

The Mind of the Collector

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7:30 p.m.

The Philoctetes Center

Levy: Francis Levy
Nersessian: Edward Nersessian
Dilworth: Leah Dilworth (moderator)
Edelman: Eric Edelman
Heller: Steven Heller
Globus: Dorothy Globus
Scanga: Bill Scanga
Volk: Tyler Volk

Levy: Welcome to *The Mind of the Collector*, which is actually a sequel to a panel we had last year with Al Sax that was called *Sensibility of the Collector*. I'm very pleased to present Leah Dilworth, who will moderate our panel. Dr. Dilworth teaches English at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus. She is the author of *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*. This work led her to consider collecting as one mode of representing the Native people of the Southwest. Recognizing collecting as a "discourse"—a system of making meaning—she continues to teach and write about collecting. She edited the volume of essays *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, and she has served on the board of directors of the City Reliquary since 2005. Dr. Dilworth will introduce the other panelists.

Dilworth: Before I get started, in the interest of full disclosure, I have to confess that I do not collect anything. I had a passing flirtation with plaid ceramic dinnerware, but I've come to realize that I'm sort of the opposite of the collector and I think there's probably a phobia word that describes that. But I love other people's collections, other people's scrapbooks, other people's family photo albums, anything—vacation snapshots—I love it. I get sort of a voyeuristic thrill out of looking at these things and seeing how people have arranged and displayed them. I'm also a terrible snoop, so if you ever have me over to your house, lock up your drawers. I've managed to turn this prurient interest into a career asset. As Francis said, I teach English and I've managed to write and publish about this subject of collecting as a discourse.

I'm delighted to be here tonight in such illustrious company and I can't wait to hear what everyone has to say. So I will introduce our panelists. You have the little biographical sketch of everyone, but I want to associate the names with the information. Tyler Volk is Associate Professor of Biology and Science Director of the Environmental Studies program at New York University. Dorothy Twining Globus is a collector of many, many different kinds of things and she has curated exhibitions at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Fashion Institute of Technology and she is currently the Curator of Exhibitions at the Museum of Arts & Design, where, by the way, there is a fabulous exhibit of knitting and lace artwork.

Globus: *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*, a very important title.

Dilworth: Next to Dorothy is Steven Heller, Co-Chair of the MFA Designer as Author program at the School of Visual Arts. He has also served as the Art Director at the New York Times for 33 years. He's working on a number of projects and has published many, many books about graphic art. I guess the books themselves are like collections. And what I thought was really interesting is that he's currently working on a critical history of the swastika.

Heller: No—that, I wrote. That's done. It's a critical history of branding totalitarian states.

Dilworth: So I hope to hear more about that. Next is Bill Scanga, my friend from the City Reliquary. He is the Vice President of Collections at The City Reliquary. He's responsible for deciding whose collections we show and then constructing the exhibits for them. We have a community collectors' window that changes every four to six weeks and we've had collections such as dipsticks, pens, Pez containers—what were some of the others?

Scanga: Flashlights, thermoses, bicycle parts.

Dilworth: And finally, Eric Edelman is a collagist and found-object sculptor living in New York City. He has exhibited widely and his work is represented in the books *The Art of the Miniature* and *Genius in a Bottle*, as well as the monograph on his work called *Eric Edelman: Collages of the Unconscious*. When I was looking around the Internet to find out more about you I learned about a new kind of object—the bottle onesie. So we'll speak more about that.

Before I turn it over to this discussion, I thought I would just introduce a few questions that we might discuss—three basic areas. The first is the motivation for collecting: what drives your collecting? Where does the impulse and urge come from? We can talk about desire, obsession, compulsion. But there's also curiosity and wonder and a creative urge. Is it about creating something that's aesthetically pleasing? The second general area would be how collecting is an epistemological system. How does it work? How does it make meaning? How do we know and learn through collections? What kinds of assumptions are behind that kind of epistemology? And finally, the third area I thought it might be interesting to talk about, since there are so many collectors here, is the way the collections are contained or organized and displayed. Is collecting always about organizing and containing information and things? Can there be a disorganized or disordered collection? And what do displays of collections tell us about the human relationship to the material world? So these are just some questions and thoughts to consider as we talk. I thought to get things going maybe we could just go around the circle and have each of you speak about what your relationship to the topic is, the idea of collecting, your own practices of collecting, what perspective you're bringing to this discussion today. So I'll start here with Eric.

Edelman: Thank you. Well, I guess the earliest memory that I have of collecting things was picking up spare change from my allowance and going to the five and dime and in those days—long gone I'm afraid—they had counters where they used to spread the stuff out. It might be in a plastic bag with a cardboard header, but it was always sort of free and you could rummage around and get what you wanted, and I remember I formed a peculiar obsession for compasses early on and began collecting them and they've become a major part of the collections I use.

Dilworth: We have some of your objects and there's a compass in them.

Edelman: Yes, several.

Scanga: My dad was a big collector, slightly problematic. When he passed away we had to throw away literally tons of stuff. My mother is a collector-phobe, like you. So whether or not this is genetic it's hard to say, because I've got some of each side in me. How long have I seriously been collecting? I don't know. I've been an artist and tried to involve it in that and now I'm just sort of a pure collector. I've been doing the Reliquary, displaying other people's collections for about five years now. I don't know what else to say at this point.

Heller: Well, I do competitive collecting. To me it's a sport. I try to collect more than anybody else and things that people don't collect. So you can see there some mini-mannequins. What I end up doing is I collect things and then I study them and then I put them in books. So I've done over 100 books. And the mini-mannequin book was great; it went out of print really quickly. It's very rare. But I had a photographer live in that area for four months photographing everything. He was a colleague of mine at the New York Times and I'd see him come in in the morning, and what happens is those characters come alive at night and they really tormented him. But competition is really a great motivation and that's how it started—I had to collect more than my parents. This is very psychological. I had to beat them at their own game. But basically, I don't consider myself a collector. I consider myself a documentarian, and I document phenomena. In order to do that I spend time at institutions looking at material, researching original material or secondary material. But there's a point at which you can only do so much of that and then you have to have it. So this book, *Branding the Totalitarian State*—I've collected and I buy from Nazis. I buy from Italian fascists and people from the People's Republic of China and I get material that can't be found anywhere else. The book will be finished by 2008 and then it all goes to the Wolfsonian Institution, where there's going to be an archive.

Globus: Making room for another collection.

Heller: Yes, underwear. Used.

Nersessian: Men's or women's?

Heller: At this point I haven't decided. I'll take what anybody gives me.

Globus: I'm very interested in objects and the stories that they tell and I'm also interested in how you present the objects. As a child we traveled around a lot and I was not really able to accumulate. Since I've moved to New York, I feel like the flood gates have opened and it doesn't stop. Part of it is the joy of finding things. People say, "Well, what do you collect?" And I collect all kinds of things and if I see something that looks interesting, I'll start collecting that category. And it's an iterative process. One thing leads to another and I have certain pieces that I consider seminal elements in my collection that got me started on a whole other trip. That's combined with the fact that since college I've worked in museums. I've worked at the Smithsonian as an intern and I've found my path and I'm really interested in other people's collections and how they sort them and organize them. I worked with lots and lots of collectors when I was at the Cooper Hewitt. I did 188 exhibitions in 20 years, and I ran into a lot of interesting people. It goes on and on and it's a lot of fun, and I can't stop. I admit it. If people don't like my apartment they can leave. I don't care; they don't have to look at it. But if you like

it, I like to show it off and play with it and talk to you about it. But I understand that it's too much for some people.

Dilworth: Tyler?

