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Chapter Two

Women's home-crafted objects as collections of culture and comfort 1750-1900

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Introduction

The collections of crafted objects produced and consumed by women during the nineteenth century for the domestic interior are worth investigating to try to unravel why women, at various levels of society, took up home crafts, and what their motives were for doing so. At one level, it may have been artistic self-expression; at another level a product of a commitment to household duty or financial necessity; or on a third level it may have been for entertainment or pastime. In any event the upshot of this prodigious work was the production of collections of home-crafted objects that provided both physical and emotional comfort. Although men were involved in producing crafted objects at home, the fact that particular craft skills were associated with women was based partly on the determinist philosophies of the eighteenth century (Messmer-Davidow, 1989, 47-50). These were predicated on considerations that supposed that each gender had innately dissimilar talents. This gendering, which was promoted both in schools and in print, meant that by the mid-eighteenth century, any visual awareness which women had developed was particularly directed towards their homes. This reinforced their notions of self as homemakers, i.e. physically,

psychologically and emotionally, and was reflected in their 'collections' (Gordon, 2006, 170). Caroline Burk's research from 1900 still found that young girls 'were most likely to collect beautiful objects or objects with sentimental associations; among their favourites were pictorial images, buttons, textiles, and dolls, followed by natural specimens such as seaweed and flowers' (Gordon, 2006, 170).

Craftworks made for the home are part of a producing and a consuming culture. The 'raw materials' that are worked upon by amateurs are transformed and manipulated into artefacts that are then consumed by them and their families. The physical labour of this domestic craft provided added meaning to an object, and created a narrative that enshrined the personal 'value added' to projects and possessions. It is even more than this. It is also culturally expressive. By the nineteenth century concepts of 'the home' were highly important, thus the material culture associated with it had great significance. This was explicit in the volume of objects, and implicit in the social reading of them. Homes were also repositories for other collections: e.g. books, ceramics, natural history, art works, and even the 'cult of death' ephemera.

The issues of production, consumption, mediation, gender and identity will all be considered as links contributing to the domestic creativity that is an important part of the making and the meaning of domestic 'collections'. In addition, the work undertaken to improve the home was unpaid, it occupied spare time, and it sometimes used kits of partly

finished materials and was, at times, a way of being thrifty. Therefore there was also often a sense of satisfaction in being able to personalise and customise the home through individual collections. The gradual bricolage or assembly of homemade goods over time links various artefacts by the fact that they were made by family members for their own consumption and wittingly or unwittingly made a unique collection.

The broad aims of this paper are therefore to explore the nature of the work undertaken, the role that home-crafted objects played in certain women's lives, and how they reflected social attitudes of the period, and contributed to the development of collections of home-worked objects as part of an aesthetic domestic programme during the period 1750-1900. Initially the issue of collecting and the role of objects as self-expression are explored. Considerations of individuality and self-expression in relation to collecting home crafted objects will then be investigated. This is followed by an account of what the objects were that women crafted into collections. Finally, an analysis of how household art as a domestic visual aesthetic was demonstrated by these collections will be discussed.

Collecting and the role of objects

Although collecting is frequently associated with antiquarianism and connoisseurship of artefacts, it is as often related to assemblage and accumulation. I am using the

term 'collecting' to mean a gathering together of objects, usually with a common feature to link them. I am also considering how the collections relate to people and the places they occupy. Greg Noble's work on the 'cumulative dimension of subjectivity' is useful in this regard. He discusses the process of the accumulation [collection] of things that objectify family life. He discusses two authors who have written about collecting and says: 'both authors [Susan Stewart and Jean Baudrillard] implicitly underline the open-ended complexity of quotidian accumulation: a complexity of 'being in the world' that entails more than discrete statements of identity and embraces the location of subjects in networks of relationships, objects and spaces' (Noble, 2004, 234). This statement succinctly links 'collections' of material culture with the home and the individuals who make it and live in it. Indeed Noble suggests that 'in the home, these objects help constitute a 'material culture of love, while they erase the labour of commodity production, they foreground the labour of intimacy, and connection unlike the [connoisseur's] collection' (Noble, 2004, 253). By raising the issue of a 'material culture of love' it links the physical making of objects for the home as a 'labour of love' or intimacy. On the other hand, rather than being 'unlike the collection', I would argue that the 'collections' or accumulations I am looking at are just as valid, although they are different from other types of collections such as stamps or coins. Beverley Gordon has identified the distinctive nature of women's collecting. She says that the 'types of

