

# Curious Collectors, Collected Curiosities



Curious Collectors, Collected Curiosities:  
An Interdisciplinary Study

Edited by

Janelle A. Schwartz and Nhora Lucía Serrano

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P U B L I S H I N G

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# INTRODUCTION

## ON THE VIRTUES OF CABINETS AND CURIOSITIES

AMY JOHNSON, JANELLE A. SCHWARTZ  
AND NHORA LUCÍA SERRANO

O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure!  
—Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”

It is nowadays taken for granted that the organizing principle of places like museums, archives, and libraries is “the idea of accumulating everything,” the desire “to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes.”<sup>1</sup> Attempting to catalog the world is a foolhardy and, of course, hopeless enterprise. And yet, as the world becomes more and more crowded with data, the eighteenth-century impulse to catalog and classify becomes increasingly attractive—just as it is becoming less and less possible. Today’s narrative impetus to construct a seeming sense of order and epistemology from the pandemic onslaught of new objects, peoples, and cultures into a single space is one that shares a kinship with the Renaissance *Wunderkammer*, the cabinet of curiosity.

As Neapolitan Ferrante Imperato’s 1599 Renaissance engraving *Dell’Historia Naturale* can attest, the *Wunderkammer* was literally a private room that had bookshelves and *studiolos*, built-in cabinets with pull-down doors, to systematize the disarray that came with collecting novelties. Only accessible through the bedchamber, this intimate space contained a variety of curiosities from medieval volumes to taxidermied animals, samples of minerals, and other odd specimens from around the world. Anticipating the organizational strategies behind a Natural History Museum today, pre-modern collectors amassed diverse, seemingly unrelated objects for their collection that had caught their eye for one reason or another. Of interest to early collectors were the before-unseen oddities that would be equally as curious whether sitting next to a man-

made object, New World artifact, or pre-historic fossil. Of further appeal were those myriad wonders that defied any systematic categorization, and thus drew attention to a cabinet's basic purpose: to arrange curios. Akin to Mesoamerican Maize that was introduced and harvested in Europe after contact with the Americas in the sixteenth century, these early curiosities (from the European perspective) had been uprooted from their natural locale, and so emphasized the cabinet's other basic purpose: to transport and replant.

Influenced by what Stephen Greenblatt describes as the Renaissance cabinet's marvelous objects,<sup>2</sup> contemporary curiosities have since been arranged with an eye to inspiring a sense of wonder and managing chaos. Ancestor of the modern museum, the cabinet of curiosity coincidentally stands in contrast to modern systems of classification that deem cabinets too intimate in their reflection of their owner and too chaotic, too apparently random, in their reflection of the world's plenitude. Much like Walter Benjamin's anticipatory fervor in unpacking his crates of books, this serendipitous organization can illuminate the task of a collector's narrative, a task forgotten by many contemporary museum-goers: to celebrate the "chaos of memories"<sup>3</sup> and their epistemological renewals.

The bliss collectors have historically taken in their cabinets and collections has always been equally out of place in an institution for serious study. Such collectors became dilettantes, their passion for collecting, as Benjamin noted, "out of date." The cabinet of curiosity, however, is an interdisciplinary creature: "[T]he modern curiosity is what curiosities have always been: a mixture of the natural and the artifactual... the historical and the ahistorical."<sup>4</sup> A cabinet mystifies its audience through the oddity of its objects and their arrangement, an expression of its creator and his particular eccentricities.

Cabinets, in contrast to those institutions devoted to whole stories and full histories, are anecdotes that do not aim for a teleological presentation of the world. They are shortened, illusory episodes of a grander historical narrative that are by their very nature assemblages of design and rupture. Indeed, it is their individuality, incompleteness, and artifactual nature that point to the labor involved in their creation—at least for contemporary audiences, who must recreate the links between the objects in the attempt to make sense of the collection. Only with a gaze of wonder and the siphoning of chaos can appreciation commence, for it is the space *between* the objects that determines a collection. The wonder that cabinets inspire—through their unexpected curiosities, juxtapositions, and exhibitions—"continually remind us that our grasp of the world is incomplete," rather than presenting the illusion of an encyclopædic representation of the world.<sup>5</sup>



In the essay “Of Other Spaces,”<sup>6</sup> Foucault argued, “this whole idea” of the encyclopædic collection “belongs to our modernity.”<sup>7</sup> “The present epoch,” he claimed, “will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.”

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. [O]ur experience of the world is... that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.<sup>8</sup>

This idea, nearly a quarter of a century old, of space as virtual, a versatile place where things near and far, both geographically and chronologically, can be side-by-side, now seems particularly prescient. The modern cabinet of curiosity has become a productive way of understanding many contemporary collections and the actual practice of collecting. The organization and experience of the cabinet offer an alternative vision to the rigidity of a museal gaze as well as the unyielding structure of linearly-organized museum collections, while accommodating a cultural moment that seems chaotic in its plenitude. This alternate vision exists in part because the cabinet can contain objects that now seem to belong nowhere (or everywhere) and juxtapositions of objects that do not ordinarily exist side by side. Thus cabinets suggest our experience of so much contemporary space as virtual—and unstable. In essence, the cabinet sanctions make possible an experience of synchronism, of chaos and renewal.

The modern mania for classification has tended to insist on the mutual exclusivity of different classes, particularly those of scientific scrutiny and aesthetic pleasure. As expressed by Greenblatt, René Descartes believed that “wonder has only knowledge as its object and thus occurs strictly in the brain,” whereas Albertus Magnus considered wonder to be a “systole of the heart.”<sup>9</sup> If we are to take Greenblatt’s understanding to heart, we can then comprehend how the contested source of wonder suggests a likewise rupture of things that once seemed connected in the process of classifying them. In is in this light that the rupture appears as a particularly modern disease of the imagination. *Curiosity*, *marvel*, and *wonder*, those antiquated terms, are all, as Greenblatt noted, words that designate both the material object and our response to it, collapsing into one space an intellectual and a sensual response. The wonder of a collection of curiosities can be scientific, aesthetic, and emotional. One such contemporary museum whose organization, labels and objects encompass this idea of a cabinet and virtual space for the bewildering, sensory experience of wonder is the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, California, made famous by Lawrence Weschler’s 1995 book,

*Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology.*

According to the Museum of Jurassic Technology's *Jubilee Catalogue* (2002), the Museum hopes that by exhibiting objects that "cause admiration and which are rarely seen... the people may be drawn and have their minds the more affected."<sup>10</sup> The *Catalogue* goes on to quote an unidentified individual named "Wittlin" in order to support the claim that collections can be "a means of emotional experience."<sup>11</sup> The return to a more holistic understanding of the world and its objects perhaps explains in part the new (or rediscovered) appeal of interdisciplinary approaches. The combining of disciplines or contexts is a trend visible in many recent museum exhibits, and even in the organization of museums like the Museum of Jurassic Technology. In fact, it is this very modern impulse that launches the cabinet as the praxis par excellence for the experience of wonder and the Museum of Jurassic Technology as an enterprise not so foolhardy as it may first appear to the contemporary spectator.