Volk: Okay, so I'm a scientist at NYU in environmental science, but I'm also very interested in systems, from the molecular scale up to the social scales and psychological scales and patterns of systems. So I guess tonight what I can probably bring to the party would be some questions about the relationship between, let's say, some of the collecting we've been hearing about and data collection, let's say, by scientists. I was thinking of an oceanographic research voyage I was on, and how obsessed I was about seeing particular latitude and longitude places in the Atlantic ocean, and what the phosphate profile was going to be down in that site and trying to put them together into a larger picture. I wrote a book a few years ago called *Meta Patterns*, and I'm still very interested in spheres. In a way, I collect patterns. I'll take photos and I'll search architectural archives, and I'm interested in the occurrence of the sphere in different places, everything from architecture to human symbolism—the Zen, all the way down to the parts of the body that are spherical, to eggs of creatures that are spherical, down into molecular structures that are spherical. So I'm really interested in why the sphere occurs in various different places. So what's the relationship between that and the other collections we've been hearing about? I can at least add my perspective.

Dilworth: Okay, does anyone want to pick up on a thread that Tyler mentioned—pattern making, or anything else that we've brought up so far?

Globus: I think of my categories of things as sort of building taxonomies of interrelated things. People say, "Well, how many do you have?" I really don't care. It keeps growing, and so I have multiple collections and I add to them as I see pieces that make sense to put into them. But I sort them and I have a California Job Lot type case that my husband bought for me early on, which has 48 drawers in it. And so I have things in each of the drawers by different categories. Of course that's defined by how they fit. It's quite shallow and there are certain limitations. I have an old microscope slide, which is even more challenging to fill, and I haven't actually filled it. They're very skinny drawers. So part of it is the sorting for me. I love sorting, and I can always go down to a finer category of sorting.

Heller: I believe that there are things that shouldn't be collected.

Audience: Underwear?

Heller: Underwear I'm making into a bigger thing than it really is. But no, for me there are things that I just won't touch, you know? Because either it's beneath me or it's above me, or it doesn't fit into a category that is in my head. I mean, there's a little compartment, and I collect what's within that interest area. Sometimes they lead to other things. Sometimes it's like a branching tree. For example, I collect these mini-mannequins, which I've stopped doing because they're extremely expensive. Thanks to my book, the prices have gone up 800%, so I couldn't buy them even if I wanted to. But I'm thanked by the dealers. I realized since I was doing this other thing on fascism and totalitarianism that there had to be figurines. So I started collecting figurines related to propaganda, which I call "three dimensional posters." So I create these taxonomies as

well. But I won't collect certain kinds of these things.

Globus: I always say I don't collect Avon bottles.

Heller: Yes, Avon or Hummel ware.

Globus: A Hummel? No, absolutely not.

Dilworth: Why not?

Heller: Hummel is Bush collecting.

Globus: I'm not interested in it.

Heller: Hummel is right wing collecting.

Globus: But I do like things that other people don't even think are worth collecting.

Dilworth: Fascist? Fascist things are not?

Globus: No, there's Fascism and then there's the American right wing. No, I won't support that but I will expose the other.

Scanga: Well, you have to kind of create limits on what you actually collect, you know? You start collecting something and it explodes, so you say, "Okay, I'm going to just go with red things." You limit yourself, or you follow a branch for a little while to see which way it goes. But you need that structure.

Heller: It's a survival mechanism.

Globus: Price is also a limiting factor. I have hundreds of doorstops, which I picked up 25 years ago. Now they're so expensive, they're not fun to collect anymore. I like the sort of forgotten, under-appreciated categories of things.

Heller: Yeah, that is the challenge. I was just in Berlin and they have something there called "Ostalgie"—nostalgia for the East. I was in the East, and I followed the path I took when I was there 20 years ago before the wall came down. Of course, it's changed remarkably. But I started buying up all this crap that came out of the GDR. It's not for my book because I'm not covering the GDR, but someday I know I'm going to use it. So for me there's a system that's building. I just don't look at it as a strict system. I just figure, "Okay, this is going to go into these boxes that I have, and someday there's going to be a need to pull it out, and I will profit from it."

Scanga: So it's about profit? You've got a competitive edge, but it's also about making money, too?

Heller: No, I'm joking. As Bill Maher says, "I joke." No, it's not about making money, because I don't make money off of any of my books.

Scanga: But your collection, the value of your collection—

Heller: The collection is valuable, but I'm giving it away. I will profit from it intellectually because there will be some connection that I can make between the GDR material and something else at some point. I don't know what it is just yet. I tried to figure it out while I was on the plane and I couldn't, so it's just pushed away for now.

Globus: It will become apparent at the right time.

Heller: Right.

Globus: I have lots of categories like that that are growing. I picked up a bunch of little envelopes of old photo corners from scrapbooks. I love scrapbooks anyway, and all of a sudden I realized that I had an unbelievably good collection of photo corners. So they're all in one box now. They came in different colors, and there were ones for WWII with red, white and blue, and heart ones for Valentines. I like things that are hand-related and sort of passed on hobbies that people don't do anymore.

Heller: And have a story behind them.

Globus: Yeah, they all have stories.

Heller: The great thing about collections is that there's a story, and if you look for the story, you'll find something really fascinating. That's what this book on totalitarianism is: it's the stories of why people did what they did, how they did them, and what the official motivation and personal motivations were. It's fascinating. I can talk about it for hours and put lots of people to sleep.

Volk: So it seems to me similar to what, in science, naturalists do—let's say orchid collectors or botanists. Even the word "collector"—probably the first thing that would come to my mind would be Charles Darwin or Wallace, naturalists who are going out and finding all these species. That doesn't seem too different from what you're describing as these taxonomies. You've got a certain category and now you're finding examples within that category and then you can expand, you can blow up and unpack it to a larger story.

Globus: You have the phylum and then you have the species.

Volk: Yeah, so it's really hierarchical, or a nested hierarchy—like all red objects, or stamps, let's say. I used to collect stamps and coins and leaves as a kid. It does go back with me to childhood, too, now that you brought up childhood. So, thinking of systems, it's relatively confined to one characteristic, like stamps. Within that there could be U.S. stamps or French stamps. But it's only a couple levels in a sense.

Globus: But I have what I call the "crossovers." I have a globe collection and I have a big collection of New York City small buildings and memorabilia, and I have a Statue of Liberty sitting on a weighted globe. So they do intersect, and that's another thing. I love the whole three-dimensional intersection of this stuff as well.

Volk: One of the spheres I found was not a physical sphere, but in Plato's Timaeus, where this deity is being described as a sphere. One of the reasons it's a sphere is because, since it's spinning—obviously the heavens are spinning—if it were cubical, there would be vacuum behind the corners. It was almost like the current view of the universe in which what's outside our universe is other universes, but then what's outside space/time—it's not that there's more space outside space/time, it's all kind of contained. Plato did have this idea, but it was spherical. There were these two great spheres and one was sameness and one was difference. I always loved that image of sameness and difference as these two spheres that are turning; this is before you get to the heavenly spheres; these are the spheres of abstraction that imprint themselves on everything.

Something such as leaves of trees—they're all green, they've all got chlorophyll in them, they're all flat. They're all very similar in some ways, but they're different for the different species. To me, clearly, that's what's going on in some of your collections, in that it's collecting almost as a pure cognitive faculty. It's stripped down to the basic desire to see. It's the difference within the sameness that leads the epistemology of the collection.