collections that are disproportionately identified with women typically do not involve sets [as male collections often do] at all; they are open-ended and are likely to be based primarily on affective criteria' (Gordon, 2006, 15).

On the basis that collecting can be defined as a gathering together, assemblage or accumulation, it is also appropriate to acknowledge Noble's suggestion that 'domestic accumulations have the logic more of a collage, or a juxtaposition of not always commensurate objects, [rather] than an ordered collection based on taxonomic logic' (Noble, 2004, 234). In this sense I will use the term bricolage as meaning a miscellaneous 'collection' of objects whose common features are made or defined by the collector rather than the nature of the objects themselves.

The products of later eighteenth and nineteenth-century domestic crafts therefore constitute a very particular set of objects that sit on a number of boundaries including craftwork itself, hobbies and collecting. The objects also reflect social attitudes, issues of identity of self and space as well as aesthetic choices. All of these are demonstrated in the domestic interior.

This paper argues that the 'collecting' of these objects is a consequence of creativity and subsequent display. The distinctive aspect is that the collection is *literally* created. Beverley Gordon talks about women establishing intimacy with their collections from the position of maker. Although she is referring to acquired items, especially

textile based ones, the idea transfers well to domestically produced items for collections (Gordon, 2006).

Craft as a creation of self, and collections as a presentation of self

One of the roles of objects is to facilitate memory, and to be part of a life-story, as particular objects bear specific memories, and are reminders as to when and where they were produced or acquired (Rice, 2007, 15). It is well known that the biography of objects in a collection is a matter of importance to the owner. Walter Benjamin's concept of the collection and *mémoire involontaire* is useful in this matter of individual identity, which is reflected both in the objects, and the modes of acquisition. Collections may be seen as formal representations of this process of identity-creation and continuation. However, the process of collecting is often irrational, emotional and psychological, as it has desires, pleasures and meanings relating to the complexities of personal or group identity.

Jean Baudrillard makes this notion explicit when he states that when collecting 'it is invariably oneself that one collects' (Cardinal and Elsner, 1994, 12). In a similar vein, James Clifford observed: 'In the West, however, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self' (Clifford, 1985, 238). In a different manner Leora Auslander suggests that: 'Whereas the collection represented the individual who possessed it, objects used as part of interior

decoration were representative of the family, not of the individual' (Auslander, 1996, 300). This may well be true but it can also be argued that not only does it represent the family but (in the examples under review) also the individual, particularly if the individual had a hand in its creation.

The connections between needlework and other home-making craft accomplishments, along with the idea of collecting to make transformations in interiors, are becoming evident in this mix of individualism and conformity. This helps to explain why domestic craft collections were often based on partly prepared or 'found' materials. Tim Dant, following de Certeau, considers that:

The arts of 'making-do' or *bricolage* are combined with ritual practices, habits and routines out of which the shape of everyday life emerges...Rituals may be followed knowingly because it suits the purposes at hand but these purposes might lead to a modification of the ritual, of material objects or of skills to meet varying situations or event to bring about variations in action, experience or environment. This is why the practices of every day life are treated as: 'arts'; the agent uses a skill of making, or making do, not to create from nothing, but to creatively adapt both ways of doing things, and material things themselves (Dant, 1999, 72).

