions and appreciation. More scientifically, this context could be labelled as the socio-psychological context. However, it can be argued that the recognition of the roles of emotion and sentimentality in their purest sense – *sentire*, literally meaning, to feel – in the biography of the collection allows for more latitude in the analysis of how cultural ideals are constructed as much by the heart and soul, as by the mind. It accommodates the added dimension of imagination and the collection’s ability to arouse the senses. The influence of a collection in the shaping of self and group identity through the desires it fulfils, is also a product of interactions taking place in the sentimental context. Evidence of the manipulation of this context is to be found in the inspirations afforded by the collection. In this way, agency can be shown to exist far beyond the realms of the primary agents: the collector and the housing institution.

Diagram 5: Sentimental context in cultural biography matrix

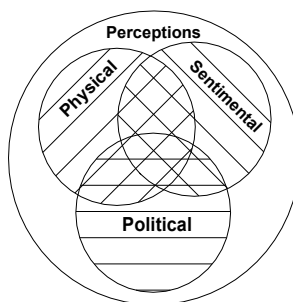


Political context

The political context is concerned with the perspectives from which the collection is used and

received. Politics is seen, in its broadest sense, as a current for change and as the ideological mode through which the collection is administered. It is this context that the agendas of the collection's most obvious agents (collector and institution) can be deconstructed. The agents work within the political context to find ways of ensuring that the moral economy continues to value the collection e.g. engendering its movement from private to public spheres or promoting knowledge value through its arrangement in new exhibitions. The shaping of identities can take place in the political context as well as the sentimental context. Value is reinforced or redefined through various uses of the collection that can be detected in its history. In turn, the collection's agents themselves are held to be worthy guardians of this treasure (Pomian 1990: 8). This may be seen in the constant propagation of the collection as a fountain of knowledge through the general rhetoric of its agents, its use as an index of taste, and its promotion as a source of pleasure and discovery.

Diagram 6: Political context in cultural biography matrix



Agency

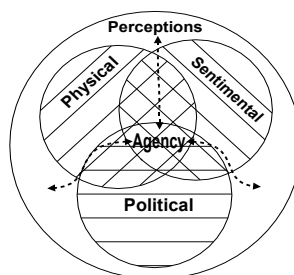
Where has the collection come from and who assembled it? How has the collection's integrity and preservation been secured?

The collection's stake-holders are its agents and manipulate the collection's contexts to define and redefine its meanings and values. The biographical questions asked of agency are concerned with motives for the collection's origins and methods employed for its survival in perpetuity. Agency pervades all the collection's contexts, influences its perceptions, shapes values of it and controls its uses. In general terms, agents have to ensure reverence is generated for the collection to ensure its hallowed status (Pearce 1995: 24). This means making sure the stable aspects of the collection are made explicit and the unstable aspects (e.g. evidence of decay, damage, criminal and political vulnerability) are either hidden or else used as a ploy to generate sympathy and positive support for the collection. What distinguishes the agent's actions is the

intent behind them (Davidson 1971: 5). The intent will change as the moral economy may dictate i.e. according to the interaction between agents and ‘patients’ – who do not manipulate the contexts but are still players in the moral economy e.g. viewers and appreciators of the collection. This interaction is mediated by the collection and manifests itself in the multiple contexts of the collection (Gell 1998: 36-38). Or, agents can be seen to shape the moral economy by expressing their perceptions and values through the collection’s uses e.g. exhibition and publication.

It is important here to confront what happens between successive primary and wing¹⁶ agents of collections. Bourdieu’s theory of the transfer of symbolic capital lends itself well to illustrating this. Bourdieu exemplifies this by looking at the phenomenology of the preface (1999: 224). This process is somewhat analogous to the movement of collections from private to public spheres. The collector, the original agent, through a sale, bequest, gift or further through legal measures such as Acts of Parliament, will transfer the symbolic capital (held in perceptions of the collection) to the new agent, an institution such as an independent trust, national museum or other heritage organisation. However, the original agent will be immortalised by the continuance of his/her name in the presentation and representation of the collection e.g. ‘Sir William Hamilton’s Collection’. In reverse, the new agent will itself appropriate some of the symbolic capital for itself by promoting the collection as its own e.g. ‘the National Trust’s finest collection of...’. Wing agents can also ‘cash in’ on the symbolic capital of the collection e.g. through processes of reproductions and contributing essays to exhibition catalogues. Labels are also applied to the collection e.g. in publication details and exhibition publicity and these labels will be meaningful to those who appreciate the collection – the ‘patients’ – and the agent will maintain his/her/its esteem.

