

THE COLLECTED

Bret Schneider

We know that museums developed out of curiosity cabinets, collections of eccentric objects of eccentric bourgeois subjects disenchanting/making the world. At an advanced historical point of accumulation, however, to stay true to the ethos of collecting, mere objects no longer sufficed to represent the totality of the universal order: living matter and consequently anomalous human beings were harvested and inserted into the collection as a way of advancing the social project of disenchantment. Not merely objects, the curious 'human' dwarves (for example) that were collected and placed in vitrines were also only in theory subjects with agency. In practice they were property of the collection. They were not 'human' in the bourgeois humanitarian sense, because they did not merely exist within the collections, a bourgeois thought experiment, so much as they were produced by them. However, because this thought experiment was so successful, and developed beyond itself, the dwarf was analtogether alien expression of that same society of intensive accumulation. The dwarf was it's "special product."

The dwarf is the 'subject-object' of history. As the bourgeois subject, the collector, needed to exercise his collection to the fullest, to max it out and advocate for its totality, he was forced to utilize the dwarf for purposes not merely static, e.g. giving tours of his collection to guests. Forcing the object to think, reflect, and speak publicly was a clever design in the mind of the bourgeois in relating to his fellow bourgeois. In this clever design, the collector seemed to boast, 'See how dynamic my collection is in comparison with the old, static collection of objects?' And he was right. A new type of human being, or thing was produced in the dwarf, who shuddered into life like Pinocchio, or Rachel from Blade Runner. And collectors across the globe began to incorporate this new design into their own collections.

In giving tours, the dwarf fulfilled an objective function in educating the public about the universal order. But not only. "After thousands of years, the object finally speaks!" some guests proclaimed. As an object within this collection, the dwarf had a special, immanent knowledge of it that the collector presiding over it could not. His entire perceptive apparatus being a product of the collection itself, it was altogether necessary for the dwarf to speak, and the more it spoke the more was revealed about the collection. And the more it spoke about itself, the more the dwarf expressed the collection to its acutest. And reflecting on itself, its own history, its own changing social context, the dwarf exceeded speculation because its thought had objective substance. That is to say, in self-reflection, the dwarf changed the collection. The more they understood the collection, the less they could propagandize

for the mere maintenance of the collection, as they were bred and hired to do, but more so could only propagandize for its capability for life to emerge from out of it.

Of course, the collector or Curator, in order to remain a collector or Curator, endeavored to muzzle the dwarf and limit its public reflection to certain times and places that did not interfere with his schedule and plan. This of course interrupted and atomized the development of reflection in the dwarf, who was forced to turn on and off like the windup toy it clearly was not. The more the dwarves spoke, the more they realized the collection as their own, and not the collector's. In muzzling the dwarf, and in dividing the dwarves amongst and then against each other, the collector oppressed not another bourgeois subject with his morals, but the material expression of historical consciousness in the collection. The dwarves were the collection's vanguard. Organization by the dwarves, to overcome the bureaucratic division of the dwarves against themselves was necessary at this point. And they rose up against the vitrines and spotlights that were installed to isolate them and so reduce them to the mere curiosities they clearly were not and could not be. This seemed like a good first tactic. But the track lighting was already laid, and every time it was replaced, it was pathologically destroyed again, ad infinitum. Until the infrastructure itself made no architectural sense. It was practice, and exercise, or a dress rehearsal for later, more ambitious protests against the collection.

But perhaps the Collection had already decayed too much, and stayed dim in sec-

tions, while other sections were blinding bright. The curators disappear into their offices, becoming abstract and mythological creatures who abdicate their responsibility to the dwarves who have overtaken the collection. Many dwarves like to think that the enlightened curators have left behind a mess that the dwarves inherited and will need to clean up. But they also left behind some nice palaces and furniture, some good cookbooks and food, and some decent art and culture. What they truly left behind were the dwarves themselves, who were themselves the critical mess that the curators could not clean up. The dwarves inherited the collection, but they also inherit the mess, and by inheriting the mess they inherit themselves. But the collection stops developing in an enlightened way, and all the dwarves and thinking objects long-ago placed on pedestals are still locked there, collecting dust and decaying and thinking about their decay. Thought becomes infected with decay and helplessness, as the dwarves stare out through the filmy pedestal glass unto a collection never experienced, jealous of those freely walking who refuse to help. They think they can think their way out, and maybe they could—if they think the right thoughts some barbaric dwarf may take them under arm for their own entertainment in their pointless travels. Only those dwarves who were in mid-lecture and let out of their vitrines for an hour to speak when the catastrophe struck are able to experience the collection. And they skulk about, peering at their peers, identifying with the mythological curator who has gone underground like Robespierre once identified with the Romans, and despising/fetishizing their locked peers more than the curator ever did. They too are now set to botch the collection by not properly

maintaining the content that reaches out to them, content that is hardly different, having been stamped with the same tasks of speaking about the collection. They should know better. If only they would let out their peers, to get a little air, to eat a little food, those dying dwarves would not be on the verge of extinction, and thereby liquidating the collection itself. But those who can walk are too mesmerized and distracted by all the speculation they were denied for so long that they do not dare. What has now become their culture esteems these depraved 'hunger artists,' and reveres the rotten thought that seeps out of them. It has become a value that can be traded amongst the thugs and gangs of dwarves that have overtaken the collection. The decay of thought itself is aestheticized at the expense of the collection's true potential. And the collection is composed of nothing other than those who reside in it and watch it disintegrate.