Globus: A lot of times it's the evolution of the design. I have a really early stapler that is completely different from any stapler you see today. They had this kind of spiral rat-tail at the back and you mounted the staples around it, and it was like, "Wow, this is really a cool thing." And so then I started collecting staplers. I have tape dispensers. Actually, I brought this one thing because there was a joke in the New Yorker a couple of years ago, with the two little snails looking at the little plastic tape dispenser, and it says, "I don't care if it's a tape dispenser, I love her." What's really interesting is that Scotch made a snail shaped tape dispenser after this cartoon came out. So those are the kinds of things that I really like.

Volk: So you start off with something and then it just expands.

Globus: You start seeing things. You start seeing a category everywhere. I've done this in exhibitions, too. The opening show at the Cooper Hewitt—the conceptualizer of the show was this very intense Austrian architect named Hans Hollein, and he decided that we should show ordinary designs. So we did a whole thing on daily bread—I don't know if anyone saw Man Transforms back in the '70s. We had hammers, and so I found all these different hammers. I was looking up all these hammer companies. Stanley had a great collection. And then he said, "We're going to show stars, because stars are certain shapes but in fact real scientific stars are not those shapes." So we started collecting stars. A lot of these things, no one wanted them after the show, so guess where they ended up?

Heller: But that's it: there are all these things in commercial culture that are ephemeral. I started, just because I was bored on a plane on a trip to Europe, collecting vomit bags.

Globus: There are a lot of collectors of those.

Heller: Then from the vomit bags, I went to those bags that are in bathrooms for sanitary napkins. And I have a ton of them. They're different designs. The fact is, these are things that don't need design, so the phenomenon is that designers or printers or somebody is given these things, and they put different typefaces on them or they put little drawings on them, and they

become this story that is told. Why are these things so important that they require this kind of customization? As Dorothy said, lots of people collect these things because they're the kind of thing that, if you're sitting around doing nothing, you pick one up and put it in your pocket, and then you find another one and pick that up.

Globus: And then you see them everywhere.

Volk: So are you looking for the generalizations, then, of the design of the vomit bags?

Globus: The iteration.

Volk: Subcategories?

Heller: I'm looking to see how many I can find that are different within the same parameters. The size is always the same and the shape is always the same. The paper may be a little different, but it can't be porous. So eventually I'll look at that file that I've thrown these in and I'll come up with a story and I'll write something about it. I'll quote somebody who designs them; I'll find somebody who produces them and I'll maybe talk about somebody who uses them. And it's a story. It's another way of telling a story.

Volk: So then you're building this larger structure around these objects after you're done.

Heller: Yes.

Volk: You're no longer making the discovery. It seems to me almost an act of discovery.

Heller: It's the act of discovery and it's kind of like flirtation, and then I have this wonderful revelation: I've fallen in love, we have sex, and then it's over.

Volk: And you write the story.

Heller: And then I write the story.

Edelman: So you quit collecting when you write the story?

Heller: I quit. Every time I finish a book I'm through with the collection. I have stuff that went to the Cooper Hewitt and, as I said, I'm sending a lot of material to the Wolfsonian, because that collection is amazing, for those of you who don't know it.

Globus: It's the perfect source.

Heller: That's the amazing thing about museums, at least these smaller museums: they embrace collections because the collections are stories and they're these receptacles.

Levy: It sounds like Picasso—the relationship to the object, the women.

Heller: Yes, exactly.

Globus: We did a show once at the Cooper Hewitt talking about the whole evolution of the museum. One of my colleagues decided we were going to do it chronologically by accession number, which was really quite a challenge. It was very interesting because it also reflected what people were interested in at a given time—really early stuff. There used to be an antiquities department at B. Altman's, and they used to give things to the Cooper Hewitt in the very early days. There's all this interesting trivia that I've amassed in great quantity. I think there are so many different kinds of stories. I've always wanted to do a show on a single object and talk about it from all the different perspectives: the way it's made, what it says about a culture, where it fits in history, how it changes over time.

Heller: The only real problem with all of this is that it takes up space. Any collector knows that space is a premium. I have an apartment and two houses that have these collections, and I have to send my kid to college so I can use his room.

Edelman: That's a novel motivation for sending your kid to college.

Scanga: One of the things we talked about, too, is that collecting something changes it entirely. It's a totally different thing once you start collecting it. I started collecting street cleaner bristles from the street. They'd fall off the street cleaners; they're scattered all over New York City and you've never noticed them. They're everywhere. Once you see one, once you figure out exactly what it is, you're like, "Oh my God, these things are everywhere." Some of them are bent and some are rusty and some are long, some are short. So I think collecting really transforms the object. It transformed it for me, but then when I share that collection with people, they say, "Oh my God, what is this thing?" They never see it, and they come back a couple days later, and they're like, "God, these things are everywhere."

Globus: "Here are a few more for you," right? Because they start picking them up.

Heller: But sometimes they look at it and just say, "What is this?" and they don't care at all. I mean it's commonplace stuff. So it's transformation of the commonplace, or it's just the commonplace remaining common.

Scanga: No, you transform it. I think you've transformed it by collecting it.

Heller: I agree with you, but I also believe, as I said earlier—Hummel is a bad example because it's just meant to be collected—but there are hangers that a friend of mine collects, and I just don't want to look at his damn hangers. You know, it hasn't transformed.

Scanga: Well, that's just you.

Levy: Does that have to do with cognition? I mean, it's the cognitive faculty of the mind?

Scanga: What do you mean?

Levy: You were saying there was something you hadn't noticed before, but by collecting it and taking notice of it, it's some faculty of the human mind that is being cultivated by collecting.

Scanga: Yeah, and I think you see things differently the more you know about them. Like bicycles: I started bicycles and looking at every bike I see on the street. I can tell who owns the bike or if it's a work bike, or the kind of person, by the bike. You know, it's all transformed by the way my mind works when I see something. Is that what you mean?

Levy: Yes, exactly.

Dilworth: Objects have, sort of, social lives, I guess. They move from place to place, and then moving into a collection does transform the meaning, and the juxtaposition of it with other objects. There's meaning generated in those juxtapositions. It's all about how you organize it and what patterns you see.

Scanga: Organize and display it.

Dilworth: And then what narrative does it tell?

Heller: You know, there's art criticism, there's design criticism, there's film criticism; there's no real collection criticism. Creating a collection, you create works of art from them, but the collection itself becomes this expressive medium that sometimes gets displayed, sometimes doesn't. But I could see now, in the world of blogs, collection critics going into people's homes and doing these things and starting a whole new discipline—a whole new graduate program.

Edelman: The blogs themselves are like a meta-collection.

Heller: Yes.

Edelman: Because you're busy collecting happenings—things overheard, things seen. And when they become about collections, there's another level yet.

Globus: But they're not objects. To me it's got to be stuff.

Heller: That's because you and I are aging baby boomers. For my son's age, they are objects. They're not objects, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't have to be an object.

Dilworth: That's what I was trying to say earlier about epistemology: that collection is the mode by which we know so many things. I mean, collecting was one of the major modes of scientific practice, right? That was how you understood the world, by getting a lot of stuff together and looking at it and organizing it.

Heller: Yeah, looking at different stars out there.

Dilworth: Observation—it's very visual.

Heller: Bird watching. That's like the primal kind of—

Dilworth: Right, they check off the birds that they have—

Heller: Yeah, there are birders that want to get the checklist of how many—6,000 species of birds that they've seen.

Globus: Life-long list.

Heller: I have a friend who's a bird watching cheater. He checks off the list.

Edelman: Oh, that's very sad.