Diagram 7. Agency in cultural biography matrix



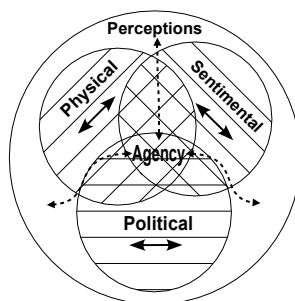
¹⁶Wing agents are those who do not directly administer the collection but contribute to its cultural biography indirectly.

Movement

What are the recognised “ages” or periods in the collection’s life, and what are the cultural markers for them?

The movement of collections from one sphere of cultural influence to another can occur in any and all of its contexts. In its physical context, collections can move location e.g. when being gifted by a collector to an institution. New taxonomies may be imposed on the collection necessitating the rearrangement of its objects. Objects in the collection may be deaccessioned or dispersed altogether. Movement in the collection’s sentimental context can be detected by looking at its career in temporary exhibitions or new inspirations it may afford e.g. to artists. The most significant movement in the political context would be its transition from private to public domains. Political movements may also come in the form of legal injunctions to protect the collection’s inalienability. Any movement in an historic collection’s contexts engenders changes in its cultural signifiers i.e. its values and perceptions. The agents of the collection are able to dictate the collection’s signifiers (Baudrillard 1994: 24) and proffer alternative discourses suited to the particular situation they find themselves in. Movement may need to be initiated because of changes in the prevailing cultural values of the moral economy.

Diagram 8: Movement in cultural biography matrix



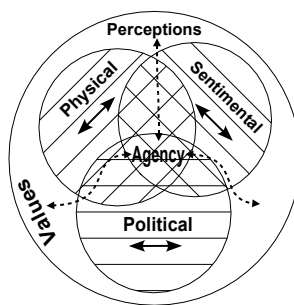
Values

What do people consider to be an ideal career for collections?

Historic collections are valued for a variety of reasons and these values change and evolve over time. Value is determined by the collection’s agents and their interaction in the moral economy. To give meaning to the valued, the moral economy has to agree what is valueless. This is the crux of Thompson’s ‘rubbish theory’ (1979) and can help to understand why historic collections are valued. They can variously embody good taste in art, raise and maintain cultural kudos, and provide historical and scientific knowledge and because these benefits are themselves valued, any resource that provides them will also be valued.

An ideal career for a Grand Tour collection would be for it to move, wholly, from private to public spheres, be financially well endowed, a central collection of a museum or historic house, kept physically away from any damaging affects such as the environment and visitors, conserved well, and to be the centre of scholarly attention in studies such as this one. That such a collection would be broken up, sold, exported, forgotten or left to decay in the oblivion of storage are an anathema because the collection's agents do not give value to such destructive consequences. However the *actual* career of an historic collection may include at least the threat of these uncomfortable and contradictory aspects. The values accorded to historic collections can be assessed by paying close attention to the cultural signifiers: what signs are given off, which are being read?

Diagram 9: Values in cultural biography matrix



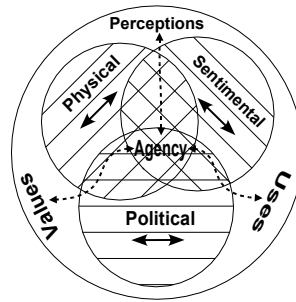
Uses

How does the collection's use change with time?

By evaluating the evidence for the uses of historic collections in each of the cultural milieux that the collection has occupied, clues to all above biographical possibilities can be found. Each of the following case-studies of Grand Tour collections will emphasise particular aspects of their cultural biographies through the analysis of their uses since their inception as collections. Their uses were determined through visits by the author to the institutions that hold the collections and through documentary research. Evidence for uses can be found in close observation of the display and arrangement of the collections, exhibition catalogues, contemporary sources, academic research, publicity, discussion with the collection's agents such as curators and collection managers, and from unlikely sources such as internet shops.

Cultural biography of Grand Tour collections: fresh perspectives on British cultural heritage

Diagram 10: Uses in cultural biography matrix



Chapter 2: Restoring context at Petworth House

Value in the physical context

The proliferation of Grand Tour collections in country houses in the eighteenth century was indicative of the culture that their owners resided in. The Grand Tour was the common experience of much of the British nobility. Aristocratic collectors such as the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Egremont were buying into the culture of antiquity through the acquisition of ‘authentic’ pieces or good copies (Arnold 1998a: 19). Such collectors valued their collections for their capacity to be a symbol of their good taste and connoisseurship of ideal beauty as extolled by classical forms. In turn, collections could be used as instruments for social and political ‘one-upmanship’. This was especially important as many of Britain’s political leaders were expected to spring from the cultural milieu of the Country House (Christie 2000: 2).

