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## 2 The Contemporary Cinephile

### Film Collecting after the VCR

Let us grant that our everyday objects are in fact objects of a passion—the passion for private property, emotional investment in which is every bit as intense as investment in the “human” passions. Indeed, the everyday passion for private property is often stronger than all the others, and sometimes even reigns supreme, all other passions being absent.

Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 1996

Since the 1970s the term *cinephile* has conjured definite meanings and associations for film scholars. Christian Metz and other psychoanalytic theorists have characterized the cinephile as an extreme but logical extension of the regular filmgoer who loves the cinema with a “passion for seeing” that is tied inextricably to the movie hall’s “theatre of shadows” and the technology that makes it possible (i.e., the camera, projector, and screen). Ultimately “enchanted at what the machine is capable of,” the film devotee enters the theater not just to encounter a particular film but to take ardent, fetishistic pleasure in the viewing conditions themselves.<sup>1</sup> The cinephile thus vividly realizes the capacity of the cinematic apparatus to transfix its spectators through the darkness of the theater, the brilliantly lit screen, and other conditions that constitute cinema’s spellbinding nature and array of visual fascinations.

Given these characterizations, it is not surprising that scholars have since regarded cinephilia as essentially and exclusively a big-screen experience, absolutely dependent on the projection of celluloid within the public space of the motion picture theater. Assuming that film pleasure arises expressly from being “submerged in the darkness of the theater,” Roland Barthes once argued that the televised film elicits “the opposite experience,” that is,

“nothing, no fascination; the darkness is dissolved, the anonymity repressed, the space is familiar, organized (by furniture and familiar objects), tamed.”<sup>2</sup> Particularly because of its domestic setting, then, television appears as the antithesis of the movie theater as an exhibition site for films, a prime example of the “death” of rapture caused by removing film viewing from its proper context. In the wasteland of affect defining the home and its subdued, private entertainment space, the exercise of cinephilia would be unimaginable.

While claims about the utter impoverishment of television as a screening venue for films are often based on cinematic or cultural elitism, developments in entertainment technologies designed for home use have made it harder to ignore television’s connections to diverse, sometimes intensely invested, film cultures. Although the dynamics of household viewing may not replicate the psychic parameters of spectatorship in the motion picture theater, certain home film cultures suggest that passion for the cinema is not anomalous within domestic space. In fact, as we saw in the case of home theater, the home has been equipped and acculturated to produce its own kind of connoisseurship, its own brand of fascinations.

In this chapter, I explore a type of home film culture based on playback technologies, a culture that, in a particularly telling fashion, provokes reconsideration of the image of the domestic viewer bereft of viewing pleasure. One of the most avid viewers to emerge from this culture has been the film collector, the consumer who purchases films on VHS, laser disc (before it was superseded by DVD), and DVD to create an extensive media library. Seated in front of the television set, today’s collector is a member of a corps of impassioned film devotees who are, like Metz’s cinephile, “enchanted at what the machine is capable of,” that is, mesmerized by the machines of reproduction that deliver the cinematic illusion. However, the mesmerizing apparatuses in this case are not the camera, projector, and screen related to the exhibition of celluloid, but the accoutrement associated with cinema playback in the home. The contemporary film collector’s romance with various technological aspects of the films and machines that make up the experience of cinema in domestic space suggests that cinephilia has been broadened to encompass the “forbidden” territories of television and the home. Film’s domestication has not obliterated cinephilia; rather, the conditions fueling this kind of zealotry have been relocated and rearticulated within the complex interactions among media industries, commodity culture, and the private sphere. Although media industries do not control the activity of collecting, they have played a significant role in inspiring its growth as a routine activity, a commonplace aspect of the viewer’s relation

to film. In league with other social forces, these industries have had a dramatic impact on defining films as collectibles in the marketplace and on shaping their reception in the home.