Globus: I'm very interested in museums and how museums present collections. I finally got to one of the most amazing collections of all time, which is the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. I don't know how many of you know it, but it's like, "Wow, this was from a time when people thought they could collect one of everything." It's an extraordinary collection because they also did lots of cross-referencing. Instead of doing it by geography—there's a whole case of ivory, and it's ivory from all over the world: amulets and talismans. I went through this museum, which is dense even by my standards, and it was fantastic to look at these different categories. And it really was about the associative stuff instead of doing it in a more anthropological way. It was really spectacular. They've left it the way it was in the late 19th century.

Scanga: But that stuff changes, too. At the time that was a very scientific method of display.

Globus: Right, absolutely. And the British Museum, a couple of years ago, opened their Enlightenment Galleries, which is a staggering installation, because it's all done using the seminal collections that were the basis of information. So there's Lord Hamilton's fossil collection, for example. That was the collection that helped to establish what a fossil was, because they thought it was something else before. It's the old library part of the British Museum, and they've done it in a sort of mid-19th century installation. Again, it's this cross-referencing stuff: religions of the world, instead of just one part of the world. I recommend it to anyone. I just flipped out when I saw it; it's huge and endless and you could go back to it forever. But it was about the ordering of knowledge at a certain point in time, and it's amazing to see that they made the effort to go back to a particular period of time and reconstruct it like that. So it's an exhibit of a time—fantastic.

Volk: Leah, one of your questions—I don't think you brought it up initially when you were going down your list, but you said something about, "Does nature collect?" What were your thoughts there?

Dilworth: Well, there was a talk about the bowerbird at the Reliquary a while ago, and I know that animals do something that looks like collecting. But I've always thought of collecting as a cultural activity. It's really a human—it's something that's quintessentially cultural. But then I'm thinking, "Am I making an opposition between culture and nature that's not correct?" I mean, is there some other way to think about collecting as occurring across species, across matter? Maybe I should just get rid of the divide between culture and nature. I don't know, I was wondering what you thought about that.

Volk: I think there's some profound difference, but nature does occur in these nested hierarchies—just the biological classification, even though it's humans imposing species, genus

and family and order and class. They're imposing the actual names. But those are real things: birds are birds because they have common characteristics, and now there are sub-categories of birds. It really does exist. So I'm really thinking as we're talking that there is something almost universal about this cognitive desire to discover more objects within that category, and then putting them together to come to some kind of new narrative that didn't exist before. That's clearly cultural and it's really cognitive. But you could argue that it evolved because it mirrors the way nature is in the nesting of category. Universal cognitive capabilities would evolve because they are correctly seeing the world as the world is. We have a predisposition to think this way, in these layers of nested similarity with differences within them, because it works, because it's very useful. It gives us information about the way the natural world is. Of course, in the human world—water pitchers or glasses or pencils or hangers or the color red—we have these categories because we are projecting out. We are manifesting these basic structures that we originally got from nature in the cultural world. So I think there must be some deep relationship, even though nature doesn't collect, per se, in the same kind of way.

Heller: You know, when you talk about nesting, I'm thinking of that movie *A Beautiful Mind*, and there's that scene where—what's-his-name, the physicist?

Volk: Nash.

Heller: Nash. He's in that little room—that garage—and the door is open and there's all this paper, as if he just nested himself. I looked at that and I thought, "Is this a collection or is this an obsession?" Is a collection an obsession? I mean, where does that kind of thing come from? Ultimately, if you were just to look at it as an exhibit, it would have some properties of a collection, but instead it's his madness.

Volk: In science, somebody historically—I think it was Lord Kelvin—used a derogatory comment by calling other scientists "stamp collectors," because they were collecting all these things but not seeing the generalization. I always thought that was really unfair. I will never call another scientist a stamp collector.

Heller: Or a stamp collector a scientist.

Volk: Because if you don't start with gathering data, in a sense—that's really the start, and some scientists are really good at data collections and others are the theoreticians that are going to figure something out. Tycho Brahe was just laying out the latitudes and longitudes of all the stars, and then Kepler came along and used some of these ideas to figure out that Mars was going in an elliptical orbit. But if Brahe hadn't done that with all the stars to start with, Kepler could never have made the overarching theory. A lot of times the discoveries in science come because somebody gets out of theory and goes down and looks at the particular—finds the particular that nobody else saw before. In a way, the data people are really driving the new discoveries of science. The Einsteins that can write the equation and make the prediction of the way light bends are often relatively rare. It's usually the data people that are the—

Globus: The foundation.

Heller: Similarly, the collectors are helping the historians a great deal.

Dilworth: We came near the subject of the collection as an obsession or a compulsion or pathology—it's often described that way. I wondered if anybody wanted to speak to that. I have a theory that because of all the new drugs that control OCD and depression that those great hoarders and old guys who are stuffing their houses with newspaper—it's all going to go away.

Edelman: Don't be too sure.

Heller: Yeah, don't be sure. Actually, there are times when I'd wake up on a Sunday morning and I'd feel really anxious, and the anxiety could only be allayed, not by taking a drug, but by going to the flea market. And if I don't find anything at the flea market, I'm really depressed. I mean, physically—I could feel it. It just wasn't satisfying my need to acquire within my area of acquisition. So I think it's clearly an obsession. You just figure out how to deal with it and cope with it.

Dilworth: But what is it allaying?

Heller: Well, something that's missing, you know? Love, hate, food.

Globus: It's a substitute object? A transitional object?

Heller: I believe in life everything substitutes for something else. It's just this long chain that you can never get rid of. So going to the gym, for me, takes the place of collecting. You know, I'd rather be collecting, but I'll go to the gym and get healthy.

Dilworth: The economy of desire, maybe, sets in? Like the more you can't have it, the more you want it? Then there's the question of satisfaction.

Heller: Well, I think that's very true with collecting. That's why people—I don't use eBay, by the way. I'm anti eBay.

Globus: Neither do I.

Heller: I never go on e-bay. If I ever need something that's specific, I have a friend who will do eBay.

Volk: So you totally use eBay.

Edelman: You use eBay by proxy.

Globus: I'm scared to go on eBay. I did it once for a little while and it was just too much.

Dilworth: You should be scared.

Globus: No, I like to find the stuff. It's partly the finding of it. I go to the flea market or an antique store, and as I cross the threshold of whatever accumulations I'm about to look into. There's a thrill about it. The potential is there, of what am I going to find.

Scanga: Yeah, but there's no difference between eBay and a flea market.

Heller: Yes, there is.

Globus: Yes, there is. You can touch the objects.

Heller: You sit on your ass and you play with the keys.

Globus: You can pick it up and decide if you want it.

Scanga: It's like your thinking that a blog is not collectible. eBay is a flea market. It's right there. It's the same thing. You search differently. You find different ways to search.

Globus: And it's changing physical flea markets radically.

Scanga: You get a thrill from searching. You're looking at objects, you're collecting stuff. I think it's the exact same thing.

Heller: It's the exact same thing unless you love this tactile process.

Scanga: You have the same process, just a different forum.

Heller: I'm going and picking something up that looks really grungy and finding—what I did once, I found this original edition of a book called *Die neue Typographie* by Jan Tschichold. I know how much it costs when it's in the dealer's hands, and it was \$5.00.

Globus: You start trembling.

Heller: Five frickin'—you do tremble. I might have wet myself. It was so amazing. Or a friend of mine found a stack of books that he knew the price on, and at the dealers they would be \$350 apiece. He found ten of them at the Strand. And you can't get the Strand experience on eBay. It just doesn't happen if you're like us. I don't think you can.

Dilworth: Well, there's the serendipity of it.

Globus: The chance encounter.

Dilworth: On eBay you can zero in on what you want, right? But is there a serendipitous aspect?