Contemporary visitors to country houses described them as “temples of the arts” where the gods themselves resided: “Here indeed the senses become astonished. In one word, the whole strikes you as if it were designed for more than a mortal residence”¹⁷ (Christie 2000: 179). A visit to Petworth House¹⁸, the seat of the 2nd¹⁹ and 3rd²⁰ Earls of Egremont and now in the possession of the National Trust, gave an immediate impression of the ostentatious grandeur of eighteenth century British high culture. Indeed this is the perception of the collections that the Earls would have wanted to convey through their collections, and the National Trust want to preserve. What was also striking was the juxtaposition of artefacts in all rooms of the house against the varying backdrops of the interior decor. Both the classical and neoclassical collections (mainly sculptures) are dispersed throughout the house, displayed with eighteenth century porcelain, oil paintings, textiles, clocks and antique furniture amongst myriad other objects. Although the non-classical objects may not form obvious collections in their own right, their effect on the perceptions of the classical collections must not be ignored as they also form part of their physical context.

For the purposes of this case-study, the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Egremont, and the National Trust are treated as the classical and neoclassical collections’ agents. However these distinctions

¹⁷Richard Sullivan on seeing the hall at Kedleston in his *Observations*, 70.

¹⁸Author’s visit to Petworth House, 24 August 2001.

¹⁹1710-1763, Earl of Egremont between 1750-1763.

²⁰1751-1837, Earl of Egremont between 1763-1837.

are not entirely clear-cut. For example, the objects displayed in the Marble Hall comprise restored antique sculpture, baroque, marble tables, portraits and an eighteenth century musical organ. Some of these objects were part of the collection assembled by the 2nd Earl, some purported to have been acquired by his grandfather, the 6th Duke of Somerset²¹ (Rowell 2000: 18) and the organ and some paintings by the 3rd Earl. In this instance, the 2nd Earl as the primary agent of the classical sculpture at Petworth, was not the only manipulator of the collection's physical context. All of his successors altered the arrangement and backdrop (interior decor) of the collection which currently remains largely as it was since the 2nd Lord Leconfield's reign²² (Rowell 2000: 16-19). The National Trust, the current primary agent, emphasises the objects' intrinsic details by providing information about their makers, date and symbolism (The National Trust 2001a: The Marble Hall Guide²³) as opposed to using them to present the culture in which they were made like many museums may do with the same objects.

The Earls and their successors had to manipulate the physical context of the collections to maintain and improve their status as rulers of their country seats. Their own values, shaped by the social and cultural idioms of the time, influenced the manner in which they altered the physical context. As country seat became historic house in 1947, the National Trust brought a new set of values and perceptions to the classical and neoclassical collections. Since the 1990s, the Trust's aim has been to preserve the collections' value, as exemplars of eighteenth and early nineteenth century high culture, by endeavouring to restore the physical context to evoke the spirit of the house during the 3rd Earl's reign.²⁴ Thus they have selected a particular *persona grata* to base their use of the collections. Further, the Trust places the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Egremont's collections near the top of Petworth's collection hierarchy and form one of the main 'selling points' of Petworth House to its publics: "Petworth House contains the finest collection of paintings in the care of the National Trust, as well as magnificent ancient and neo-classical sculpture, fine furniture, ceramics and domestic items" (The National Trust 2001b: leaflet).

The 2nd Earl of Egremont's collection of classical sculpture and its original setting were inspired by his Grand Tour (1729-1730) and participation in the Dilettanti Society upon his

²¹1662-1748, 6th Duke of Somerset 1671-1748.

²²1830-1901, Lord Leconfield between 1869-1901.

²³Guides to the contents of Petworth House were available to visitors in each room.

²⁴Personal communication (conversation) with Nicky Ingram, Collections Manager at Petworth House, 24 August

return. The gallery he had had designed was intended to emulate Roman *palazzi* and museums (Rowell 2000: 80). Until recently, there was little evidence to indicate what the original physical context of his collection looked like (Guilding 2000). This is the result of the 3rd Earl's control and arrangement of his father's collection which has since taken precedence in its physical interpretation. By the 1820s, the 3rd Earl's patronage of neoclassical sculptors such as John Flaxman and Sir Richard Westmacott, and artists, notably J.M.W. Turner necessitated redesign and extensions to the 2nd Earl's gallery to accommodate his own collecting (Guilding 2000: 29). As a consequence, the 2nd Earl's mainly restored classical sculpture has been placed in amongst the 3rd Earl's collection of statuary, no where more startling than in the North Gallery where only a trained eye could tell the difference between antiquity, cast and neoclassical.

The first stage of the 'Rehanging Petworth' project (1991-1993) aimed to reassemble the 3rd Earl's neoclassical collection with his father's classical collection for the first time since 1824 (Rowell 1993: 32). The ethos and methodology of the collections' agents, the National Trust, reveals how their own perceptions of the collections has impacted on both their cultural biographies. The restoration of the physical context was largely a matter of literally peeling back the layers accrued over time and undoing previous agents' efforts at maintaining physical context. The right interior design, as the backdrop to the collections, was considered to be as important as the rearrangement of the objects. Scientific methods such as paint analysis of previous layers were used in conjunction with interpretative methods from contemporary images of the gallery such as J.M.W. Turner's *The North Gallery*²⁵ (Rowell 2000: 35). The rearrangement of the collections was based on interpretations gathered from sources pertaining to the house between 1835 and 1859 (Rowell 1993: 32), well after the 3rd Earl's death.