My consideration of the phenomenon of film collecting in the home begins by addressing several preliminary questions. How has collecting become an integral part of the viewer's media landscape in the United States? Who, exactly, collects? How do we situate this pastime, often regarded as personal and idiosyncratic, within a cultural frame? To examine in more detail the implications of contemporary film collecting for reception, I focus on a figure who vividly incarnates the domestic cinephile: the high-end collector committed to the best technological standards in playback equipment and films. As we shall see, there are different kinds of collectors, yet this subculture reflects with particular clarity the substantial effects new technologies have had on film consumption in the home. Like the home theater enthusiast, this collector helps to shed light on the relationship of gender and home film cultures, demonstrating a persistent equation of men and machines. Collecting enables us to see from a different angle the importance and function of the male technophile or gadgeteer to home film cultures, as well as the special "exclusionary discursive practices" that animate and define this world.<sup>3</sup> As contemporary cinephilia is associated with audio-visual technophilia, a range of discourses persistently address this collector as an "insider," an individual with highly specialized industry knowledge. At the same time, as films become possessions within this world, technophilic systems of value generate an influential aesthetic that assesses Hollywood film reissues of old and new films alike according to digital standards, shifting their identities and meanings for a new echelon of consumer.

Although this collecting enterprise foregrounds technology in a way that affects both collectors and films, cinema's very status as private property also helps to define this home film culture. Since film collecting is definitively characterized by a desire for ownership, I consider how the establishment of a home archive—the arena in which the possession of films is most vividly realized and displayed—affects reception. Appearing at first glance as simply a utilitarian procedure, the organization of films within the personal library is a significant activity. As the collector assumes control over his or her videocassettes and DVDs, classifying titles within the order and logic of the collection itself, the personal archive appears as an inner sanctum. Here, the archivist gains a sense of mastery over a private universe, while the historical identities of films undergo yet more changes. As it creates an apparently self-regulated space, the archive can obscure the

substantial pressures exerted by public discourse on this area of consumer life—a masking central to the pleasures of ownership and to the dialectic between public and private that characterizes home film cultures.

### Why Rent When You Can Own?

According to Anthony Slide, the 1970s and 1980s marked a period of abundant activity for those who collected films in 8mm and 16mm formats. During this time, numerous companies devoted to film distribution in these formats sold titles to individuals at reasonable prices.<sup>4</sup> The early history of film collecting in 8mm, 16mm, and 35mm formats by individual collectors (including well-known collectors such as David Bradley, David Shepard, and William K. Everson) predates this particular high point, as does the acquisition of film libraries by various archives around the country.<sup>5</sup> Although films in the libraries of individuals and organizations were frequently screened in public and of course enjoyed in private, film collecting was still a relatively specialized activity until the advent of the video player, most avidly pursued by dedicated film lovers, museum curators, and archivists. Film collecting on celluloid continues today. However, the contemporary collector is no longer only a cinema specialist living in the Hollywood hills surrounded by hundreds of prints or an academic screening films on a 16mm projector in the basement. As movie ownership has become more pervasively defined by VHS and DVD, it has become dramatically democratized.

Part of the reason for this shift is that the videocassette and DVD have provided viewers of all types—from the most to the least cinephilic—with unparalleled physical access to the cinema. Viewers can now own and operate what once was an unapproachable medium, hovering in the distance on the silver screen or subject to broadcast flow, its transient appearance guaranteed by the end of its theatrical run or the beginning of the next television program. Today cinema can be contained in small boxes and placed on a shelf in a room, left on the coffee table, or thrown onto the floor. Viewers can pause, fast-forward, rewind, or mangle images through the VCR; they can select scenes precisely through the chapter-search feature on the DVD remote. On VHS or DVD, films can be screened repeatedly at an individual's whim and achieve an indelible place in everyday routines. As Timothy Corrigan remarks, within home economies of viewing, people often "adopt movies," transforming public objects into home furnishings that respond to the concerns and rituals of domestic space.<sup>6</sup> This previously physically remote and transitory medium has thus attained the solidity and semiper-

manent status of a household object, intimately and infinitely subject to manipulation in the private sphere.