While the museal drive for completion means that we still require truthfulness and facts of museums, the Museum of Jurassic Technology inspires "a level of creative engagement that museums are perhaps no longer in the habit of demanding."<sup>12</sup> The Museum's founder, David Wilson, sees museums "as a place for the muses, a place of inspiration."<sup>13</sup> The Museum produces wonder in part through its refusal of certainty, a cataloguing that celebrates the chaotic. A cabinet's curiosities are "at once unbelievable and true."<sup>14</sup> Some sources seem to be entirely fabricated, while suspicious-looking references turn out to be thoroughly reliable. The Introduction to the *Catalogue* notes that "the text is extensively footnoted; this gives definiteness and avoids confusions with earlier publications"—publications which may or may not exist.<sup>15</sup> Those extensive footnotes, however, are the primrose path leading to the reader's surprise at discovering there is no Bibliography offering the full citation for any of the named sources. Readers are left to their own devices in determining what is true and what isn't, or whether for the purposes of the Museum such a distinction matters at all. The experiences of readers and the museum's visitors alike are individually rooted in a productive ambiguity, the wonder of creating one's own cabinet. By replacing the typical linear museal organization with an arrangement that is dictated by the experience of wonder, the Museum of Jurassic Technology productively disorients its visitors.

It is that uncertainty in questions of truth—that and the cabinet's cheerful failure of completion—that leads to our "sense of dispossession... a self-estrangement in the face of the strangeness, diversity, and opacity of

the world.”<sup>16</sup> The cabinet of curiosity thus makes possible James Clifford’s desire to restore some otherness to objects:

At a more intimate level... we can return to them... their lost status as fetishes... *our own* fetishes. This tactic, necessarily personal, would accord to things in collections the power to fixate rather than simply the capacity to edify or inform. [A]rtifacts could once again be *objets sauvages*, sources of fascination with the power to disconcert.<sup>17</sup>

Such objects can also provide pleasure and an alternative way of taking in the world. Although museum studies entered academic high fashion in the late 1980s-early 1990s,<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Hudson anticipated this trend in 1975 when he suggested that “there is nothing disreputable about...a love of museums for their own sake. ... One can enjoy cathedrals without admiring bishops or cemeteries without being dead.”<sup>19</sup>

“Walking through the Museum,” the *Jubilee Catalogue* claims, “the visitor experiences, as it were, a walk back in time.”<sup>20</sup> This step back is more than anything else a mischievous retreat to earlier concepts of collection and exhibition. Benjamin’s “Unpacking My Library” has become a touchstone for thinking about the phenomenon of private collecting. In it he confesses, “the collector’s deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things” is “[t]o renew the old world.”<sup>21</sup> It is this desire to renew the old world, to bring it back to life and to remake it, that allows cabinets of curiosity to help us make contemporary space habitable and, in some sense, our own. And if contemporary museum-goers are willing, they can accept the cabinet of curiosity’s invitation to participate in this renewal of wonder and a return to the museum’s mythological origins by making the spectator share in the task of the modern curiosity cabinet maker.

Like the conventional *Wunderkammer*, the Museum of Jurassic Technology extends an invitation to marvel at its collection of curiosities. So too does *Curious Collectors, Collected Curiosities: An Interdisciplinary Study* ask its readers to enter into an investigation of the nature of collecting as an aesthetic exercise. Spanning the sixteenth century through today, this book gathers together the work of current scholars to re-envision the task of collectors and their collections in broad strokes. Each chapter appropriates the idea of a cabinet of curiosity in order to expand its boundaries of meaning and to complicate our understanding of the acts of display and observation. These chapters also demonstrate that collecting is a universal trope which nevertheless depends on time and place for its particular expressions. Whether the

collection is made up of literary texts and criticism, visual art, including mechanical reproductions, taxidermy and photography, historical travelogues, museum exhibitions, blockbuster films, or airline in-flight briefing cards, it conveys an urgent relevance to our consumer age, in which information is abundant and attention is a commodity.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter One, “‘Very Rare, Fragile and Priceless’: Transforming Leonardo da Vinci from Collector to Curiosity,” opens the discussion by introducing Grande Exhibitions, an international company that designs and leases out autonomous touring exhibitions using current technology. Throughout this chapter, Grande Exhibitions is presented as a cabinetmaker that takes advantage of various multi-media projections and constructions to rearrange and reframe continuously the relationship between the objects and viewers. The primary focus is on the first of Grand Exhibitions’ shows, “Da Vinci—A Genius,” which incorporates 3D projections and large-size replicas of da Vinci’s most famous machine inventions. A folio page from his sixteenth-century *Notebooks*, the exhibit today, and even Grande Exhibitions itself are all read through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s notion of “aura,” John Berger’s idea of spectatorship, and Jacques Derrida’s sense of frames, in order to present how the collector paradoxically transforms into the curio.

While scholars have long remarked the use of visual tropes of wonder in new world contact literature, their readings have largely focused on the European’s gaze at—and display of—the native body as an exercise of colonial power. Chapter Two, “Cabinets in Reverse: Staging the European Body as Curiosity in the Literature of New World Encounter,” offers a slightly different view by examining scenes in which the trajectory of the gaze is reversed. In a sampling of accounts taken from some of the most studied literature of contact, the European body is in fact staged as the object of curiosity and wonder for native audiences. These scenes depict natives looking at Europeans. Complicating the iconographic image we have of European purveyors of the gaze in the cabinet of curiosity, these scenes reveal Europeans looking at Natives looking at Europeans. Careful examination of such tripartite reversal scenes in Columbus’s letters, Harriot’s Brief Description, Behn’s Oronoko and Cavendish’s Blazing World reveals key tensions between contradictory rhetorical justifications for new world colonization. This chapter suggests that close study of the conventions whereby these writers project their own appetite for wonder onto the native body lends a more complex view of the desires and fears attendant to the discourses of curiosity and collecting associated with the history of new world contact.