Scanga: You can do all kinds of crazy searches and you can find something that's categorized improperly.

Heller: You could do that, and I agree, for those people who are into it, it's fantastic. But it's kind of like Googling and feeling you've done research. I'd rather go to the library and find something, and if I don't understand it, I'm not going to have it translated by pressing a button and getting really bad English. I'm going to find a translator to translate it. It's old fashioned and I accept it.

Scanga: I think it's old fashioned.

Heller: But, you know, collecting is old fashioned in a weird way. So be it. I do other things that are progressive and modern.

Scanga: I'm not saying you're a crazy old collector man.

Heller: It's okay. I wouldn't take it as an insult.

Globus: And proud of it.

Scanga: I'm just getting a little tired of everybody saying, "Oh, I don't believe in eBay." I think it's almost exactly the same.

Heller: I believe in it.

Globus: It's not that I don't believe in it.

Heller: I just don't want to do it.

Globus: I just don't want to do it.

Scanga: I think you can get the exact same thing from it. I can get up on Sunday morning and go on eBay for a little while, and I can get the same exact experience from it.

Heller: This is where the real debate is. Forget abortion, this is it: eBay versus non-eBay.

Dilworth: eBay or not.

Globus: No, but on eBay you don't meet the characters you meet at the 26th Street garage.

Scanga: Who? I don't even like meeting them.

Globus: I sort of see the regulars.

Scanga: No, but you do. You meet someone, you email someone, they've got a collection. People are friends because of eBay.

Globus: No, as I say, sometimes I use it, but I try to avoid it because it's a control mechanism for me.

Heller: I don't do eBay, but I do get these emails from people who are dealers out there. For the totalitarian graphics book, I've been dealing with somebody and he's in South Dakota and he's a Holocaust denier. I made it very clear when I started getting information and buying from him that I was a Jew from New York who did believe in the Holocaust. And I've gotten amazing things. What happens is, every week I get an email with a listing of material, and it's a thrill, because the stuff he has is choice. He must have been Hitler's grandson or something.

Volk: This is Idaho, did you say?

Heller: No, South Dakota—a red state.

Dilworth: Well, is there an ethical issue here with collecting these sorts of objects?

Heller: There can be I suppose. It took me a long, long time to get to the point where I'd actually buy this material. I've justified it by creating a book that will explain all of this once and for all, and I'm giving it to an institution after it's done. I'm not going to hang it in the apartment and dance around and, you know, have rites. I figure it's going to go someplace where it will have historical significance.

Edelman: But here's a question for you: during this time that you have the collection in your possession, do you derive any sort of visceral pleasure from having it there?

Heller: Yeah, I do.

Edelman: You do enjoy it?

Heller: I do, yes. I get very excited and I tell people. Once I get the material I have that shaky feeling, and it's like life is worth living again. But it's there for a reason. There is a clear-cut reason, and it's not that I'm buying it for the pure aesthetic joy. I'm buying it because I found something that will help support whatever thesis I have.

Audience: I just wonder about your statement about how you kill your collections. Once you're finished, it's finished, it's over, and you don't go back. It is no longer of interest. That's sort of like murder.

Heller: Well, it's not murder. It's like giving up something for adoption. I haven't killed it; I'm just giving it to somebody else.

Audience: But your interest is no longer there.

Heller: My interest isn't there because I've done all that I can do. And other people will do more, hopefully, with the material that I've acquired. So I see it as just the circle of life as opposed to murder. But the collector as murderer is interesting. In the movie *Seven*, the guy who was the pathological killer collected skin, right?

Scanga: Yeah, but these are movies.

Heller: Yeah, but they're based on—

Edelman: No, but there have been real-life ones like that.

Dilworth: Collectors are often demonized in popular culture.

Heller: Yeah.

Dilworth: There are other movies in which the serial killer is a collector.

Heller: This could be a good film series.

Dilworth: There's an essay in my book about that. Anyway, maybe we should open it up to the audience for participation.

Audience: I was just interested because everyone here has managed to take what is almost like an obsessive quality and turn it into a positive thing. But there are a lot of people for whom it's not turned into anything but a kind of insanity. For all of you in the panel it's a positive thing; you've turned it into something that's giving you income and giving you satisfaction, but what about the kind of aspects of it that are sort of controlling and bordering on insane. You started to bring that up.

Dilworth: We need a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

Globus: My husband just finished a tatami room—a Japanese empty room. And it's his escape from the rest of the loft.

Heller: My wife will never go into that room, and it's right below our apartment.

Scanga: I see myself getting obsessed like, "This is bad. Is this getting bad?" And I've recently sort of drawn the line: hoarding is bad; hoarding is collecting things for yourself and it's not sharing. No one's seeing your collection. You're collecting things and putting them in boxes. I've decided that it's healthy when you can share it, you can display it, other people can see it. You're doing something with your Nazi stuff that you collect. I think that's the line of when it becomes healthy.

Levy: We recently saw a film on Alan Stone, the collector. The film is more or less gluttony, actually. He just collected. It wasn't so

Heller: But he also had a gallery. He did show a lot of amazing work.

Levy: He showed his work, but sometimes he would take on an artist's work and refuse to put it into the marketplace at all, and just wanted to keep it all to himself.

Heller: But gluttony is a great word, because I think a lot of this is gluttony.

Levy: But he had no epistemological element in what he was doing. It wasn't the search for—it was just that he wanted to have. It's not like what you talk about, it's like what she was saying: it's a different variation on that whole thing.

Audience: There's an element of control.

Heller: Right, but I feel there's an element of control: I bought up the market of mini-mannequins. So that nobody else could have them. It's control of a lot of things. I think, quite honestly, if there were different sociological and personal issues, I could easily go over the edge.

It's there. It's quite clear. But, you know, I keep it in check because I have this hierarchy or structure that I'm doing it for publication and I write about it and all this stuff. But if I didn't, if nobody bought the things, I'd still have them and something bad would happen.

Volk: I think it's an interesting question, because I sometimes will start going off into fields—let's say something in archeology. I read an article and I'll really want to know more. Or I'll need to know something about linguistics in this search for patterns. And sometimes it does take away from me being focused, you know? "This is my field and I'm one of the ten experts in this field." The way you get ahead in the university system is by staying as the lord of that area. And I'm now spinning off for hours into this thing that may never bear any fruit. I can always say that maybe I'll come into a chapter on some kind of pattern, but sometimes I do get a little concerned. I just have to say, "Okay, I have a job and I guess I'm fairly okay," and allow it. But I could see getting off. I could see that it wouldn't be too difficult to really spin off into madness—the A Beautiful Mind-type madness, where the walls are pasted with—

Heller: But if you are trying to corner a market on something, for whatever reason, if somebody else comes into your field of vision—I mean, I was joking about being competitive; maybe I wasn't—you can get into this situation where experts are pitted against other experts in their field. There is something, whatever it is—the competition, the jealousy, etcetera.

Volk: Look at this fact!

Heller: Exactly. And the fun is out. I mean, we haven't talked about fun. We've talked about obsession and we've talked about compulsion, but there is a lot of fun to all of this. I don't think I'd do it if I didn't get some sort of satisfaction where I could smile, if it was always just gritting my teeth and feeling nervous and shaky—no way. I get enough of that in every other aspect.

Globus: I never feel nervous. I mean, I get shaky if I find something—excited—but I love what I'm looking at and I love putting it together in different ways. For me, the exhibition of it is also a big, big part of it. That's what I translate into the installations that I work on in all the museums I've worked at. That's another part of the fun: coming up with a way to tell a story about objects by the way you arrange them, and the spaces between them are as important as the actual objects. You can tell all these narratives that are unwritten—visual narratives.