The 1975 introduction of VHS to the consumer market, the 1978 entrance of laser disc, and the more recent appearance in 1997 of DVD have provided venues that are more "user friendly" and less expensive than celluloid, inspiring cinema's contemporary cultural omnipresence. Although laser disc was unable to penetrate the U.S. market beyond a few million homes and hence maintained a boutique identity, VHS and DVD have experienced different fortunes. In 2002, VCRs were in approximately 90 percent of U.S. households (with home video bringing in more than double the revenue of theatrical sales, constituting 58 percent of Hollywood's total income). Considered "the hottest selling consumer electronics product in history," as mentioned in chapter 1, DVD players were in 30 percent of U.S. homes five years after their commercial introduction. Although estimates vary, the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association found that DVD's penetration rate a year later, in 2003, had increased dramatically to 57 percent of homes. Forecasters predict that this number will rise to 80 percent by the end of 2005.<sup>7</sup>

As these statistics suggest, cinema's domestic presence has become an almost inextricable component of leisure and life that has, in turn, broadened the horizons of public and private film cultures. As a *New York Times* reporter comments in a 1997 article entitled "Land of the Cineplex, Home of the Cassette," "Americans are watching movies any way they can . . . watching movies has become something of a national pastime."<sup>8</sup> Within the national pastime of watching movies, a marked trend toward purchasing videocassettes and DVDs has helped redefine film collecting as a more democratic art. Many consumers are not satisfied with renting certain titles for one-night stands; to embrace their favorites truly, they want to possess them, organize them into personal libraries, and view them repeatedly.

Along with the sheer availability and accessibility of cinema in the home, certain economic factors, such as the falling prices of VCRs and DVD players and the development of a strong sell-through market for videocassettes and DVDs, have played an important role in the growth of the home "movie habit." In addition, marketing campaigns that promote films as collectibles and address certain kinds of collectors have been central to enhancing the attractiveness of ownership.

According to Robert C. Allen, a different pricing structure for films on video gained momentum between 1983 and 1992, when feature films "priced for sell-through increased at an average annual rate of 52 percent, from 59 million copies to 264 million."<sup>9</sup> In sell-through, studios offer their

films on VHS or DVD at a low enough price that the consumer is encouraged to buy rather than to rent the film in question. Whereas once consumers had to spend about a hundred dollars to purchase a videocassette, with some exceptions, a sell-through market meant they could obtain it for approximately twenty dollars (or less).<sup>10</sup> This arrangement not only helped to spur a movement toward film acquisition; it also proved financially advantageous for the studios. By 1989, the sell-through market already made up a three-billion-dollar industry.<sup>11</sup>

The last ten years have seen the increasing importance of the sell-through market to Hollywood while also witnessing the ascendancy of DVD. In 1992, VHS sales alone surpassed the theatrical take for the first time and continued to gain ground through the decade. In 1996, when revenue from the domestic box office totaled about \$5.9 billion, patrons rented \$8.7 billion worth of videocassettes and spent \$7.6 billion on prerecorded tapes.<sup>12</sup> Since then DVD has made significant advances. For the first time in 2001, DVD sales revenues superseded those of VHS, constituting 52 percent of the \$10.3 billion U.S. consumers spent on purchasing films. By mid-2003, Video Business reported that \$4.8 billion worth of DVDs were sold, whereas the sales of videocassettes amounted to only \$1.05 billion. In the same year, DVD rentals also surpassed video rentals. As the cases of *Training Day* (2001), *The Fast and the Furious* (2001), and many other titles show, revenue from DVD releases can easily exceed that of first-run theatrical box office releases.<sup>13</sup> In any case, with consumers spending \$15.5 billion on DVD purchases in 2004 (and \$5.7 billion on DVD rentals), the home continues to represent not only a formidable market but also a site of rising populations of DVD aficionados.<sup>14</sup>