An example of this application of found materials is in the use of natural materials for crafting objects that will be

part of a collection. Madame Levina Urbino in her encyclopaedic work entitled *Art Recreations*, noted amongst many possibilities the collecting and arranging of mosses, shells, feathers and flowers (Urbino, 1860).

Lene Otto and Lykke Pedersen note that in the twentieth century, the home also became the focus for identity creation, through collected objects. They suggest that:

The pure mania for collecting things was primarily a bourgeois habit. It was not uncommon to create private museums in the home, where the collections contained both valuable collectors' items that expressed wealth and personal souvenirs that expressed an exclusive self-awareness (Otto and Pedersen, 1998, 7)

I would argue that this phenomenon of self-representation through a collection of objects was actually found in the nineteenth century (or earlier). Otto and Pedersen continue by making connections between objects and the self: 'Much research into objects regards them from a communication perspective, in which the function of the things is to be 'read' and identified by others in social life. They then considered 'how interaction with things is a part of a strategy to understand oneself' (Otto and Pedersen, 7). From the collections' point of view both these interpretations have value. The collections of domestically crafted objects on view in the home acted as both social communications of skill and position but also as self-referential possessions.

Women and Craftwork

It is clear from the contemporary literature that women and home-making crafts in the nineteenth century were often considered to be complementary and based on emotional rather than functional criteria. The Victorian domestic handicraft movement began at the end of the eighteenth century, when an earlier aristocratic fancy-sewing tradition was succeeded by a new middle-class set of hobbies (Schaffer, 2005, 222). The nature of women's upbringing had an important bearing on the defining of their relationships with art and craft and much else besides. Dr. John Gregory identified these interactions in 1774 when he explained that female education was calculated to draw out their 'natural softness and sensibility'. He went on to say that the function of education was to develop character and roles, although there seems to be more truth in his last sentence regarding sewing accomplishments:

The intention of your being taught needle-work, knitting and such like is not on account of the intrinsic value of all you can do with your hands, which is trifling, but to enable you to judge more perfectly of that kind of work, and to direct the execution of it in others. Another principle end is to enable you to fill up, in a tolerable agreeable way, some of the many solitary hours that you must necessarily pass at home' (Gregory, 1774, 30).

This ideology of femininity connects to a historically constructed division of art and craft, which has its roots in the Renaissance (Bloch, 1978, 239). Male commentators reinforced these notions. Whether it was Thomas Milles in 1613 saying, rather contradictorily: 'Fear God and learn woman's housewifery/not simple samplers or silken folly', (Parker, 1984, 90) or John Ruskin in his *Sesames and Lilies*, (1865), maintaining that 'the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle- and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, management and decision [i.e. interpretative consumption]' (Forty, 1986, 105), the sentiments remained the same.

Although men were promoting the conflation of women and their handicrafts, women themselves also supported the value of the arts and crafts, in part as tools to help decorate the home. In 1750, Mrs Delaney explained how she ordered her craft work and her collections:

I am going to make a very comfortable closet: to have a dresser, and all manner of working tools, to keep all my stores for painting, carving, gilding, &c.; for my own room is now so clean and pretty that I cannot suffer it to be strewn with litter, only books and work, and the closet belonging to it to be given up to prints, drawings, and my collection of fossils, petrifications, and minerals (Llanover, 1861, 600).

In 1798, Maria Edgeworth wrote in her *Essays of Practical Education*, that 'every sedentary occupation must be valuable to those who are to lead sedentary lives, and every art however trifling in itself, which tends to enliven and embellish domestic life, must be advantageous, not only to the female sex but society in general' (Parker, 1984, 142). Nearly one hundred years later, the comments of Frances Power Cobbe, writing in 1881, expressed her notion of the powerful role of home making for women in a far more forceful manner:

The making of a true home is really our peculiar and inalienable right: - a right, which no man can take from us; for a man can no more make a home than a drone can make a hive. It is a woman, and only a woman, - and a woman all by herself, if she likes, and without any man to help her, - who can turn a house into a home (Cobbe, 1881, 139).

