

## Compte rendu

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### Ouvrage recensé :

*Obsession, Compulsion, Collection: On Objects, Display Culture, and Interpretation.* By Anthony Kiendl, ed. (Toronto, The Banff Centre Press, 2004. Pp. 384, ISBN I-894773-05-5)

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knew that I *liked* how her voice sounded and how the music in *The Wizard of Oz* sounded. I can't explain it any better than that. Perhaps there is a part of gay people that strives to attain some sort of normalcy, to have a childhood and a life like the people we read about or see in a movie or play. Judy Garland certainly did not have this idyllic life. Neither did Copland, Bernstein or Porter, being marginalized by their genius or homosexuality or both. Perhaps their estrangement from ordinary society seeps unconsciously into their music thus creating the "gay sound." Or maybe they were just a bunch of talented guys who happened to be gay? Pick up Hubbs' book and decide for yourself.

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**Obsession, Compulsion, Collection: On Objects, Display Culture, and Interpretation.** By Anthony Kiendl, ed. (Toronto, The Banff Centre Press, 2004. Pp. 384, ISBN 1-894773-05-5)

Distractions of the unspoken object. This is how editor and curator Anthony Kiendl describes the fascination for material culture and collecting, the subject matter for this compilation of essays by twenty-four contributors. These contributors, either curators, historians, artists, writers, teachers, critics, or film scholars have combined their insight and knowledge with visual images to illustrate the reasons why people collect objects and what we make of these collections in public forums.

The book's format is visually and tangibly enticing; even as a paperback, its jacket is lined with bright neon pink and the glossy pages offer a delectable taste of the eclectic writing and material found in each essay. Though this book is "the fourth in a series ... about curating and contemporary art" as written on the front inside jacket synopsis, it may be used by itself for the subject alone about collecting and why humans collect things. The book attempts to recreate the obsessive compulsion of collecting by displaying the amassed objects, art, and images within each text. The conclusion "Doodles" (371-376) is most befitting for this book's finale. All that is written as far as a conclusion is concerned, is relevant to a selection of notes and sketches made by

some participants of the “*Obsession, Compulsion, Collection* Symposium in May 2003 [and] artists who took part in the Banff Centre residency Big Rock Candy Mountain” (371). We are then shown these sketches and notes which may seem pell-mell as far as doodles are concerned, but we may read the significance related to the theme of why and what we collect and whether there are underlying purposes to our “obsessions” in collecting. One sketch particularly caught my attention as it was a cross between a Salvador Dalí, Picasso, and Clive Barker sketch with academic scribbles and a framed “Metadata” cleverly inserted to exemplify how in such a pot-pourri of tangible collections, the meanings of things and the things themselves become sub-categorical. These collections become data of data, or metadata. Though this sketch was the penultimate plate before the contributor biographies, it illustrates the book’s case: selective interpretations and the need to display collections. Does it matter that an object is no longer used for its functional purpose? It should not, because most museums that display objects carefully entomb them in glass cases so they no longer live out their initial purpose. Why then is it important for people to keep these objects when they seemingly have no more functional use and why do we feel the need to display them? The attempts to answer these questions are found through each contributor’s interpretation. Such discussions are found in curator Melanie Townsend’s careful criticism of making meanings rather than collecting blindly (18-24), or Anthony Kiendl’s photo essay about “sentimental values” attached to objects (25-46), and Ngahua Te Awekotuku’s ethnic relativism in the exotic display of the Maori ta moko, or tattoo art and body preservation (77-91). Aoife MacNamara’s cultural landscape essay on political representation in signs and murals of Derry, Ireland (169-192) also challenges concepts on the meaning of display, just as Sarah Cook’s “database art” essay challenges where data resides, whether in cyberspace or as a collection (330-345). Donald Goodes and Paul Litherland’s textual and photographic profile of an “installation artist” (359-370) provides a significant social outlook on how artists may communicate new meanings for things as they “creat[e] conceptual art, through the endless variety of materials and forms of contemporary art, which reflects their ideas, feelings, and concerns” (359).

Could this book be of use to folklorists? The answer lies in how one would use “*Obsession, Compulsion, Collection*,” because some essays

may offer supporting theories on curatorial concerns in object selection, historical interpretation, and the progressive ways to display in museums. Some theoretical perspectives are more transparent than others in the way the essays try to make their point in answering the question “why people collect.” Overall, the reflections made by the various contributors are noteworthy for those studying material culture and how people communicate with each other through collections.

Some criticism, however, is left on editorial oversight. In compiling the contributors’ biographical notices, the author Ngahuia Te Awekotuku is altogether forgotten, therefore, the reader does not know that he is a museum curator and professor for the “Centre for Maori and Pacific Development Research” at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. No effort was made to compile a referential bibliography as an index for consultation. This leads the reader to review individual texts and endnotes that are, at times, incompletely referenced. Because this book is part of a series, perhaps a future referential publication will be needed. For now, the book is an accessible and interesting read. It leaves a conference proceedings impression that is much appreciated because it offers a perspective glance at what is being discussed at curatorial meetings such as the Banff International Curatorial Institute(BICI). This book is a welcome addition to contemporary material culture and interpretive studies.

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Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion. By David H. Brown. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. 413, illustrations, photos, plates, notes, appendices, bibliography, index, ISBN 0226076105)

Though primarily derived from the traditional religious practices of a complex of sociolinguistic groups now known as the Yoruba, orisha