Previous to the re-hanging, Anthony Blunt had, in the 1950s, rearranged the all collections at Petworth taxonomically, by schools and periods (Rowell 1993: 29) and the decor was changed from 1920s green, woodchip wallpaper to pinky terracotta paint (Rowell 2000: 35). However the co-ordinators of the Re-hanging Petworth project made the decision not to return to the white decor as depicted in Turner's view of 1827 but to restore the dark red scheme depicted by Mrs Percy Wyndham's view of the gallery of 1865. The justification of not returning to the white scheme of the 3rd Earl's period was:

2001.
²⁵c. 1827.

...in view of the bitumen damaged condition of many of the oil paintings... and the pleasingly dull oil gilding of the medley of early nineteenth-century frames. Instead of looking like 'black holes' framed shabbily on a light ground, the muted red enhances the qualities of the pictures and is a traditional foil to sculpture. (Rowell 1993: 29-30)

This indicates the the collections' current agents have made certain judgements about the value of the aesthetic display of the objects. In this example, the oil paintings have taken precedence over the sculpture in dictating to what extent restoration to the 3rd Earl's time was undertaken.

However, concern for the sculpture collection's effective display and arrangement has also formed part of the decision-making process.

The result of Re-hanging Petworth project "promotes the impression that the gallery has survived unaltered since the nineteenth-century" (Rowell 2000: 35). Currently the project has moved to the Carved Room comprising Grinling Gibbons' famous wood carvings that is intended to be restored to its early nineteenth century appearance as the 3rd Earl's grand dining room (The National Trust 2001c). The physical context of the classical collections will again be altered as four large busts of Roman emperors will be returned from the Marble Hall to the Carved Room (The National Trust 2001c). The Trust's publicity about this part of the project (The National Trust 2001c), outlining the changes that will be made, indicate how they, as the collections' agents, are participating in the moral economy to share their perceptions with the public.

The cultural biographies of the classical neoclassical collections at Petworth House have seen to be shaped through the manipulation of their physical contexts. Throughout the collections' lives, the moral economies that have influenced their biographies have placed particular value in the physical context. The 2nd Earl's desire to express his cultural identity and the expectation of peers and visitors to his country seat to see fine, complete pieces of ancient sculpture in a quasi-classical setting prompted his plans for a dedicated sculpture gallery. This use of the collection continued in 3rd Earl's time where similar values were placed in the display of his patronage of British artists as well as using his father's collection amongst his own to enhance his kudos as an arbiter of good taste. The National Trust at Petworth preserves the evidence for both collecting and patronage of the 18th and early 19th centuries by restoring the physical context to the 3rd Earl's time to be representative of Petworth in its 'golden age' – the strong links with JMW Turner no doubt influencing their perceptions of the collections. Today all players in the moral economy desire seeing country house collections *in situ*, against 'period' interiors so that a coherent, albeit not entirely accurate, historic sensation can be gained.

Chapter 3: Enacting perpetuity in Sir John Soane's Museum

Agency, perceptions, movement in the political context

Sir John Soane's Museum lies somewhere in between a cabinet of curiosities in layout, an historic house in form, and a museum in intent. His collection is a cornucopia of objects from cork models of ancient temples to bronze sculpture, and from antique fragments to casts collected while on Grand Tour. Its arrangement was intended to demonstrate the myriad possibilities afforded by space, light and mirrors²⁶ and inspire and educate students of architecture and onlookers about the art of architecture. It is this intent, that the collection should form a permanent museum, and an educational and inspirational resource, that this chapter aims to explore under the aegis of the political context of the collection's cultural biography.

Sir John Soane's Grand Tour (1778-1780) was the creative inspiration for his ideas about architecture (Dorey 1992: 126). The motivation for his collecting sprung from this initial experience as a way of embodying his own architectural philosophy. Soane's agenda for his collection expanded with his participation in the education of young architects at the Royal Academy. Pieces had to have aesthetic and educational value to be worth collecting and acquired objects with particular spaces in the house-museum in mind (Thornton and Dorey 1992: ix and Dorey 1992: 123 and 125). Soane personally arranged his collection as opposed to having it done by a designer like Matthew Brettingham the elder who designed the layout of the 2nd Earl of Egremont's sculpture gallery at Petworth by (National Trust 1984: 52).