Multiple factors have contributed to DVD's success and its growth as a sell-through market. Its use not restricted to the stand-alone DVD player, DVD has been featured on or associated with other massively popular digital technologies identified with high quality and personal use, such as CDs, PCs, laptops, and gaming systems. The presence of DVD has contributed to a sense of the versatility of these other machines while allowing DVD itself to attain a diffuse presence in the household. Moreover, given its superior image and sound, DVD seems a more logical counterpart to another significant home entertainment form—the home theater system—than the Hi-Fi VCR. In fact, purchasing a home theater system often provides a strong incentive for building a DVD collection. At the same time, DVD's cost and quality have given it a comparative advantage over VHS in the market. Certainly, lower prices for DVD players and the inexpensiveness of disc manufacture in comparison with VHS—a boon to both vendors and studios—

have figured into its rapid growth.<sup>15</sup> Like the face-off between the LP and the CD in the music business, VHS, an analog-based medium with limited image resolution and a proclivity for deterioration, has all but been displaced by DVD, a digitally based technology boasting better reproduction and less susceptibility to degeneration (as well as the practical advantage of taking up less shelf space). Because DVDs can be watched repeatedly without substantial alteration in image and sound quality, this format appears to be a better preservation medium, making it especially attractive to film buyers and collectors. Moreover, DVR machines give this technology the recording capabilities lacking in other earlier would-be competitors of VHS, such as laser disc.

While VHS has been outmatched by DVD—seen by the falling stature of VHS as a revenue source as well as by its absence or dwindling presence in video rental stores and in the minimal shelf space devoted to VCRs in electronics showrooms—it is important to remember that DVD is a relative of VHS in its playback capacities and concentration on Hollywood films. In this respect, as we shall see, DVD raises similar kinds of issues about home film cultures. However, because of its superior technical capabilities, DVD also refines and redefines what VHS has been able to offer viewers, significantly transforming certain characteristics of these cultures.

Within the rerelease market, irrespective of format, any film is potentially a collectible. But certain films are also explicitly designated as such through a host of labels, including special collector's editions, widescreen editions, director's cuts, restored or remastered classics, anniversary editions, and gold, silver, or platinum editions. Each of these labels suggests that the rereleased film is a privileged form that stands outside of the normal avalanche of videocassettes and DVDs. Packaging of these editions can be quite elaborate, underscoring their elite position in the flow of movie goods. The Criterion Collection, a film distributor co-owned by Janus Films, was influential in propagating this marketing strategy. Beginning in 1984 as part of its efforts to sell and popularize laser discs, this company sold special collector's editions of films. These editions might feature digitally remastered versions of films in their original widescreen formats (if appropriate) and provide extras such as the director's commentary and accompanying background material, including trailers, outtakes, and "making of" documentaries. Criterion has been especially associated with film as "high art," promoting the work of renowned directors and classic films. Thus, the company announced its 1997 collection by telling its patrons, "The cornerstone of any movie collection is the work of a few great filmmakers," adding that its list of "popular favorites, lost treasures, and land-

mark films from around the world [will provide] the closest thing we know to a perfect shelf of movies."

Although the special collector's edition began as a niche market for film buffs and academics interested in buying films on laser disc or widescreen VHS, the extras it boasts have become an intimate part of DVD release—so much so that consumers expect to get behind-the-scenes information with their rentals or purchases. Studios have made extras such a fixture that it would be hard for fans of *The Matrix* (1999), for example, to imagine the film's home version without facts about the accomplishment of its special effects (especially "bullet time") or the choreography of its martial arts fight scenes by Hong Kong master Yuen Wo Ping. DVD extras and a sense of a DVD aesthetic have already become a prime feature of film culture. This is especially visible in the case of younger generations of viewers attracted to both blockbusters and technology and for newspaper and magazine columnists covering home releases who routinely refer to certain films (particularly those heavy on special effects) as "perfect" DVD movies.

