

Title: Contemporary popular collecting in Britain : the socio-cultural construction of identity at the end of the second millennium AD

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Abstract: This study is an attempt firstly, to explain the phenomenal increase both in the activity of collecting and the range of material that is now collected in Britain. It does this by exploring the contexts of change over the last twenty years. This change it is argued has led to a culture of social and material insecurity in which collecting is used for the creation and defence of identity. The social theory of Guy Debord is employed as an underlying philosophy in which contemporary popular collecting is interpreted as a passive situationist response to a society driven by market forces. The social world and values of collectors are explored through their clubs, which it is asserted, comprise an alternative society or environment, one in which a legitimisation of their activities and preferences can be made and in which they develop a complimentary reality. Secondly it compares private popular collecting with that of museums, finding both potential and need for a closer relationship. It is argued that as collectors, develop in sophistication museums can partially redefine themselves through them. There are a number of areas in which collectors and museums are increasingly overlapping. Museums it is argued, should take advantage of this and the current boom in collecting by valuing collecting in the wider community. This would help museums comply with focused collecting policies and allow staff more time to concentrate on other areas such as community activities. Museums and collectors it is ultimately argued, should converge to form a symbiotic knowledge sharing nexus, thus strengthening and deepening communal bonds, acting as an anchor in a changing and diversifying museum profession and a socially atomised society.

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