That Sir John Soane's²⁷ collection of objects, its accompanying library of books, manuscripts, drawings and prints, moved from private to public domains is not unusual, even for 1833. What makes this movement significant is the manner in which it took place, and the perception and use of the collection that Soane wanted preserved by successive agents, and conveyed to its publics, in perpetuity. His manipulation of the collection's political context during his lifetime has ensured the collection's longevity and its accessibility by the public. How did Soane achieve his aims? How have the collection's agents since this time ensured Soane's aims for his collection are realised?

²⁶Personal communication (conversation) with Joseph (?), steward, Sir John Soane's Museum, 5 September 2001.

²⁷1753-1837.

The gift of Soane's collection to the public was announced²⁸ in front of the audience he wished most to make use of it: his students:

[After] a long life subservient to the promotion of art and science, and of giving to the public at large, and especially to my young friends... the students of the Royal Academy, facilities and access to a collection of works of art which has not been formed without exertion or obtained without expense, I have lately sought the aid of Parliament, without whose sanction my intentions could not be realised, of perpetuating for the public my museum and library... I will add that the hour which records this Assent will be amongst the happiest of my life. (Watkin 1996: 667)

The rhetoric in this announcement is indicative of all the values he held dear about his collection as well as demonstrating his relative difficulty at the time to secure his collection for the public's benefit.

The Bill for the museum's settlement was initially cordially received by the House of Commons who compared Soane's manner of giving to the nation more favourably to the "bargain and sale" some collections to public museums (HC Deb (1833) 16, col. 667). At the third reading of the Bill, William Cobbett presented a petition to the House on behalf of Soane's disenfranchised son, George. The petition was made on the grounds that possibly legally and, more to the point, morally, John Soane would be neglecting his duty as a father and grandfather in endowing a public museum instead of providing for his family's future (HC Deb (1833) 16, col. 1334-1337). Those that supported the Bill criticised doubters for being ungrateful in the face of such a munificent gift to the nation (HC Deb (1833) 16, col. 1337-1338). The exchanges occurring in this miniature forum of the moral economy pitched family and social values against national cultural values. The compromise that was reached precariously plumped for the relative triumph of both sets of values: an amendment stipulating that Soane would be allowed to take any opportunity to leave his collection to the British Museum upon his death so freeing up his assets for his heirs (HC Deb (1833) 16, col. 1339-1340).

The terms of the Act²⁹ were precise and took a long term view for the collection and museum. It contained details about the arrangement of the objects; on the choosing of the museum's trustees (agents); on the use of the collection and resources in museum e.g. Soane's grandson John was only allowed to use library if he chose the career of an architect (Summerson 1981: 69); and on the financial wherewithal to secure collection's integrity in the future. The Act was reinforced by extensive provisions of funds and the appointment of trustees in his will of May 1833, soon after Royal Assent was given to the Bill (Last Will and Testament of Sir John

²⁸21 March 1833, after Lecture XII at Royal Academy, London.

²⁹The Act received Royal Assent on 20 April 1833.

Soane 1833). His will was also significant in asserting his right not to bequeath the collection to the British Museum whose own taxonomies would have killed the very perceptions and values of the collection he wanted to preserve. Further justification for his decision to leave his collection *in situ* was given in his memoirs where he also made a point of detailing provisions for his family (Soane 1835: 69).

Apart from the Act of Parliament, Soane employed other methods to ensure that his collection would be perceived and used as he desired. During his lifetime, he ensured his own students maintained the collection's educational value by training them to graphically reproduce his architectural casts and fragments in watercolour (Dorey 1992: 125). In addition he published three editions of Description 1830, 1832 and 1835 to “[leave] these works of Art subject as little as possible to the chance of their being removed from the positions relatively assigned to them; they having been arranged as studies from my own mind” (Soane 1835-6: vii). Description goes beyond the mere narrative of the objects on display by also giving explanations of his display techniques with the use of light and mirrors (Soane 1835-6). It complemented the collection by propagating Soane's own perceptions it because “some objects of great interest may require that the eye should be expressly directed to them” (Soane 1835-6: vii). The Act of Parliament or a summary of its terms has appeared in every edition of the Description or its successor, the New Description³⁰, ever since, so as to be a constant reminder of Soane's agency over the collection transcending his own time. Thus the physical context of the collection can be seen to be inextricably dependent on agency acting in its political context.