These contemporary comments seem to reflect the ideas that the making, and by extension, the collecting of objects, would help one to overcome feelings of anxiety or loneliness, fill up time, and give one a sense of self-worth.

By the nineteenth century, middle-class women were even more involved in the consumption of goods for the home and the maintenance and arrangement of their interiors. If anything, there were increasing pressures on women to apply their artistic endeavours to decorate and enhance the home for the family. Even though the range of crafts undertaken by women

widened, with variations on existing themes such as Berlin woolwork and the addition of specific Victorian crafts such as featherwork and fernwork, the reasons for their adoption remained the same. *The Habits of Good Society* (1859), explained that 'all accomplishments have the one great merit of giving a lady something to do: something to preserve her from ennui: to console her seclusion: to arouse her in grief: to compose her to occupation in joy' (Nunn, 1987, 8). Even an intellectual such as George Sand could remark that for her, needlework was 'an invisible charm which I felt at every period of my life, and which has often tranquillised my strongest agitation' (Gordon, 1988, 52). This immersing of the self in a hobby or collecting activity is a key part of the pleasure provided by the practices.

It has already been pointed out that there is more than a suggestion that a particular notion of femininity and certain of the home-making crafts apparently went together. It is in the latter case that particular craft media were seen as peculiarly appropriate for these women, as the products functioned both as customizing work and as decoration in a domestic, self-expressive context. In addition many of these crafts represented the female virtues of diligence, patience and perseverance, especially where careful and detailed work was required. Rozsika Parker neatly sums this all up by saying that 'when women embroider, it is seen not as art, but entirely as the expression of femininity' and crucially it is categorised as craft' (Parker, 1984, 5).

However the development of home crafts and their subsequent accumulation or collection, could indicate both the application of female talents and industry and a representation of the borders of angst and misery. Thad Logan suggests that 'the sheer number of useless decorative objects produced by women might be better viewed as a manifestation of anxiety, boredom and depression rather than a satisfying and healthy engagement with art' (Logan, 1995, 213). Although this may be true to some degree, it seems clear that Victorian women saw something of a creative role in the production and collection of these products. Not only were the objects useful as decoration, but they also carried clear meanings for the makers who often became the users and collectors. In addition, the importance of creating, giving and collecting gifts should not be underestimated.

Baudrillard acknowledges that 'objects do play a regulative role in everyday life in so far as within them all kinds of neuroses are neutralised. All kinds of tensions and frustrated energies are grounded and calmed' (Cardinal and Elsner, 8). This demonstrates how collectors, through the things they collect, use their hobby to escape for a while from the 'real world'. In this case, the role of crafts for women acted as inventive activity, as a contribution to home decoration and to encourage the creation of collections.

Crafted objects, creative women and the collection

It is a truism that for much of the mid to late-nineteenth century, many homes demonstrated in varying degrees an abundance of objects in their rooms, and the results were often later referred to as 'clutter'. The interiors increasingly became depositories of 'things' that went way beyond the practical needs of living. It is possible to argue that any collections of things are by definition not actually needed but are very desirable for a range of personal reasons. Whether it was blue and white china, Japanese artefacts, home-crafted objects, paintings, or geological specimens, among others, the results were the same. The accumulation of these 'miniature collections' contributed to the 'clutter' of later nineteenth-century homes and as such were often criticised. Writing in 1880, Edmond de Goncourt described this psychology of accumulation as 'bricabracomania' (Saisselin, 1985, xiv). Mania may be defined as an irrational but irresistible motive for a particular action. Although this may appear extreme, collecting as a demonstration of ennui was given as an explanation for the mania. In 1888, Paul Bourget considered that the 'refined mania of an unquiet period in which the fatigues of boredom and the diseases of the nervous sensibility led man to invent the factious passion for collecting because his interior complexities made him incapable of appreciating the grand and simple sanity of things in the world around him' (Saisselin, 69). At the end of the nineteenth century this collecting fervour rose to such a

pitch that philosopher Max Nordau saw it as an example of *fin de siècle* decadence: 'The present rage for collecting, the piling up in dwellings, of aimless bric-a-brac ... appear to us in a completely new light when we know that Magnan [a French doctor concerned with degenerates] has established an irresistible desire among degenerates to accumulate useless trifles' (Saisselin, 62).