Whereas Chapter Two focuses on how literary representations, largely in the early modern period, reveal an appetite for wonder, Chapter Three, “The Ark of the Museum: Epistemological Change in John Tradescant’s Cabinet of Curiosities,” examines how changes in the perspective of art can be traced through the culture of collection in the same period. In the early modern period, art shifts from something that is simply the revelation of universal artistic principles to something constructed by artistic ability. At the same time as artistic taste is emerging in this period, subjective notions of external realities also emerge. Like art, physical reality increasingly becomes something that natural philosophers participate in constructing. How the physical space of collection coincides with this fundamental shift in natural philosophy is thus closely studied. As Tradescant’s Ark moves from its private location in John Tradescant’s home to an institutional location in Oxford, the perspective of collection and of external realities shifts from universal and eternal to subjective and contingent. The institutionalization of the collection indicates the shift away from understanding cabinets of curiosities as a microcosm of the macrocosm to an independent and provisional excerpt of physical reality.

Following up with an alternative interpretation of a cabinet’s projection of physical reality, Chapter Four, “Botched Animals and Enigmatic Beasts,” explores the aesthetics of natural specimens from sixteenth-century cabinets of wonder and seventeenth-century collections of natural history. While much critical analysis has been brought to considering the cultural, social, and intellectual histories of these spaces of wonder, no study has fully examined the physical appearance of their organic specimens. Early modern taxidermy was hardly a polished craft. Most creatures were only known through bits and pieces not susceptible to decay, rot, or insects: feathers, bones, claws, beaks, and horns. While such enigmatic shards fed the early appetite for wondrous nature, those same bits and pieces were increasingly difficult for later, more empirically minded collectors. How was objective knowledge (rather than wonder) to be extracted from desiccated parts of little known creatures? By investigating what such animal morsels looked like, this chapter explores the sort of information that could be extracted and suggests that bad taxidermy and botched animals made for truculently opaque objects. Materials count, particularly when it comes to organic materials and even more particularly for preserved nature. While always offering the anticipation of knowledge, some objects prove too obscure to decipher by purely empirical means.

Chapter Five, “A Curious Commodity: Antoine Galland’s *Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*,” returns to literature as a topical curiosity by

looking closely at the reception history of the *Arabian Nights'* *Entertainments*, the English translation of Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et une Nuits* (a text that Benjamin himself unpacked in his library). Given that the written record offers little evidence for how the text was read, the number of editions that appeared between ca. 1706 and 1799 and the references to the *Arabian Nights'* ubiquity in various sources suggests that it must have been quite popular. Those readers who recorded their responses also seem to have assumed that it offered a view, though of course of a questionable accuracy, of "Eastern" culture and society. Such a reading obscures the text's importance as literature, miring it in a debate about its origins and authenticity. In the written record, the *Arabian Nights* also serves as a useful frame of reference for any kind of fantastic image. Writers drew on its magical and marvelous descriptions of fabulous palaces and exotic cities, though only by vague allusion, when attempting to describe some other, unrelated object of curiosity. This chapter examines the text's fantastic nature, so useful for writers struggling with their own descriptions of curious objects; it considers why *Arabian Nights* attracted numerous critics, many of whom dismissed the text as unworthy and some of whom defended the value and importance of fancy. The critical reception of *Arabian Nights* demonstrates how this text projects a kind of infinite cabinet for the eighteenth century's collection of oriental places; it acts as a repository for curious tales. But it is also reduced to the status of a curious object itself.

Contemporary to such fantastic literature of the eighteenth century are the real travelogues of imperial explorers, most often collected in the form of personal journals published for public consumption. In Chapter Six, "Captain Cook's Cabinet: The Making of an Arctic Imaginary," the journals from the Third Voyage of James Cook are realized as the practical catalogue of a cabinet at sea. Defined as a floating cabinet, Cook's ship, the *Resolution*, is positioned as a charted nexus for natural and synthetic objects alike. As Cook's journals reveal, his ship was responsible for collecting specimens from the Arctic's indigenous peoples (oftentimes extending beyond tools and weapons, skins, timber, food, and water, to include the people themselves), as well as samples of arctic flora and fauna, and accurate charts of land- and seascapes. By extension, the *Resolution* was a kind of trading post, providing iron and other metals, buttons and livestock to the indigenous peoples in exchange for their goods (or as gifts, or as the result of outright thievery). But all such collections were secondary to the location of a Northwest Passage—itsself a failed attempt to satisfy the practical curiosity of a more efficient trade route for the British Empire. As this chapter demonstrates, therefore,

Cook's ship becomes a staging ground to reveal the essential tension, or buoyancy, between the land and sea, and interior and exterior boundaries, in order to reconcile real and imaginary spaces. Based on Foucault's notion of a "heterotopia," the floating cabinet is proposed as a mixed space at once demonstrative of the actual challenges of an arctic expanse and representative of the aesthetic experiments deployed to capture it.

Trading in effect one moving cabinet for another, Chapter Seven, "Collective Animal Images: A Natural History of Cinema," investigates the motion picture, or cinema's contribution of life unfolding in time to human representation, by looking to the animals that populated the images of proto-cinematic apparatuses. Set against the backdrop of a nineteenth-century culture of collection in general and the emergence of the zoological space of animal observation in particular, this chapter argues that the works of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey seek to recuperate animals and reconstitute an animality that has been stripped from western culture and its practices of representation. Muybridge and Marey are integral in understanding the technological drive toward motion photography because of their shared singular focus to represent movement as such. Together, they overcame virtually all of the technological hurdles necessary for the cinematic apparatus to emerge. By comparing the emergence of the zoological space with the emergence of the cinematic space in their work, it becomes clear that the presence of animals foregrounds the pursuit of the representation of life at its fullest. Cinematic space allows humans not only to see animals in a new way, but also as a new type of representation grounded in the physical world. Central to this analysis is the question of whether or not we can understand cinema as the register of animality, and to the extent that we can or do, what does it mean to turn that back on ourselves. The chapter concludes then with an analysis of a series of self-portraits by Muybridge.