The museum's agents have also worked within the political context to ensure Soane's aims for the collection are maintained and justified. The continuous republishing of his Description and the New Description have maintained much of Soane's original content – including appendices on the Act. In recent editions a chronology comprising events in the collection's life, as well as Soane's, and details of deeds of the collection's successive agents (Summerson 1984: 58-68). Temporary exhibitions and publications in the architectural press (Richardson 1999: 54) pertaining to his collection or an aspect of his persona have also contributed to the maintenance of the collection's kudos by bringing it to a wider audience and constantly offering new insights into his ideas and vision e.g. Soane: Connoisseur and Collector. A Selection of Drawings from Sir John Soane's Collection (1995). However, the trustees' and curators' efforts have not always been

³⁰Published under this new title since 1955 to indicate alterations made to the text of the guide by successive curators.

seen to work to promulgate Soane's aims for his collection. The author of a review of the Soane: Connoisseur and Collector exhibition can be seen to exert his influence in the political context: "... if the gallery is to fulfil its didactic role and to realise Soane's educational aims, then what is needed is more than just a collection of show-stoppers... the exhibitions... must surely be organised around a theme or themes..." (Cruikshank 1995: 52).

Time has obviously taken its toll on the collection and conservation and restoration have been necessary as have changes to the arrangement and display of the collection for practical reasons such as security (Summerson 1981: 8). However, Soane's agency is also seen to impact on these aspects. At the time of some significant restoration to the interior fabric, Peter Thornton, then the curator, explained the museum's ethos: "The vision that one must aim to restore is Soane's... for Soane told us what he wanted done. He asked his Trustees to keep his Museum as nearly as possible as it was in his time. What are we to say that we can improve on that?" (Thornton 1990: 232). Other limitations have also forced the collection's agents to exert their influence in the political context for the benefit of the collection. For example, by 1947, the funds placed in Trust for the maintenance of the collection and museum were no longer adequate. Parliament was requested to give the museum financial help to fulfil the terms of the 1833 Act and to ensure the collection's accessibility to the public for five days a week. Ever since this request, Parliament has offered the museum annual gift aid to honour the provisions of Soane's Act (Summerson 1981: 68).

Compared with many museum collections whose uses and values have evolved, perceptions of Soane's collection have largely remained as Soane would have wished as a consequence of his own agency. Had the moral economy, at the time of the collection's gift to the nation, prevailed on the side of social values instead of cultural values, then it is possible that his desires for his collection would never have come to fruition. However, Soane's own agency is inescapable and he is seen to have enacted the most durable form of perpetuity for his collection.

Chapter 4: Uses and influences of Sir William Hamilton's collection

Inspiration in the sentimental context

Sir William Hamilton³¹ acted as host and guide to many Grand Tourists during his time as the British Envoy Extraordinary to the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies³². As a knowledgeable connoisseur of classical art, patron and avid vulcanologist he inspired tourists in the wonders of what Naples had to offer: archaeology, art and scientific curiosity. Hamilton's collection of antiquities, naturalia and contemporary art was not one, discrete entity. Indeed, the continuous sales and gifts of collections and single pieces in the course of his life may lead one to question whether it is appropriate to speak of 'Sir William Hamilton's collection' at all. Today, objects he owned, whether intended to form a collection or not, are dispersed throughout the world between museums, art galleries, universities and private collections (Jenkins and Sloan 1996: 8). The British Museum was the most significant beneficiary of his collecting. Even here, due to the taxonomic mores of the museum, evidence for his collection can be found in almost all of its departments, on display and in storage³³.

There is no doubt that the impact of Hamilton's collecting on British cultural heritage has been an important one, in terms of the knowledge value it has provided and the far-reaching inspirations it has afforded. Within the framework of this case-study, reference to Sir William Hamilton's collection will be used in the widest possible sense and will encompass objects he acquired for his private collection and, through sale or gift, have moved either into a public collection or have remained in private hands. An exploration of the collection's sentimental context will demonstrate how broad an influence an historic collection can have and will also emphasise the role wing agents can play in the propagating of the collection's values in other spheres of cultural influence.

Hamilton was keen to improve contemporary English design by encouraging craftsmen to make detailed studies of antique forms and motifs (Haskell 1987: 33). For this reason he commissioned the French connoisseur known as 'Baron D'Hancarville' to publish his first collection of antiquities, mainly comprising decorated Greek vases. These aspirations were echoed in his desire to find "good homes" for his collections where his own role in their acquirement would not be overlooked (Burn 1997: 188). So Hamilton can be seen to value his

³¹1730-1803.

³²1764-1800.

³³Personal communication (email) with Jill Holmen, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Medieval and Later

collection for this inspiration they would provide for others. In addition, his role as patron to contemporary designers such as John Flaxman and Josiah Wedgwood (both of whom also worked together) cemented his desire for the collection as an inspirational model.

Baron D'Hancarville's efforts to publish AEGR did not just contribute to fulfilling Hamilton's aspirations. D'Hancarville himself was inspired by the collection and sought to propagate his own theories about the evolution of art, civilisation and society through its publication (Haskell 1987: 39). The impact AEGR on fine and decorative art has probably superseded the impact of the collection itself (Burn 1997: 188). Thus publication enabled the ideals and symbolism represented by Hamilton's collection to be appreciated and reproduced far and wide: "Writing... has caused the Moral world revolutions like those which navigation has produced in the Physical... Every mind is in some measure become contemporary; and times, stopped as it were in their progression, seem to be reunited."³⁴ (Jenkins 1996a: 40). The cultural biography of Sir William Hamilton's collection can therefore be seen to be shaped by one of its wing agents, in this case Baron D'Hancarville. AEGR was a product of D'Hancarville's manipulation of the collection's sentimental context.