Volk: So we all have this public side of the collection. What happens when it's just private? It could be the same.

Dilworth: Maybe it has something to do with—you're controlling the objects, but then if it starts to slide over into the objects controlling you, in the way that hoarders do. I guess it's a sort of recognized pathology of older people to—

Globus: The Collyer brother problem.

Dilworth: Right, the Collyer brothers. Their collecting killed them. It's a hazard that way.

Globus: I always thought they were not very discriminating.

Heller: What's their story?

Dilworth: They were hoarding.

Globus: They were hoarding, which I think is different.

Heller: They were hoarding and they were—were they the ones that were crushed?

Dilworth: Yes.

Scanga: They buried themselves in their stuff.

Audience: I just wanted to ask particularly Eric Edelman, but also Dorothy, about the idea of taking the collection and really making art out of it, and that transformation.

Edelman: For my part, I found myself slightly disagreeing in terms of the motivation for collecting. For example, a lot of the stuff that I collect for use in artwork, of necessity, must be redundant. I have to have a lot of it. Sometimes if I'm trying to create a given effect in a construction, I need to create a massed effect. So therefore you'll see, in the pictures in the slideshow, and a lot of this stuff, it is of identical things. It's not really collected so much for its uniqueness as for another quality that attaches to it. The other thing that I wanted to say at this point: I wanted to take the opportunity to address your epistemological idea. I actually think that you can actually construct a kind of archeology of epistemology in this way, through the collector. In my opinion—through a reading interest I have in the art of memory—I think it first originates in Western culture in the method of loci, back with the Greeks.

Audience: The method of what?

Edelman: The method of loci, in which you visualize a well-known place—a palace for example—and you visualize yourself walking through it, and you place objects that you wish to remember in the given order and sequence in which you walk through the place. One of the things that became clear to me is that there's a common thread that I never saw before, as we're having this discussion, between the idea of taking a well known place—a building or a palace that you're familiar with—and placing all of the things that you want to remember in each of the different rooms. It's a kind of collection in its own right. Then it goes on and you get to the Baconian idea of science in the enlightenment, in which Bacon actually physically thought that he could see the laws of science emerge when he'd collected enough phenomena together. All of a sudden everything would fall into the natural slots and the grid work that it all existed in. So I think that idea persists a lot through science, but also through culture. I think it crosses over into art when we come across the Wunderkammers, those wonderful collections of the enlightenment collectors, and that wonderful museum you spoke of. I think it continues through there and gets to modern people like Joseph Cornell, who did the same thing as I do in a lot of ways. He and I share a lot of affinities. When I first saw his work I was really struck by how similar it was to things that I was feeling in my soul. And he collected tons of the same things. He might collect little glass bottles, and they would be identical—grosses of them. Watch faces, China watch faces, things like that.

I find that somehow multiplicity is necessary for me. But the thing that particularly strikes me about the way I collect is that I collect older things because there is a sort of sense that I can't quite readily understand—a residue of sentiment about them. They were made in an age and at a time when people weren't trying to make absolutely efficient the manufacture of things, to squeeze down to the last fraction of a cent the way you made something. So there was, maybe, a lot of waste involved. Things weren't made the most efficient way. They weren't made of the most permanent stuff, because at that time celluloid was flammable. You could actually set it on fire and throw it away. A celluloid billiard ball, actually, is a dangerous object when it gets to a certain age. But things like that—they have a sense that attaches to them of leisure or of value for industries that no longer exist.

Scanga: But isn't that just nostalgia? That's just a romanticism of old things.

Edelman: Of course it is—unashamedly so.

Audience: Why say, "just"?

Scanga: Yeah, you're right.

Edelman: Yes, I am a romantic in that sense.

Audience: Isn't this collection sometimes a reflection of your personality? Your collection will change, you know, as you change. Even though you might not let it go, you still allow it to be there, even as it erodes and you go on to new things. Some of the things you keep. Isn't that because it's part of you even if you're not active with it anymore?

Edelman: Absolutely.

Audience: It's a very big thing. I think everybody collects.

Edelman: Yes.

Audience: You're professionals. You sound like professionals.

Edelman: Well, we may have twisted our obsessions around a sort of professionalism.

Audience: But it's part of who we are, what we are, and it develops.

Heller: If you look at a scrapbook or a photo album or a box of photographs, it's our memory of our selves. It's the document of our selves. So in that sense we are all collectors, because I'm sure everybody has at least a few snapshots, and now digital shots. What always struck me about the Holocaust is that when people were forced out of their homes and sent to camps, they lost all of that—everything. Other people may have found it in flea markets later, if it was preserved, but most of it was destroyed—the really ephemeral stuff.

Audience: They could find it in some other forms. That's why I agree with whoever said that it's not all a physical object, or that there are new physical objects that can remind you of all these

things. Speaking of personal life, I have a scrapbook of me as a ball player. The stuff is shredded away because it's so long ago. Every time I've opened it up, it's a shame. I've got a lot of good things in there that are just not there anymore. It's sad, but I turn it away, I turn it over, that's it. It's gone, somewhat. It's still there, but—

Heller: Well, you still have a memory and that's part of a collection as well.

Audience: Yeah, but I want to tell other people about it.

Heller: I once went to Klaus Oldenburg's studio years ago, and he had this huge room. In it were just drawers and drawers of underground newspapers. I used to be art director of Undergrounds in the '60s. And there was a lot of stuff that I had done that I saw, and he just had it there for collages. He had multiples of these rare items that I had given away because they didn't seem that important to me at the time, but they were my memory bank. And he was just cutting them up. So it was like he was putting the knife in.

Audience: I have a question for Eric Edelman, because you're a found-object sculptor. I was reading book of essays by Joseph Brodsky. He said that when he was a young man he used to find books in dumpsters. And he says in the essay that books find their readers. He had this idea that it was the object that found him; it was the book. Do you, as a found object sculptor, feel that the objects that you use in your sculptures somehow find you?

Edelman: Oh, absolutely.

Audience: Because we saw a movie not too long ago on the artist Jack Smith, and he would find things on the street or in the garbage, and he would alter it and collect it, and it was somehow the same sort of sense. None of you talked about that, but I was just wondering if any of the rest of you shared that?

Edelman: Maybe I shouldn't confess this here, but my one real act of dumpster diving resulted in the acquisition of a 1920 Funk and Wagnall's dictionary with hundreds of little engravings in it. It was one block from my house, and it was in the middle of January, and there was this wonderful old Funk and Wagnall's dictionary. I have a feeling that that dictionary did, indeed, choose me. There was also that wonderful quote that Cornell used, which was, "Who knows what one object may tell another?" Well, you could almost paraphrase it to say, "Who knows what one object will tell a collector or an artist."

Scanga: I don't believe it at all. I think you found that object and you knew what it was because you're interested in those things and you found that object and discovered what it was. Only because you knew something, you knew that was something you wanted. Somebody threw that thing away.

Edelman: Well how do you explain when I was about five years old seeing one of Joseph Cornell's pink palaces for the first time and not knowing what the hell this thing was, but knowing that it was gorgeous?

Scanga: Right, right.

Edelman: My parents actually had to physically and bodily drag me away from it before I would consent to leave.

Scanga: Do you think the Cornell found you?

Edelman: In a certain sense it did. I feel it did. It found me in a strange way that I can't convey.

Scanga: I don't believe it. I think it's totally romantic that an object would find you.

Edelman: You're using romanticism rather as a bludgeon.

Heller: The romanticism is great. I love this line of thought.

Scanga: A book couldn't have found you.