Chapter Eight, "An Incoherent Collection? André du Bouchet's *L'Incohérence*," studies French poet André du Bouchet's seemingly disparate collection of prose, *L'Incohérence*. The book collects prose poems, meta-poetic meditations, translations, reflections on translation, and texts on artists. On the surface, and despite the aforementioned grouping, *L'Incohérence* appears incoherent. Du Bouchet, when asked about the book's structure, claims that "there is in *Incoherence*, a contradiction found in the title itself. At bottom, it is a book that, in a certain fashion, appears very constructed all the while escaping the order of succession. The book is not paginated. A text leads to another, a page is read in regard to another, yet one could begin the book in the middle or read it backwards in all senses." How can a book be "very constructed all

the while escaping the order of succession”? What does it mean to call such a book—or any book—*Incoherence*? What does such an appellation imply about reading? What does such a book, glimpsed as a collection, if not a *Wunderkammer* as described by Giorgio Agamben, say about textuality, about what happens to texts and to the subjects of those texts when they are apposed? These questions are addressed by closely reading selected passages from *L’Incohérence* with support from other du Bouchet texts, paying particular attention not just to what the poet says, but to how he arranges his words on the page.

Chapter Nine, “Anatomy of an Exhibition: W. G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*” continues the discussion of twentieth-century literature-as-cabinet by exploring the “museum effect” of Sebald’s novel. *The Rings of Saturn* depicts the troubled relationship between aesthetic pleasure and the ethical treatment of others. The museum effect, as this chapter argues, is one that describes the relationship between the object and the observer, rather than a transformation of the object, charting the different ways we find it useful or necessary to arrange objects and thus produce stories. While criticism of Sebald’s novels has generally focused on their use of photographs or representations of trauma, this chapter analyzes the way in which his narrative is structured like a visual and a temporal experience, even as it critiques the value of various kinds of visual experiences. *The Rings of Saturn* presents narrative interruption as an opening to the otherness of history, its places and its people. The trope of the museum allows Sebald to make an ethical argument about representation, making “visible” people or moments that are gone, without suggesting that we can know them.

The epilogue to *Curious Collectors, Collected Curiosities* offers another twenty-first century vision of the curio cabinet to complement that of the Museum of Jurassic Technology with which this introduction opened. But rather than be a structured space, like that of a museum, the concluding cabinet of this collection is situated largely in the open and makes up part of the everyday of our popular culture; it draws the gaze back to humankind as the curious object itself—able to travel far and wide. “On Being Embedded: Some Notes on the Environmental Curiosities of Air Travel” explores conjunctions of “natural” imagery and commercial flight. Collected into this concluding vignette are a range of visual texts that unpack the environmental implications of how flight is depicted in these images, from official airline schematics and advertising schemes, to a Google image search and the Hollywood smash hit *Avatar*. It demonstrates how the contemporary air travel imaginary reflects a paradoxical arrangement: humans are both inescapably “embedded” in



environmental existence, but also constantly defining themselves against and transporting themselves as if outside any environmental reach. To see the curio aesthetics of air travel is to gain an oblique perspective on this paradoxical arrangement, and to catch a glimpse of the vexed environmental awareness of being human.

This collection grew out of discussions from a three-day panel that we put together for the *American Comparative Literature Association's* annual conference in 2006. The panel focused on cabinets of curiosity and their role in defining the human. Support for this project came largely from the innovative research and continued enthusiasm of its contributors, and from the editorial team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. We would like to thank especially Carol Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar for their enduring patience and generous guidance, which helped to see this project through to completion.

## CHAPTER ONE

# “VERY RARE, FRAGILE, AND PRICELESS”: TRANSFORMING LEONARDO DA VINCI FROM COLLECTOR TO CURIOSITY

NHORA LUCÍA SERRANO

One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself.

—Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*

In 2006, when Australian-based Grande Exhibitions, an international company that creates and markets autonomous touring exhibitions, unveiled its very first traveling exhibit, it focused on Leonardo da Vinci, Renaissance artist, writer, and inventor, and a collector of curiosities in his own right. It is no surprise that they chose da Vinci as their focus since they already owned and operated two permanent museums dedicated to this collector of curiosities in his own right: “il Genio di Leonardo da Vinci Museo” in Florence and Venice, Italy. “Da Vinci—A Genius” (formerly known as “Da Vinci—An Exhibition of Genius, 1452-1519”)<sup>1</sup> is an interactive exhibition, traveling to the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D. C. from June 18-September 12, 2010, and composed of da Vinci’s drawings and paintings, anatomical studies, and the major scientific studies and inventions found in his *Notebooks*.<sup>2</sup> In short, Grande Exhibitions has created a modern cabinet, using current technology, in order to display the works of an iconic figure from the fifteenth century. From 3D projections of two of da Vinci’s most famous works, *The Last Supper* and the *Vitruvian Man*, alongside a replication of his most ambitious sculpture project, the *Sforza Horse*, and large-size replicas of his most famous machine inventions, this is an exhibit that seeks to engage actively with its viewers as it looks back nostalgically to the earlier days of the *Wunderkammer*.

As the Grande Exhibitions’ catalogue emphasizes, the comprehensive scope of “Da Vinci—A Genius” is presented “under one roof”; one of its

kind, it is equal almost to the “rare, fragile and priceless” inventions themselves.<sup>3</sup> The catalogue goes on to stress the exhibit’s commercial appeal because “all can *marvel* at the brilliance of this great mind.”<sup>4</sup> Again according to their website, Grande Exhibitions advertizes “broad mass appeal”<sup>5</sup> as one of its profitable features so that prospective venues would be interested in renting their traveling exhibits. In the case of “Da Vinci—A Genius,” the unparalleled focus on the artist is for the viewer’s benefit, allowing the magnitude of da Vinci’s stature as “genius” to remain undisputed just as the exhibition itself projects its own outstanding ability to craft da Vinci’s innovative technologies, in some cases for the first time. The catalogue, like the traveling exhibit itself, thus privileges the spectator by re-presenting the past in a present moment. In doing so, this model ironically transforms da Vinci’s inventions into not-so-rare or fragile or priceless artifacts, but into reproduced (and reproducible) technological novelties.