The inevitable reaction to the attractions of collecting bric-a-brac had set in by the early twentieth century. Mary Quinn demonstrated the rejection of clutter:

Bric-a-brac! What sins are committed in your name! The housekeeper must not allow her sentiment or her friends' generosity to clutter up mantels, tables, and shelves with useless articles. Vases, ash-trays, cups and saucers, and innumerable inappropriate grotesqueries, decoratively intended, must be severely dealt with and banished either to the ash-barrel, the store-room, or the gift-box (Quinn, 1914, 54).

These issues of accumulation, bricolage and bricabracomania relate to the nature of collections that are not designated as particularly artistic or worthy of connoisseurship. Logan suggests that: 'aesthetic impulses [such as women's craft, bric-a-brac collecting etc.] found expression in forms unrecognised as 'art' and were undervalued by those in positions of cultural authority' (Logan, 1995, 212). However, these [collecting] strategies helped to fashion

identity and create 'a place'. This place was of course the domestic interior. Logan continues by acknowledging that the bric-a-brac was a meaningful choice and that 'their [Victorian] cluttered parlours were at least in some cases generated in response to a desire for aesthetic pleasure' (Logan, 213). Surely this is important, as although a major part of craft creations were intended to be a pastime, the other aspect is their display and contribution to the home ornamentation.

Janell Watson pointed out that some 'collected' objects fall into a 'no-mans land' of aesthetic value. As she discusses bibelots (The bibelot is difficult to define as it has variously meant anything from a kitsch knick-knack to a curiosity, to an *objet d'art*. They are defined here as small household ornaments or decorative objects), the comment would be appropriate for the objects I am examining. She says: 'the modernity of the bibelot lies precisely in its association with superfluous aesthetic qualities such as the ornamental, the merely pretty (as opposed to beautiful), the domestic, the feminine, [and] the minor arts' (Watson, 1999, 16). By linking this to the concept of 'the art of daily life', it seems clear that the domestically crafted objects I am discussing have a similar relation to the interior as does the bibelot. In other words, the collections of domestically crafted objects serve as components of an aesthetic interior.

Jean Baudrillard's *Le système des objets* approaches collecting as a 'way of dealing with objects'. Baudrillard suggests that objects have two functions: 'to be put to use

and to be possessed' (Cardinal and Elsner, 8). The crafted objects under examination here again fall into both categories as they may be both used and possessed. As Baudrillard says: 'Our everyday environment itself remains an ambiguous territory, for in ordinary life, function is constantly superseded by the subjective factor as acts of possession mingle with acts of usage in a process that always falls short of total integration' (Cardinal and Elsner, 8).

Furthermore, even if objects have a notional function, they might be collected as part of a 'personal microcosm' or subject that has objects made relative to the collector. In other words, they refer back to the subject in Baudrillard's terms. In the case under review, domestic interiors are the sites of the collection - the objects within have varying degrees of usage but are also integrated into a collection in which they are possessed and valued as objects of memory. Taking this a little further, and in a different essay, Baudrillard suggests that through the process of collecting 'it is invariably oneself that one collects' (Cardinal and Elsner, 12). Collectors are sensitive to the biography of objects, so if the collector is also the maker, the intensity of the relationship would appear to be even greater.