Although some versions of AEGR were lavishly published, often in full colour to show off the aesthetic qualities of the collection, single prints from AEGR were also available for those who were not able to afford all volumes (Jenkins 1996a: 61) thus enabling more people to buy into the ideals of the collection and associate themselves with its virtues. The impact of AEGR can be detected in numerous spheres of influence. For example, Sir John Soane owned a copy of AEGR who made a close study of it to inform his own thoughts about symbolism in Antiquity (Watkin 1996: 256-257). "From fireplaces to papier mâché boxes, and from wall-paintings to tapestry, the influence of his publications could be seen everywhere" (Jenkins 1996a: 61). One may speculate that the reproduction Greek vases sold in the British Museum's Grenville shop³⁵ is also a result of the desire to buy into the very ideals Hamilton wanted the collection to extoll.

The most notable inspiration derived from the collection can be seen in Josiah Wedgwood's use of AEGR as a basis for his pottery designs: "I am picking up every design and

Antiquities, the British Museum, 31 August 2001.

³⁴Baron D'Hancarville in AEGR II, p. 6.

³⁵Observed during a visit to the British Museum, 9 September 2001.

improvement for a Vase work”³⁶ (Finer and Savage 1965: 66). Wedgwood not only chose to emulate the classical motifs of the collection but also wanted to reproduce its materials (Vickers 1997: 269). An interesting example of this is in his development of black basalt ware with red enamelling to reproduce the Greek red-figure vases of Hamilton’s collection. Originally known as ‘Egyptian black’, Wedgwood refined its composition to resemble real basalt more closely. This is indicative of the demand for ‘good’ copies of antique pieces and the desire by those who could not afford the ‘real thing’ to acquire comparable pieces (Vickers 1997: 270). Through the inspiration afforded to Wedgwood by Hamilton’s collection, Hamilton own aspirations were realised – both in inspiring good design and spreading his ideals of good taste to a wider public. Wedgwood wares themselves were collected and have been collected ever since:

I am rejoiced to know you have shipped off the Green and Gold – may the winds and seas be propitious and the *invaluable* Cargo be wafted in safety to their destined Market, for the emolument of our American Brethren and friends... It is really amazing how rapidly the use of it has spread almost [*sic*] over the whole Globe, and how universally it is liked.³⁷ (Finer and Savage 1965: 58).

This appropriation by Wedgwood of symbolic capital from Hamilton, by virtue of the publication that mediated this transfer, has effected a far greater impact on taste in design than Hamilton’s collection has done by itself. Further, the name ‘Wedgwood’ is synonymous, in some circles, with ideals of good taste in objects. And symbolic capital has also been appropriated by those trying to emulate Wedgwood’s ‘style’.

An example of this can be seen in these so-called ‘Wedgwood style’ items being sold on the internet.

The British Museum is now one of, if not the most, important primary agents of Hamilton’s collection. The museum’s own manipulation of the collection’s sentimental context can be demonstrated by an analysis of the motives behind their mounting of Vases and Volcanoes. Sir William Hamilton and his Collection in 1996. Clues to the motivations of those who were inspired to create the exhibition can be found in the book that accompanied it (Jenkins and Sloan 1996). The exhibition and accompanying volume was intended to pay homage to Hamilton’s role as collector and connoisseur by bringing together part of his collection dispersed throughout the museum and throughout the world under one roof and revive methods of interpretation that were prevalent in his time (Jenkins and Sloan: 9). The organisers also sought to use this opportunity to create the most comprehensive account of his life and of any eighteenth century collector (Jenkins and Sloan 1996: 9). What is significant about this endeavour is its

³⁶Letter from Wedgwood his business partner, Thomas Bentley, June 1767.

³⁷Letter from Wedgwood to Bentley, September 1767.

underlying hope that the reputation of Hamilton as collector and connoisseur will take precedence over his tarnished reputation following his wife's misdemeanours during his lifetime³⁸ (Jenkins and Sloan 1996: 9). And it is the inspiration offered by his phenomenal collection that forms the impetus for this endeavour.