Globus: You're just talking about it from the other side, though. You find it because you're meant to find it.

Scanga: No, you found it because you knew what it was and you knew something about it.

Audience: It's materialism versus idealism.

Heller: But you also find things because you're lucky. You do know what they are or you have a sense of what they might be. But I'd like to think that things find us. That's so much nicer.

Dilworth: They live in a dream world.

Volk: Well, if this is when you were five years old, then this is before you were even making conscious decisions about what you were liking and not liking. You had a deep—

Edelman: There was something about that immediate thing: this elegant little box with a funny frame around it that was created by masking paint in a sort of French provincial sort of curve. And inside was this little rare engraving in which all the windows had been cut away. It's an engraving of an old building and it's backed with mirror and there are trees around it, all studded with glitter. I didn't know what the hell it was, but I just knew that it was beautiful. And it was years before I ever came back and identified it.

Volk: But if you had said it just the way you did, just that eloquently, the government would have you in an institution studying you right now.

Dilworth: We have another question.

Audience: I agree with you, by the way, about Cornell. It's such a thing that a child could imagine. I mean, it's not for an intellectual to then go about and describe. But I wondered if we could talk a little bit about—I'm sorry, I just had a root canal, so if I drool, forgive me—about status and the idea of collecting and status and, perhaps, greed. Because I think we've all been reading a lot about the contemporary and impressionist art auctions lately, and the staggering

amounts of money that are being spent on Warhols and Rothkos, etcetera. What do you all think about this? You think about what they cost when Allan Stone was buying them and promoting them, and what they're selling for now, and who's buying. Who are these collectors, and what's up? What do you all think about it?

Heller: But doesn't that go back to robbing tombs? Collecting, you know, has a greed component, and that's where eBay drives me crazy, because you see the greed.

Audience: eBay again.

Heller: Right in front of you, you see all those numbers flicking by. I mean, if you're at a flea market, you just go to the guy and say, "Okay, will you take \$5.00?" "No, I paid blah-blah." And you go through this ritual and then he takes the five.

Globus: It's the human interchange.

Heller: I think there are a lot of people that deal in it as a business, and business is fine; you can't condemn everybody. Then those are those who are really trying to make fortunes off of it. But it's life. What's interesting is a lot of these artists whose works sell for tons of money died poor, or don't get that money. It's not theirs. I mean, let's talk about who owns the rights to things. Who owns the rights to the physical manifestations that you are using in your artwork? I mean, there was an engraver who did it, but it was work for hire back then, so nobody owns it.

Edelman: And in any case it's fallen into the public domain long since.

Heller: Right, and the public domain issue. Every so often I get a lawyer's letter, or I get a letter from an artist's rights association saying I've used something in one of my books that's over 50 years old, and that an estate has claim to. And I know this stuff. I know all commercial art, and I know it from certain periods of time, and there are no copyrights. So somebody at an estate is trying to make hay off of their relative or whatever. I don't blame them, you know? I usually ignore the letters, but every so often I'll pay it if I feel like I've done something wrong, if I feel a twinge of guilt.

Scanga: But I think this art thing is like a collector's game at a really high stakes. It's art dealers and art collectors and it's just a high-priced collector's game, that's all.

Globus: And I have no interest in it. I mean, I don't care about the value of things. I'm just interested in the objects.

Audience: I don't think I would agree with you that everybody collects. It seems to me by observation that there are some people very drawn to it, and some people not drawn to it. I have a sister who keeps nothing in her apartment. And I'm feeling that pull even as I'm listening to you talk. I'm both fascinated by the richness of what you have made out of your collections and kind of baffled and shrinking from it. It's slightly overwhelming, and I don't mean that in a way to denigrate what you're doing. I'm just thinking of myself. Does it ever feel overwhelming or cluttering in your mind and in your lives to have these things?

Heller: Yes.

Volk: Absolutely.

Audience: Not only space-wise but just mind and thought and focus-wise.

Heller: It is all those things, and it also comes down to, “Will my son do anything with this stuff, or is he just going to put it in a dumpster.” And the fact of the matter is, if you go dumpster diving, you’ll find these families that just throw it out. It is cluttering. It’s amazingly cluttering. I’ve known collectors who have done big books on their collections who have just de-assessed and totally gone to that tatami room in their minds and in their physical beings, because it takes on this life of its own, and it’s kind of like a tsunami. It’s a tidal wave of stuff. So what you raise—I had forgotten all about that because I’m in denial, but now I’m not and I really don’t appreciate it.

Dilworth: A 12-step program for you?

Audience: This is for Steve Heller. Surely it was a compliment to have Klaus Oldenburg collaging your artwork?

Heller: Yes, it was.

Audience: I think of the Max Ernst collages of marvelous engravings that are, in a way, preserved and elevated by what he did with them.

Heller: I agree totally. I joke about the idea of cutting my stuff up, but I would have cut it up as well. And at least it goes through a great artist instead of me. But back to what you said, it’s like this cotton in our brains, and therefore you either don’t do it anymore, or something happens. It’s like going on a diet, you know? You can go on a diet and it can work somehow, or you go on a diet and you feel you’re deprived. I think for me if I stopped the collection process with a purpose in mind, I feel deprived. But I hate to think what’s going to happen in another 20 years.

Globus: I figure it’s going to go back out into the great maw and someone else will pick it up.

Scanga: The Smithsonian is going to. You sound like your bases are covered.

Heller: Well, some of it’s going places, but some of it’s not going places. One thing about collections is—you were talking about taxonomies and systems—it does require cataloging. I’ve got lots of graduate students and people say, “Why don’t you get your graduate students to catalog?” Well, I don’t want them going in and disrupting the disruption. It’s hard. If you really want to do it well, you set up a system. Now with computers—we have a program at our school where you just scan the ISBN numbers. And there’s a program that puts it on a shelf on your computer screen, so you actually see the cover of the book if the cover of the book was sent to the Library of Congress and they scanned it with the ISBN number. It’s fascinating. There are people I know who have created very systematic collections where everything is digitized and they can access it very well. To me that’s a Godsend, but I haven’t gotten to that point.

Audience: I must say that I feel very alien amongst all you profound accumulators, because there's a big difference between being a collector and an accumulator. You were talking about the birds accumulating twigs or something. You think that's a collection? I think the first thing we have to do is define terms. What's a collector, and what's an accumulator? I know what I believe in. I know what I've taught my people to believe. I have formed a society—it's been in existence for 30 years—of collectors of Judaica. There are very rigid rules about what you do and why you do it. I've never heard any of my people talk about collecting for their own self-interest. We all collect to preserve the history of the Jewish people who were destroyed in the Holocaust, and every piece we find is a piece that has been preserved, so it has a purpose. But what is a collection and what is an accumulation of junk?

Globus: One man's collection is another's accumulation. But it's true—some people think that my stuff is all junk, and they don't know why I have it.

Audience: I didn't say that at all.

Globus: No, but I'm saying it's about perception.

Audience: A collection must have a purpose. It must be directed someplace. It must be analyzed, studied and maintained, and carried forward to the next generation. Otherwise it's accumulation of junk. If you don't know what your collection is going to do or where it's going to go, if you don't have a museum in mind or an institution in mind or a child in mind, you have wasted your time.

Dilworth: Strong words.

Audience: To what degree do you all—especially the collectors—think that your passion for collecting is communicable to others? Can you show your wives or spouses or others how much you care about these things, and do they get it? Or is it irreducibly yours? I'm thinking of Frank Zappa's famous booger collection.