If a task of a cabinet of curiosity is to mesmerize the viewer with individual specimens within their paradigmatic arrangements, then Grande Exhibitions proffers a wondrous spectacle with most of da Vinci’s inventions standing side-by-side in life-like proportions. What makes these models even more astonishing is that Grande Exhibitions employed Italian artisans, who for the most part used the very same materials and techniques available to da Vinci in fifteenth-century Italy. Grande Exhibitions’ aim for da Vinci’s inventions to be realistic and enticing to the viewer is made possible not only with the attention paid to the authenticity of materials and the location of their construction, but also to the machines’ scale. Some of the reproductions are small in size, others are truly life-like as da Vinci envisioned them, and even others are larger-than-life for the viewer’s appreciation and edification, all of which stress that the gaze and the display are crucial for the show’s success as an interactive, educational tool. With the awesome reproductions, da Vinci’s genius is paid homage. But more suggestively Grande Exhibitions emerges as the cabinetmaker of a unique collection as-yet-unseen. In other words, what Grande Exhibitions ultimately displays are not da Vinci’s inventions alone, but Leonardo da Vinci himself; the persona surfaces as the true curiosity in this traveling cabinet.

However, it is impossible to access this persona without the context of his works. Da Vinci’s *Notebooks* have long been esteemed by many scholars to be the treasure trove and key to his overall *oeuvre*. Robert Zwijnenberg claims in *The Writing and Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*, that da Vinci’s *Notebooks* are the “most important of his activities, perhaps even the foundation of the others.”<sup>6</sup> The *Notebooks* have survived as loose

fragments torn from the original notebooks and reassembled—literally cut and pasted in some circumstances—into ten very different codices located all over the world, from England, Italy, Spain, France, and the United States. While the folio pages are fragments in the sense that they are scattered around the world without knowledge of their original pagination and interconnectedness, Zwijnenberg disagrees that they should be considered disparate or chaotic in the modern pejorative meaning of the word. The purpose of the *Notebooks* was not about organization or categorization *per se*, and much less about following a linear narrative trajectory; rather, the *Notebooks* reveal one man's scientific and artistic curiosity for nature, the human, and the world. In sum, the fragmentary status of the *Notebooks* attests to their "collectedness" as well as their collective value for enthusiasts like Grande Exhibitions and da Vinci himself. Zwijnenberg further posits that the *Notebooks* need to be seen as a "useful and functional instrumen[t] with which to acquire knowledge of the world,"<sup>7</sup> like a stream-of-consciousness narrative. The *Notebooks* themselves were a verbal and visual cabinet of curiosity written onto the 2D, flat plane of a page in an effort to articulate 3D inventions and observations.

With so many drawings dedicated to anatomy and the general make-up of engineering, da Vinci clearly was an observer, dissector, and collector of curiosities. For example, one of the Windsor Folios drawings depicts a seemingly haphazard juxtaposition between a human leg in the lower right-hand corner and an early sketch of one of his mechanical inventions in the lower left-hand part of the page.<sup>8</sup> In jotting down these thoughts and observations together, da Vinci was potentially creating links between the inner workings of a machine's mobility and those of the man. With only a partial sketch of each object, da Vinci was seeing their interconnectedness. He was dissecting man alongside his mechanical inventions in order to grasp both: man was the paradigm for the mechanical inventions, while the machine served as the skeletal frame through which human anatomy was to be understood. This combined methodology of dissection using scientific and artistic lenses, resulting in a written paradigmatic comparison, suggests that da Vinci's genius lies truly in his being an early cabinetmaker of human and technological curiosities.

To organize and give life to these paradigmatic curiosities in the *Notebooks*, as Grande Exhibitions has done, is perhaps an impossible reading and curatorial task not unlike any attempt to reclaim the loss of "aura" that Walter Benjamin laments in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."<sup>9</sup> Like the Grande Exhibitions' traveling show on da Vinci, the cabinet of curiosity as a mode of

(re)presentation permits us to understand better the appeal and need in this day and age for wide-ranging, technologically savvy museum exhibitions of older canonical works, collections, and masters.

In what follows, I propose that the cabinet of curiosity and its praxis could be vital critical tools for understanding the tasks and implications of displaying curiosities from the past (like Grande Exhibitions has done with da Vinci's mechanical inventions and two additional exhibits, "Planet Shark" and "Van Gogh-Alive"). Modern theorists like Walter Benjamin, John Berger, and Jacques Derrida will help to elucidate how Grande Exhibitions successfully demonstrates that mechanical reproductions do indeed cause a decay of aura, allowing in turn for a shift in framing to expose the eponymous curio of the exhibit. Benjamin's notion of the displaced object's eroded then refurbished aura, combined with Berger's idea of spectatorship in *Ways of Seeing* and Derrida's sense of the frame in *Truth in Painting*, illuminate further how historical curiosities reproduced within a modern cabinet derive their multifarious meaning from displacement and reframing (i.e. in a technologically rendered cabinet).

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin introduces the concept of aura as an explication of how modern day re-presentations of past and current works of art can unveil newer understandings toward the public's consumption and experience of these "sacred" objects. Defined as the art object's special power, a relevant and unique quality that asserted its original historicity, the aura, according to Benjamin, is eroded when mass-produced, i.e. when taken from its original cultural milieu and reconfigured through mechanical reproduction. The sacred object, whether relocated, reframed, photocopied, filmed, or photographed, inhabits an essentially new historical and cultural space once it is moved *as if* it were indeed a *curious* object. For Benjamin, the newly displaced object marked a change of value not only for itself, but for the important epistemological practices of observation and reception. Hence, while Benjamin's particular focus was on photography and cinematography—the new means of mechanical reproduction in his day—this pivotal essay drew and continues to draw attention to how a new context, frame, or border for the work of art could challenge the viewer's critical perception of it. For example, with a penchant to challenge the viewer's critical understanding of an artist and their works of art through an emphasis on traveling, spectatorship, and the creation of new frames "under one roof," Grande Exhibitions and their innovative exhibits fit the Benjaminian bill for displaced objects.

Grande Exhibitions acts like a hidden museum or clearinghouse that one cannot physically visit but whose attic nevertheless boasts of sheltering

rare works of art and collections. Because it markets its pieces out to other museums and venues, it functions much like a specially curated show. As of 2010, Grande Exhibitions has marketed five stock exhibits, each of which travel world-wide, moving from venue to venue with the potential to change with each move. Following the success of “Da Vinci—The Genius,” the company constructed “Planet Shark,” “Secrets of Mona Lisa,” “Van Gogh-Alive,” and “Game On.” Each one of these exhibitions demonstrates both a cabinet of curiosity’s theoretical approach to display, reception, and collection, and the company’s own role as collector of disparate phenomena. “Planet Shark,” for example, an eco-educational, interactive display, juxtaposes the shark as both predator and prey. Advertised as traveling for no more than three months at a time, the viewer is educated through interactive modules about the animal and about humankind’s fascination with it. Amongst the videos and displays, there are also collections of diving cages, hunting and commercial fishing equipment, and fossils not unlike the curiosities found in a traditional cabinet. Besides marvel and fear of the shark, another overarching frame that emerges from this exhibit is a very contemporary, socially and politically charged message: the exhibition works to promote an understanding of how the shark is important for our ecosystem. Clearly treating distinct subject matter, the da Vinci and shark exhibits, as manufactured by a single company, reflect the seemingly unsystematic composition of a traditional cabinet’s contents.