What the objects were, how they were produced, and who made them

Although the range of craft techniques were varied, they often shared common ground in their need for manipulative skills and the use of materials that were clean, ready to use, easy to prepare and commercially available. For example, scrollwork or quilling, which employed paper and small decorative beads, seeds, was apparently ideal. It was clean and could be completed by beginners or experienced workers alike. As with many other crafts, it had its own patterns and specialist suppliers. In 1786 *The New Ladies' Magazine* supplied 'a profusion of neat elegant patterns and models of ingenuity and delicacy, suitable for tea-caddies, toilets, chimney-pieces, screens, cabinets, frames, picture ornaments etc.'. It was added that 'the art of filigree, [the art of creating decorative designs from thin strips of curled papers] affords an amusement to the female mind capable of the most pleasing and extensive variety; it may be readily acquired and pursued at a very trifling expense' (Edwards, 1964, 318). Not only was it amusing: it also offered the possibility of decorating and personalising domestic objects. The examples of Mrs Lybbe Powys demonstrates the blurred connections between craft work and collecting: 'She embroidered, worked in cloth, straw plaited, feather worked, made pillow lace, paper mosaic work, &c., dried flowers and ferns, painted on paper and silk, collected shells, fossils, coins, and was a connoisseur in china, &c' (Climenson, 1899, 159). In 1795 'Lady Ailesbury

gave Mrs Powys when leaving Park Place, [amongst other gifts] fourteen quires of paper containing plants, sea-weeds, roses, &c., she had collected' (Climenson, 287).

For many collectors, the demands of skilled craft work, as well as limitations of time and money, meant that the adopting of pre-prepared ideas and materials to create individualised products was very satisfactory. One such idea was published in a work entitled *Elegant Arts for Ladies* (c. 1856) which suggested that (ready-made) stencilled designs on velvet would 'look very handsome [on] a music stool, the front of pianos, ottomans, banner screens, pole-screens and borders for table cloths' (1856, 19)

The importance of these ideas and practices in relation to the concepts of crafts may be seen by considering Daniel Miller's ideas about the re-working of purchased goods: [The re-working] may be defined as that which translates the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition: that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artefact invested with particular inseparable connotations (Miller, 1987, 190). This reflects Miller's concept of the 'material culture of love'. Although Miller refers to shopping, the concept can be adapted to this discussion as it is clear that part of the emotional context of the making and collecting of domestic objects is about creating significance (through objects) for loved ones. The second motive that Miller identifies - creating objects with individual meanings, is particularly related to homemaking itself. Penny Sparke has

emphasised the role played by women in this 're-creation', which was also recreation:

The distinction between production and consumption in the Victorian interior was eroded as objects acquired in the marketplace such as pianos and chairs, were transformed in the domestic setting by their aesthetic integration with pieces of needlework and other objects, natural and otherwise, both made and acquired by the housewife, and with 'artistic' arrangements also created by her (Sparke, 1995, 41).

Women's activity in the home, in a non-commercial capacity, has often been regarded as essentially selfless. However, 'keeping up appearances' has been a motivation for much domestic work and it may be argued that crafts, especially in the form of craftwork, may bridge the gap between altruism and self-respect and hobby, pastime or collecting. In addition, this was also linked to the issue of encouraging women to use their 'spare' time productively. There was also a tendency for women to be regarded as capable only of copying, but not using their own imagination. This last concern reflects the nature of some craft projects where ready-made plans, advice books and designs, as well as pre-prepared materials were the mainstay of the process of assemblage. Collections of objects that were made from commonplace materials were tempered by the intervention of the maker and the particular bricolage effect that the individual selection produced. Thus the gendered

distinction of domestic craft production and consumption shows how generally the idea of the female as the natural homemaker developed throughout the period. This had the effect of confirming the dichotomy of art and craft in gender terms so that even when women became increasingly ingenious and imaginative in the choice of materials and techniques with which to express themselves, it was still 'only domestic craft'. This issue has been partially addressed by feminist historians. Cheryl Buckley, for example, has pointed out that the meaning of home changes over time. This fluidity means that the 'idealised "haven" in which essentialist notions of feminine identity were fixed' and static did not reflect reality (Buckley, 1998, 157-71). However, in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise (Buckley, 1989, 251-262). Typical later nineteenth century advice for young women went as follows:

Girls who are clever with their fingers can do very much towards making the home beautiful, not only by needlework, painting and drawing, and the various kinds of fancy work, but by the practice of amateur upholstery (*Young Ladies' Treasure Book*, 1881-2, 161).