Heller: Certain collections are irreducibly somebody else's I guess. Mine, I feel, are all about a public. There is an audience for the things that I do. I think there's a commonality of interest. I'm not interested in collecting boogers, unless I could make a really good story out of it. But that story, then, isn't just going to lie in my desk; it's going to go out to the public.

Scanga: But you sort of attach yourself. I collect different things and different people attach themselves to it. Like, I've got a club of bicycle collectors. They can look at my bikes; we look at each other's bikes; we get it. There's a connection there. They don't really get my ceramic E.T. collection, those guys. But my friend that collects E.T.s does. So it's different for different people in how they attach themselves to it.

Audience: There was a movie called *The Collector*. Pinter wrote the screenplay, and I don't remember what it was really about. I saw it, but I don't remember it.

Dilworth: Was it the John Fowle's novel *The Collector*? Is that what it's based on?

Levy: Yes, that was it.

Dilworth: It's about a man who captures a young woman and keeps her and then kills her.

Audience: Susan Sontag wrote that thing.

Dilworth: Yeah, about Ward Hamilton, right?

Audience: Nobody mentioned Andy Warhol. He bought houses to put all the flea market stuff in.

Heller: It's true. I used to run into him at flea markets getting the material.

Audience: The competition.

Heller: Yeah, he was competition. I used to collect German satiric magazines of the turn of the century for an exhibition I did, and later a book. And he used to buy the same things. I don't know why, because he didn't do anything with them.

Audience: Possession.

Heller: Possession, yes.

Dilworth: He made those time capsules, those boxes of items. I don't know if they're all open now, but they were systematically opening them for a while.

Scanga: They're still opening them.

Globus: An auction that went on for weeks.

Dilworth: There are a lot in the museum in Pittsburgh, right?

Audience: You can do the same, Mr. Heller.

Dilworth: The gentleman in the back who was talking about what a collector is and what a collection is—I think it gets us back to the idea of memory. That's a lot of what collecting is doing. The metaphor of the palace—it's one of the ways we remember. Collection is re-collection. It's deeply cultural and it seems to be deeply human to do this. That memory—what is the memory? In some cases it's a public memory; in other cases it's much more private.

Audience: Walter Benjamin, in his piece *On The Concept Of History*, mentions that all documentation of culture is also a documentation of barbarianism. He also writes a lot about collections. At one point you mentioned that collections are essentially good for history. These are individual collections, and they are allowing you to present both the cultural achievement and the barbarianism in it. But do you find that by having personal collections as opposed to, say, a country or a state collecting their cultural artifacts—are your collections intended to sort of present both sides of the coin? Again, I'm thinking specifically of your totalitarian collection.

Heller: When I collect, as I said, I tend to write stories. Sometimes they're histories and sometimes they're more anecdotal. But what I'm trying to do is very simple: I'm trying to uncover and expose material, and I have this belief that other people will take that material and do something else with it, whatever it is, so that once it's collected into something, more people are apt to appreciate it and then do further research into it. So for me it's a very simple process. It starts with a basic interest and fascination and passion, maybe, and I look at it through different lenses. Sometimes I look at it through rose-colored glasses, so I don't see the barbarian. In the case of this totalitarian material, I am just fascinated by how ideologies are branded like a corporation, and how that branding filters its way into the public mind and one embraces it or not, as the case may be. So the documents that I found to support the visual materials are as important to me as the visual materials.

Audience: You're sort of like a middleman in a sense, and someone else can carry on this totalitarian theme. It is very interesting stuff.

Heller: Frankly, I can take it so far. I'm not smart enough to take it to the next level, so middleman is perfect.

Audience: I don't mean that in a bad way.

Heller: No, I accept it in a good way.

Audience: I've been a collector for 40 years. I deal with decorative arts and Flow Blue china, crystal epergnes, things like that. It's just beautiful. I mean the reason I collect it is that I think it's lovely. And I don't just display it; I use it if I have company. But the thrill of the beauty! I belong to the Flow Blue International Collectors club. And when you go to a store, you might not find one piece of what you're looking for, and then you go into this club and you see a room full of this. People who belong to this club are literally swooning and fainting and ecstatic. There's an auction and you sit there and you watch how people will absolutely die to have this one piece. And it's not because of the ownership so much as that they want to enjoy this one piece to complete their dinner collection or whatever. I was helter-skelter. When I collected, I didn't have to have all cups. I just had whatever was pretty. It's just a hodgepodge. But I have to tell you, listening to you, you really do understand the thrill of it, but I'm not sure you understand it in the same way. I mean, I still go to all of these meetings every summer by myself. The family hates it. They will not have any part of it. They're going to throw it all in the garbage when I die, so I have to make sure it goes back to the auction. But I think that you have to be passionate about it, and if you're passionate about one collection, it's very likely you're going to have a bunch of other collections, which I do.

Audience: Can we ask Eric Edelman to talk about the collection?

Edelman: Oh, yes, actually I was going to pass those around for people to look at.

Audience: Would you talk about it?

Edelman: Yeah, sure. I first began collecting about 30 years ago. I basically was collecting objects that sort of accorded with my interests then, which were along the idea of making box

sculptures à la Joseph Cornell. Since then I've sort of branched out, and the things I do now incorporate these things. There are, as I said, pictures on the slide show of how I've done that. But I'm also interested in taking other collections, such as the written word, writing narratives and stories specifically related to a piece of artwork and actually incorporating them into that. The motive for collecting these particular ones—I don't know that I can really reduce the taste that I had for these things. There were certain objects at the time that just seemed very attractive. Can you say why it was, for example, that your folding hangers suddenly seized you in that way?

Globus: Well, I'm interested in design. A lot of what drives me is the design and the evolution of designs. I think this is a brilliant object, and it was really very interesting. Then I started finding all these other folding hangers. Why was there such a need for folding hangers? We actually did an exhibition years ago at the Cooper Hewitt on the subject of travel. The whole history of travel is of interest to me. Then I started collecting other things that were designed for travel. Today you go to a hotel and you've got the hanger and the hair dryer. You can fly around the world and you can be somewhere else in a couple of hours. Ages ago, you made 15 miles in a day and you were traveling with all your entourage and you had to bring everything with you. So this is a little part of that chapter that I never even knew about. I remember, I showed this to my father and he said, "Oh, yeah, we always had traveling hangers." A lot of times for me it relates back to my memories of childhood. I remember my grandmother would take little trips to the South in the winter, and she would lay out all her little wash and dry kits and her sewing kit. I never actually saw folding hangers. But a lot of my collections link to memories of my childhood, I guess.

Audience: Can you demonstrate that?

Globus: What?

Audience: Will you demonstrate that please?

Globus: Oh, okay. This is an amazing—the guy who sold it to me handed it to me, and people go like this and they try to figure out what it is. And then what you do is you go like that. I probably have several dozen different designs for folding hangers, and then I found plastic versions of earlier ones. You can look after the roundtable. I've got a book of some of these collections. I know you don't like hangers—

Heller: No, these hangers I like.

Globus: Good. But I have all kinds of folding spoons, and a fantastic little series of Bakelite clothespins in little colored pigskin kits that come from Mark Cross. You brought your little tiny clothespins with matching thumbtacks to hang up the string, and it's all in this little silk-lined pigskin kit. And so I found one, and I have four of them now. They're just beautiful, but they're from another time, when you needed to bring all that stuff with you. Now you pull that string out of the bathtub in a hotel room and you've got your clothesline.

Heller: People who love this stuff are art directors from movies. I get a lot of calls after a book of mine comes out from different film prop directors. They want to go accurate, although they usually find anachronisms to work with.

Dilworth: Any other comments or questions? I think we can bring the evening to a close. Thank you so much.