Hamilton himself is frequently referred to personally, highlighting the authors' admiration for his collection: "... we should like to thank... Sir William Hamilton for being so charming and fascinating" (Jenkins and Sloan 1996: 10). "Sir William would have been pleased to find so many of his cameos and intaglios brought together here" (Jenkins 1996b: 105). During Hamilton's lifetime, he felt he did not receive the gratitude from the British Museum that he thought was deserved for his efforts to ameliorate their collections: "The presents I have made, & have further to make to the Museum since my return here have, I am sure, cost me £300, tho' the dons do not so much as thank me when I send them a work of art..." (Ramage 1990: 477). However the opportunity to 'right' this lack of reverence for his collection was taken by the director, Dr R.G.W. Anderson: "All who work with the collections of the British Museum are constantly reminded of the debt they owe to the Museum's many founders and benefactors. It is fitting, therefore, that the life and collections of Sir William Hamilton, one of the most gifted and versatile of that remarkable group, should be celebrated in *Vases and Volcanoes*" (1996: 8). The exhibition and accompanying book can be seen to restore the values associated with Hamilton's collection by working within the sentimental context to regain the interest of its publics. This use of the collection for this purpose was complemented by a three day colloquium in April 1996 (Burn 1997: 187) and a subsequent issue of the *Journal of the History of Collections*³⁹ entirely devoted to different aspects of Hamilton's collection.

These testaments to the value and perceptions of Hamilton's collection are part of its cultural biography. Just as the collection inspired the collection's primary and wing agents to pay tribute to it, the products of their endeavours will work to remind the moral economy of the collection's value as knowledge and as inspiration.

³⁸Hamilton was publicly embarrassed as a consequence of his second wife, Emma Hamilton's, affair with Horatio Nelson.

Conclusion

This study sprung from a desire to understand the deeper significances of historic collections in British institutions. How has the application of a cultural biographical approach to Grand Tour collections helped to gain this understanding? It has been demonstrated that cultural biographies of Grand Tour collections help to reveal the motives for their assemblage and for their preservation. Through the revelation the collection's physical, sentimental and political contexts, a deeper understanding is gained of the reasons why such collections are still held in such high esteem in Western Society today, despite the diversification of ideas of taste in cultural heritage since the time of the Grand Tour. Collections incarnate and make culture visible (Pomian 1990: 275). Grand Tour collections incarnate more than one culture. Every agent that has affected their contexts will leave with the cultural biography some residue of their cultural mores. The accumulation of these cultural meanings patterns the collection's aura. Cultural biography shows that the collection is valuable not only for the knowledge it holds about the many cultures that produced the objects but also makes explicit the culture of the agents that have administered the collections and the publics that have appreciated them.

The case-study collections used in this study have highlighted certain aspects of their cultural biographies, each collection being viewed through one of its contexts. However, a comprehensive cultural biography would seek to make connections between these contexts to a much greater extent than the scope of this study has allowed. Although agency in one context may seem to prevail over agency in another, the interplay between all contexts should also be explored as it will further elucidate how all contexts are manipulated to affect a collection's perceptions, values and uses.

To propose further avenues for the approach presented in this study certain criteria have to be fulfilled. What is important is that the collection is treated as a singular entity in its own right, and the processes it has undergone must be analysed over the collection's entire life-span. It would therefore lend itself well to other collections considered to be of historic and cultural importance because the answers to the questions that this approach poses reveals so much about how the cultural value systems of the past have changed, or remained the same. For example, another strand to late eighteenth and nineteenth century British culture was the Gothic Revival

³⁹1997. *Journal of the History of Collections* 9 (2).

and nostalgia for 'Old England'. This 'movement' also spawned avid collectors and has resulted in a not insignificant legacy of historic collections for cultural heritage institutions (Wainwright 1989). Collections built up in the period of British colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have also had a significant impact on the shaping of British cultural heritage (Davis 1997). A cultural biographical approach to understand the impact of these collection would also be revealing. The changing contexts of natural history collections would also prove to be a fascinating exemplar for this approach.

Cultural biography could be extended to comparative studies of collections e.g. of the similarities and differences between male and female motivations for collecting and the comparison of the processes they have undergone. Similarly, the comparison of the processes undergone by collections in different countries may also reveal the extent to which cultural values play a role in shaping the moral economies the collections are part of, and subject to. The cultural biographical approach would essentially lend itself to the interrogation of any type of collection, collected by any type of person or institution, particularly a collection that has survived over a significant amount of time. What is important is that the collection is still intact and publicly accessible. One's understanding of collections long ago dispersed would not be elucidated much through cultural biography nor would it be socially meaningful if the collection has remained in private hands.

The purpose of this study was to present a culturally informed investigation by asking *how?* and *from what perspective?* It is important to ask these questions of the material culture that is valued in one's society to be reminded of the importance of object systems in the shaping of cultural perceptions, identities and taste. The multi-contextual approach of cultural biography reveals that the importance of these object systems to (Western) society is reliant as much on the processes that have shaped them as the collected objects themselves.

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List of abbreviations

HC Deb – House of Commons Debate

n.p.p. – no place of publication.

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