As has been shown, the idea of creativity was antithetical to the determinist's idea of the soft female character. Nevertheless, women were increasingly able to express a high degree of inventiveness, especially in the crafts associated

with interior decoration. Indeed there were attempts to define a category of art production as Household Art, thus linking domestic creativity with the aesthetic dimension. As this essay is interested in considering how the crafted collections represent the aesthetic dimension of the interior, it is best to consider the results of the labour, although some consideration of the process is useful.

Household Art: idea and artistic/aesthetic guidance

Although much needlework of the nineteenth century was intended to decorate the interior furnishings, there were a number of processes and objects that were classed as fancy work, which were not personal or particularly functional, but were ornamental and decorative. These often came under the name of household art. There were of course a number of publications that assisted them in this process of creation. One of the most revealing works that illustrates and demonstrates these activities is *Household Elegancies or Suggestions in Household Art and Tasteful Home Decoration* by Mrs C. Jones and Mr. H. Williams, published in 1875. In the preface to the work they demonstrate the idea of home and the need for an aesthetic dimension to it:

The beauties and attractions of Home can be none too pleasant or tasteful. Here gather the young to learn for all years to come. Here social life gains its lessons of utility and sense. And in these pages all may find a

stimulus for new thoughts, more active work, with pretty fancies, and aesthetic beauty to gild the days for years to come (Jones and Williams, 1875, Preface).

This book gives detailed descriptions for making objects from leaves, flowers and grasses; for spray and spatter work; fancy leather work; wall pockets; work baskets; wax flowers, fruit etc; cone spruce and seed work, as well as a number of miscellaneous projects. The results of these efforts were the basis of the 'collections' of artistic endeavours undertaken as hobbies by nineteenth century women.

According to the hobbies historian, Steven Gelber: 'Hobbies develop specialized skills, reward perseverance, integrate participants into a specialized sub-culture and provide benchmarks by which they can measure their achievements' (Gelber, 1999, 11). In this discussion, hobbies are also a link between the individual, the crafts they produce and the collections they make. In addition to the making, there was a need to accumulate the 'raw materials', work them, and then integrate the finished items into the wider 'collection' of objects. It is interesting to see that one aspect of hobbies, i.e. direct acquisitions of 'things', was also relevant to the interior collections under discussion. The exchange of gifts, purchases from bazaars or sales of domestic work were methods of adding to the collections.

Janet Ruutz-Rees's *Home Occupations* (1883), one of the first hobby books for women, discussed productive leisure

pursuits including leatherwork, wax flowers, and painting. She claimed that these pastimes were advantageous because they provided 'valuable knowledge acquired in the pursuit of some favourite hobby' (Gelber, 161). They also furnished the interior and presented an image of the creator. Ruutz-Rees developed the discussion by pointing out that there was an inherent love of collecting in mankind and she went on to urge a fostering of this taste among children and young adults. She wrote: 'It is quite surprising to find how naturally interests spring up in connection with [collecting], so that in time the simple habit of taking care of things grows into one of classifying and arranging them' (Gelber, 161).

Beverly Gordon usefully categorises ornamented objects or 'fancywork' into one of three groups: personal accessories or embellishments, household accessories, and sewing and writing accessories (Gordon, 49). As the Victorians drew little distinction between functional objects and decorative ones, these possessions could be classed as bric-a-brac or 'collections'. Gordon again suggests that these fancy craft works were 'an expression of escape and transformation' (Gordon, 64). The collecting and accumulation of the works was a development of this expression, just as much as any other form of collecting.