Since their focus is on “broad mass appeal,” it is not strange that Grande Exhibitions runs the gamut of museums, from Natural History exhibitions to Fine Art exhibitions. For example, another recent exhibit is “Van Gogh-Alive,” a multimedia projection of twentieth-century painter Vincent Van Gogh and his works. This is another show that travels for no more than three months at a time, during which the viewers experience Van Gogh’s images in a specially created space that permits them “to be immersed in the artist’s work rather than observe it.”<sup>10</sup> With accompanied sound and larger-than-life projections on walls and floors, Grande Exhibitions examines up close Van Gogh’s brushstrokes and color by zooming in on artistry as a curiosity. It allows the viewer to walk literally through the reproduced paintings of Van Gogh. Here technology and high-definition optics are the frames through which artistry, as well as art criticism, are transformed into objects for study and wonder.

The very fact that Grande Exhibitions delights in having “its own in-house design,... [which manages] every visual aspect of [a] traveling exhibition,”<sup>11</sup> secures their role as cabinetmaker, as *the* manufacturer of what Berger defines as a spectatorship. And yet, as Derrida’s analysis of

truth and frames in painting illuminates, a cabinetmaker who employs technology as a framing mechanism cannot control this spectatorship, or “mass appeal,” much less what viewers will consider to be the real curiosity. The cabinet therefore takes on a life of its own. Together with Benjamin, all three of these theorists demonstrate that the cabinet of curiosity is a significant system of organization relevant not only for Grande Exhibitions and the manner in which they display their objects, but perhaps for all modern renderings of a cabinet of curiosity and their audiences.

Given the primacy of aura for a work of art, Berger argues that Benjamin extolled the virtues of the age of mechanical reproduction because the essay privileged (for Berger) spectatorship—i.e. a new dynamic use of the gaze that favored the viewer—over cult veneration—i.e. the static experience of an art object’s aura that favored the object—as the critical *modus operandi* in the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Similar to Grande Exhibitions’ marketing strategy of mass consumption, Berger himself privileges the museum-goer and their relationship with an object’s aura. For Berger, the decay of aura is vital, because without it new forms of art or innovative, critical methods that challenge the viewer—like the cabinet of curiosity—would not be possible. Moreover, without a decay of aura and the nostalgic gesture to recreate the art object’s historicity, assorted museum exhibitions about the very same objects or artists would not be possible, and perhaps much less appealing for the curator or museum-goer.

Berger’s emphasis on spectatorship as a mode of consumption complements Derrida’s idea of overlooked frames, or the context and truth-value of a work of art, when considering Grande Exhibitions’ traveling cabinets. Derrida argues that a truth in painting is an impossibility not unlike a truth in language. There are inherent contradictions and oppositions—e.g. inside and outside, the framer and the framed—that make any so-called truth unstable, complex, and impossible.<sup>13</sup> Like an object relocated to a cabinet—seen as curious because of its dislocation from a natural setting to an artificial one—any understanding (i.e. placement on a shelf or in a drawer) or description of it (i.e. in museum guidebook or an exhibition catalogue) inevitably reverts to a discussion *around* its curiosity without necessarily being an explanation of it. Stuck vacillating between the framer and framed, a displaced object moves back and forth between cabinets and the epistemological understanding of its curiosity; its meaning is overhauled continuously wherein meaning is only relayed through a passage of difference. Derrida’s idea of frames thus suggests that what resides outside the frame is as important as what is depicted within the frame and even the frame itself. Cultural context,

therefore, is as important as the work of art within this context, the cabinet that frames it, and the act of collecting itself. “Da Vinci—The Genius,” as an exemplum of this idea, derives meaning from its contemporary placement, its mechanical reproductions, its existence in varied venues, and its curatorial procedures.

In the context of this Derridian-like cabinet of curiosity, the museum-goer who sees one of Grande Exhibitions’ traveling cabinets is overwhelmed with everything simultaneously: the curiosities, the collection as a whole, and the cabinet itself, whether literally a shelf, box, an interactive module, a projection, or furniture piece. Separately and all at once, the viewer quickly realizes that the experience of approaching a Grande Exhibitions’ cabinet is at once elusive and enticing, furthering the decay of aura, yet closing in on its new contextual meaning: a Derridean wonder. By suggesting that the meaning that a work of art conveys is as varied as its effect on a person, and from person to person, Derrida echoes Benjamin’s essay in that the frame points out that there is already a loss of aura that is not completely lost. This loss of aura is vital to project meaning for a work of art. For instance, a museum-goer who visits “Da Vinci—The Genius” will leave with a sense of wonder because they feel as if they have seen a real artifact, even if it is an enlarged facsimile of a folio page from his *Notebooks* or a reproduced, 3D model suggested by one of his sketches.

All in all, Grande Exhibitions’ traveling exhibitions emphasize the technologically savvy, relatively mobile cabinet of curiosity, which grants previously seen and unseen objects a new meaning, contextual frames, and experiences no matter where it is displayed in the world. As their website claims, Grande Exhibitions prides itself on the “highest quality” show,<sup>14</sup> a performative frame through which the multiplicity of meaning is filtered and strained. Since the exhibitions are traveling shows, however, each exhibit cannot help but emphasize in its own unique way the shifting aura and cultural context of the displayed pieces. With an exhibition life cycle of no more than three to six months at a time in any given city and venue, Grande Exhibitions underscores a constant modification of dwelling, perspective, and frames.<sup>15</sup> This international organization, whose dedication to the concept of a traveling exhibition is utmost, operates much like that of American P.T. Barnum’s beloved traveling circus, which displayed animal and human oddities beneath its Big Top. Like this circus, Grande Exhibitions ultimately aims to leave a trace of the visual marvels it carries to and displays at each of its stopovers.