The idea of transformation can be developed further by reference to the notion of 'salvage art' described by Talia Schaffer. She defines salvage art as being produced from 'the primary materials [that] were the debris of everyday life, and it derived a powerful appeal from its ability to recycle

worthless stuff into the simulacrum of a costly consumer good'. But the most interesting comment Schaffer makes is in relation to taxidermy when she says that 'taxidermy is perhaps the hobby that most clearly expresses craft's naturalistic urge' (Schaffer, 2006).

Although reminiscent of the 'cabinets of curiosities' of previous centuries, where exotic and unusual objects were displayed for the collector's delight, the stuffed fauna of the Victorian period fell into two distinct aspects of collecting. When undertaken by women for use in the domestic interior, taxidermy was considered more of an art form than a scientific discipline. In making domestic artefacts, women were apparently concerned more with aesthetic principles than with the scientific precision that would have been accorded by, for example, male naturalists.

It is clear that for Victorian women, collecting was not connected to the traditional ordering and cataloguing but rather with the emotional and psychological activity which helped to situate them in their home and the wider society in which they lived. The semiotic nature of the objects produced and collected reflects the absolutely autobiographical nature of the objects surrounding nineteenth-century women.

Conclusion

Unlike a traditional collection where the meaning and identity of the objects is dramatically separated from their origins, the domestic collections are a narrative of making and using.

In this way they are a visual metaphor for the role of women in the nineteenth century interior because the objects reflect the physical endeavours and the way many women lived their lives. In this way they represent sexual identity; they have connections with space; they link the personal and the social, and integrate visual and material culture into displayed objects.

Amassing a collection may be described as a 'labour of love' whether it be undertaken by male or female, but in the case of the domestically produced artefacts, there is an intimacy and familial connection which is opposed to the 'traditional collection' of commodities derived from outside the home. For men, it was in the organising, classifying and analysing that the individual was able to exert influence over the collection, which was often without a direct aesthetic dimension. The distinctive thing about women and their collections of crafted work is that the collection is quite literally, created. It could be argued that others, often in the form of journals, books or magazines, prescribed the aesthetic framework, but the display and performance of the collection was always made by the individual.

The home interior is the collection 'en masse'. It is the hub of a wheel of connections that link personal relationships, objects and spaces. The objects within have varying degrees of usage but are usually integrated into the display. They are not based on any taxonomic system but are a collected accumulation of objects that not only give a space an aesthetic dimension, but also create a range of semiotic

triggers. All collectors would identify with this latter issue, whereby the history of the process of the acquisition would be well known. The difference between 'collecting proper' and the accumulations found in the interiors is the difference between private and public, between specificity and generality, and between completeness and open-ended approaches to things.

In some cases the home interior may be seen as an exhibition space or showcase of, usually women's status, skill, and aesthetic sensibility. In other cases the interiors reinforce the personal aspects of the relationships between people, family and friends through the choice and arrangement of objects. In yet others the collections may act as didactic tools that not only give visual pleasure but also demonstrate natural or man-made histories.

Finally collections of the sort I am discussing make clear links between material and visual culture embodied in the semiotic and aesthetic. Many 'pure' collections are often hidden away in albums, drawers or cabinets for the delectation of the owner and perhaps a few close fellow devotees. On the other hand the collections or accumulations of domestic crafts are intended to be a public expression of the self, though more importantly they are central to the 'performance' of family life. The reason why these 'public' collections are important is that they 'sediment our experiences and relationships as embodied history, as something to reabsorb in the inhabited spaces of everyday practices (Noble, 2002, 58). In this way the sedimentary nature of self-construction and

being is made manifest through the crafted object and its collection.

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