Even if modern-day reproductions are visually appealing, intellectually enthralling, and highly marketable, what Grande Exhibitions has achieved



are demonstrations of how, in the twenty-first century, mechanical reproduction does in fact cause the productive decay of aura. In the context of their “Da Vinci—A Genius” exhibition, da Vinci’s inventions are dissected facsimiles of ideas presented to the viewer. Unlike the *Notebooks* themselves, which are more a specimen of continuous journal-writing and -thinking rather than a comprehensive textbook, “Da Vinci—A Genius” attempts to represent a systemization and totality that was never there to begin with in order to grant privilege to the viewer. Grande Exhibitions takes da Vinci’s early cartoons, preliminary sketches, and outlines for a final work and realizes them literally to confirm his genius for the viewer. Furthermore, Grande Exhibitions promotes the sense that to translate da Vinci’s works via mechanical reproduction is to place a frame around the multiplicity of meaning found on the disparate folios themselves. However, this frame remains malleable in that it allows for the act of collecting to be on display as much as the collected objects themselves.

As a purveyor for modern cabinets of curiosity, Grande Exhibitions is the quintessential example of a growing twenty-first century mainstream proclivity for interactive technology as the preferred medium through which knowledge is presented to the masses in museums.<sup>16</sup> In all of its current exhibits, Grande Exhibitions takes advantage of various multi-media projections and constructions to rearrange and reframe continuously the relationship between the objects and viewers. Yet this realignment is consistently dependent on the object’s aura; the realignment must echo the object in some manner or else the exhibition would fall prey to being a mere spoof and not the “highest quality” it seeks. What Grande Exhibitions accomplishes is thus the privileging of spectatorship over old-fashion veneration; it reinforces a new form of veneration for the museum-goer, one which is based on displacement, resemblance, and reframing, and which emphasizes an anachronistic human experience not unlike the renderings found in the fragment folios from da Vinci’s *Notebooks*. Just as da Vinci moved from the stance of collector to that of the collected, or curio, Grande Exhibitions emerges as the curiosity that is itself enframed by its own collections.

## CHAPTER TWO

# CABINETS IN REVERSE: STAGING THE EUROPEAN BODY AS CURIOSITY IN THE LITERATURE OF NEW WORLD ENCOUNTER

STEPHANIE SHIRILAN

Neil Kenny begins his history of early modern curiosity by noting that the family of terms that make up the semantic range of curiosity “had both subject- and object-oriented senses.” In other words, a person could be both curious and a curiosity.<sup>1</sup> This paper foregrounds its study of mimetic desire in representations of early modern contact narratives with the complex figure of the ‘collector,’ who translated his own curiosity into an object that made him the curiosity of others. Marjorie Swann reminds us that *sprezzatura*, the courtier’s seemingly nonchalant grace, aimed to make “all men wonder at him, and he at no man.”<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Foucault’s genealogy in *The Order of Things*, early modernists have marked the ascendance of a modern episteme in the transition from an economy that privileged the object of the gaze to one that privileged its exercise. Renaissance power, as Stephen Orgel, Christopher Pye, and others have argued, resided in “being looked at.”<sup>3</sup> “Modern” (proto-bourgeois and proto-scientific) power, suspicious of the subject’s passivity to wondrous displays, adopted the discourse of curiosity in place of wonder.<sup>4</sup>

The cabinet of curiosities unsettles the ease with such epistemic lines are drawn. I suggest that the confusion of the subject and object of the “gaze” is the very animus of the cabinet, and as such the cause of its continued fascination for intellectual historians.<sup>5</sup> Paula Findlen’s *Possessing Nature* illustrates how the Italian cabinet served the changing interests of court, market, and the early academies of science. In each instance, collectors curried favors, patronage, or influence by soliciting the wonder of visitors who (it was hoped) would direct their wonder at the

displayed marvels towards their proprietor. The collector assembled and published a careful, if seemingly disordered, persona as the purveyor of wonder.<sup>6</sup> Doing so successfully required the translation of the collector's curiosity into a powerful apparatus of wonder-inducement. Such translations are never neat. Here I propose that the depiction of the awe-struck native, a recurring motif in early modern travel literature, displaces European wonder and mimetic investment in the new world onto native bodies instead. The gazing European rhetorically stages himself as the object of the gape.<sup>7</sup> I offer examples of the reversed-curiosity motif in several iconic representations of new world encounters, "real" and imagined: Columbus's letter announcing the discovery, Hariot's *Brief Description*, Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*, and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. These texts have been selected to provide generically variant and historically specific instances of a thematic substitution of indigenous fascination for European wonder.

Stephen Greenblatt writes that in the scene of new world contact, Europeans drew on wonder to "cut the complex mimetic knot that links the eyewitness and the world he describes."<sup>8</sup> In Greenblatt's estimation, wonder is a discourse Europeans called upon to disidentify with the indigenes; it is the prelude to appropriation.<sup>9</sup> I argue that European writers did not fashion a discourse of alterity out of their own performance of wonder, but rather that the rhetorical operation of disidentification takes place in the reassignment of wonder to the indigenous "other." Closer examination of the force by which mimetic curiosity is rhetorically transposed from European to Native in early travel narratives complicates our understanding of the place of new world objects in the European cabinet, and, by extension, overly simplified representations of the cabinet as an epistemic prelude to the modern possessive individualism associated with "the collecting habit." I aim to show how the transposition of European mimetic desire takes place through a highly unstable discourse of the value and desirability of the European commodity. I argue that the European body and its refinements are offered as consumable wonders—surrogates for European hyper-investment in the bodies and resources of the new world.

Despite what I will foreground as the centrality of the reversal theme, there remains considerable perception that, as Karen Kupperman writes, "very rarely English writers turned the lens around and conveyed Indian interest in the newcomer's appearance."<sup>10</sup> Mary Baine Campbell notes that while the reversal theme is not unprecedented, it is unusual: "I do not point it out as morally benign or politically progressive but simply as a surprise, a rhetorical moment that...invites a moment's wonder itself."<sup>11</sup> I take up

the “surprise” of this rhetorical turn and seek to understand the mechanisms by which wonder and desire (to know, touch and imitate the other) is made to move from the colonizer’s body to the body of the colonized.

The paradigmatic representation of Indian curiosity in European objects and exotica goes back at least as far as Columbus, who repeatedly situates the inherent servility of native peoples in their capacity to be awed by the physical objects put on display before them: medallions, bells, images and, later, books.<sup>12</sup> The narrators of these scenes of encounter make tenuous distinctions between the kinds of awe that can (or ought) to be cultivated by “valuable” objects, and the naïve, idolatrous and infantile worship of trifles. According to the interpreters and marketers of new world venture, the thrall that the image of the monarch printed on a gold coin places over the natives testifies to their inherent recognition of rightful authority. Their equal valuation of “broken crockery” and royal images both entices savvy traders and presents a problem that shores up the doubleness of colonial desire so pervasive in representations of early contact: the desire for maximal, indiscriminate profit and the desire to present the native as reasonable and convertible. If the natives with whom they seek to trade are indeed potential Christians, the Spanish cannot seem to trade worth for worthlessness—a scheme Columbus styles himself as being anxious to avoid, even while he repeatedly emphasizes its ease.

Whether the thing be of value or whether it be of small price, at once with whatever trifle or whatever kind it may be that is given to them, with that they are content. I forbade that they should be given things so worthless as fragments of broken crockery and scraps of broken glass, and ends of straps, although when they were able to get them, they fancied that they possessed the best jewel in the world.... They took even the pieces of the broken hoops of the wine barrels and, like savages, gave what they had, so that it seemed to me to be wrong and I forbade it. And I gave a thousand handsome good things, which I had brought, in order that they might conceive affections, and more than that, might become Christians and be inclined to the love and service of their highnesses and of the whole Castilian nation, and strive to aid us and to give us of the things which they have in abundance and which are necessary to us.<sup>13</sup>

Columbus’s description of the natives’ appetite for European objects exposes the complex and contradictory logic of the super-valuation of the symbolic commodity over the non-symbolic “trifle.” What value can be conferred on the image of the monarchs or regal banners, or the name Columbus gives to the ground he plants them in, if they command equal awe to the trifling objects he and his sailors so easily pawn away?

Already in Columbus's account, the emphasis placed on native appetites for European objects seems to operate in excess of economic expediency. It suggests the narrator's own awareness of the semantic instability between objects of value and everyday objects, and registers his trouble over how to represent the difference between them. Thomas Hariot's annotations of Theodor de Bry's engravings in *America Part I* disclose a similar instability. Hariot annotates one engraving which shows a nearly nude "Chieff Ladye of the Pomeiooc" and young girl holding a European doll and rattle. Hariot concludes his portrait of the mother's and daughter's minimal dress with the remark that they "are greatly Diliged with puppets and babes which wear brought oute of England."<sup>14</sup> The engraving conveys the propagandist suggestion that the indigenous people of Virginia, like the abundant resources they enjoy, have immediate as well as cultivable value. Hariot's spotlight on native desires for European commodities suggests that the natives sensibly desire the supplementation of European goods while it simultaneously testifies to their naïve valuation of these trinkets over their own natural resources. Hariot and Columbus seek to make the native familiar to Europeans on the basis of their shared appreciation for European goods. The inference in these documents written primarily for colonial stakeholders is that the immoderate appetites of the native peoples for European commodities will make them rapt subjects for colonial investment.

The European commodity first takes prominence in the scene of encounter as an illocutionary object that subdues and even assuages the potential, and rhetorically cannibalistic, violence of first contact. Hariot describes the "great and horrible crye" his party first receives from the Virginians: "as people which never befoer had seene men apparalled like us" (45). The word 'horrible' reflexively connotes both English horror at the sight and sound of the natives as well as Hariot's assumption that the spectacle of the English party provokes horror from the natives who had never before seen their likes.<sup>15</sup> The threat registered by the inscription of the greeting cry as 'horrible' is only revised after the Indians are successfully "called backe" to admire the "wares...glasses, knives, babies and other trifles" (45). Hariot's interpretation rhetorically straddles the suggestion that the natives are both pacified by the power of the commodities on display and that their seeming hostility is a misinterpreted sign of their admiration for the European in all his finery.

The same misinterpreted welcome scene is reproduced nearly identically a century later in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. The arrival of Behn's narrator at the Indian villages of Surinam is also met with a "horrible cry" portentous of real or imagined violence. And, as in Hariot's

account, this cry is magically diverted by the enchanting spectacle of the European body and its accoutrements.<sup>16</sup> The narrator prefaces her depiction of the Surinami natives with an explanation that her longing to see 'real' Indian villages had been almost thwarted by the recent threat of Indian uprising. She remarks that the Indians have risen up against the Dutch, "who had not us'd 'em so civilly as the *English*," cutting and stringing women and children "in pieces" and (foreshadowing the story's grisly conclusion) dismembered and nailed the narrator's own footman to a tree (81). In spite of these threats, the narrator is determined to make the eight-day trip to see the Indian villages, and does so in the company of her brother, whose appearance in the text is limited to this one scene where it seems to serve the single narrative purpose of doubling the display of European fashions across the sexes, producing a 'his and hers' touch-and-feel show that makes the male and female body equally available as consumable curiosities. Upon arrival, the narrator and her brother are greeted with a loud cry, which they initially interpret as murderous and almost as quickly reinterpret as one of "Wonder and Amazement":

We thought it had been for those that would Kill us, but it seems it was of Wonder and Amazement. They were all Naked, and we were Dress'd, so as is most comode for the hot Countries, very glittering and Rich; so that we appear'd extreamly fine. My own Hair was cut short, and I had a Taffaty Cap, with Black Feathers... my Brother was in a Stuff Sute, with Silver Loops and Buttons, and abundance of Green Ribbon. This was all infinitely surprising to them, and because we saw them stand still ... we took Heart and advanc'd; came up to 'em, and offer'd 'em our Hand; which they took, and look'd on us round about calling still for more Company, who came swarming out all wondering...taking their Hair up in their Hands, and spreading it wide... as if they would say (as indeed it signify'd) *Numberless Wonders*, or not to be recounted, no more than to number the Hair of their Heads. (81-2)

The Indians grow bold and move from gazing to touching,

Laying their Hands upon all the Features of our Faces, feeling our Breast and Arms, taking up one Petticoat, then wondering to see another; admiring our Shoes and Stockings, but more our Garters, which we gave 'em and they ty'd about their Legs...In fine, we suffer'd 'em to *survey* us as they pleas'd, and we thought they wou'd never have done admiring us. (82)

It is worth noting the timing of this scene within the chronology of the plot. An atmosphere of climactic threat is temporarily dissolved in the