The broad acceptance of this new technology reflects the perception that the digital era in theatrical cinema has finally found its aesthetic equivalent on the domestic front in DVD. Since DVD offers film images with good resolution in widescreen formats and sound that performs well through surround systems, it approximates the theatrical experience, thereby altering a film less dramatically than previous distribution venues. DVD thus provides an interesting twist to discussions of the inferior status of nontheatrical exhibition and the debased forms of film presentation often thought to be characteristic of the nontheatrical. Moreover, although specialized markets in film collectibles still thrive, at once high-tech and popular, apparently exclusive and omnipresent, DVD is in the process of expanding the notion of the aesthete beyond the laser-phile addressed in Criterion's pioneering days to include more mainstream consumers. At the same time, given the proliferation of industry discourses that accompany the feature film on DVD, this technology has enabled media companies to extend their reach into the home, shaping the patron's relationship to specific films as well as to Hollywood itself.

With the progressive development of the sell-through market and the special edition, film and other media industries have explicitly targeted collectors in their packaging and selling of titles. In its broadest configuration, collecting is undertaken by the consumer who purchases just a few favorite titles to put on a shelf as well as by the rabid devotee who pursues hundreds or thousands of titles systematically in order to create a model library of films. Film production companies, electronics firms specializing in home

theater, VHS and DVD vendors, and other businesses avidly pursue the spectrum of possible collectors, attempting to ignite and feed their desires. In fact, there appears to be a strong link between the purchase of DVD players and starter collections,<sup>16</sup> a link the industry has nurtured by releasing “completist” boxed sets of the works of specific directors, actors, genres, and TV series. Generally, the goal of media industries in relation to collectors is to tap into a middle-class consciousness about the superiority of ownership. As an ad for the VHS edition of *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996), priced at \$14.95, puts it, “Why Rent Space When You Can Own It?”<sup>17</sup> But the industry also issues specific appeals to various demographic and taste groups associated with collecting. As a sign of its mainstream presence, youth, men, women, and families are all recognized as potential collectors.

One ad, for example, asks the reader to “Accessorize Your Evening” by buying *The First Wives Club* (1996), *Clueless* (1995), *Sabrina* (1995), and *Harriet the Spy* (1996) as “the perfect additions to your home video collection.”<sup>18</sup> Against a backdrop consisting of personal accessories of clothing, jewelry, and roses, the ad attempts to sell a package of chick flicks (that is, films conceived for and marketed to female viewers) to younger and older women. While women are thus “targeted,” sales charts for VHS have long indicated that families provide a major market for sell-through, because they consistently purchase titles for their children and grandchildren—a group likely to want to see the same films repeatedly. As Robert Allen points out of the pre-DVD era, “The core markets for both video rentals and sales are families with children under the age of seventeen. Households with children are more than twice as likely to be frequent renters and heavy buyers of films on video.” As he continues to note, “Sixty percent of all U.S. households own feature films on video, with an average number of titles in family collections standing at forty-one.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the majority of the ten best-selling videocassettes of all time by the mid-1990s (such as *E.T.* [1982] and *The Little Mermaid* [1989]) were children’s films or films oriented toward youth. Today, families are in the process of moving strongly into the DVD market, reflected by the presence of children’s films such as *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Shrek 2* (2004) at the top of DVD sales charts.

The way in which film collectors can be identified as more truly composing a niche audience lies in the distinction between “high-end” and “low-end” practices. Typically, high-end collectors buy expensive entertainment equipment and concentrate on the acquisition of DVDs, good-quality videocassettes, or, during their heyday in the 1980s and early 1990s, laser discs. Low-end fans are less focused on glamorous machines and images, preferring often obscure titles that may be several or more generations

removed from original video versions (available, for example, from vendors such as Sinister Cinema or Something Weird Video). For this group, the less pristine the image, the more authentic it seems.<sup>20</sup> The growth of legitimate film purchases coexists with this “shadow” culture of collectors who pursue fringe titles and frequently engage in “illicit” practices, such as dubbing films illegally from prerecorded tapes or buying bootleg titles, to form their libraries.

Film collectors, then, do not constitute a homogeneous community. As I have mentioned, my analysis primarily concerns the media industries’ pursuit of high-end collectors—typically, white males intent on building a film archive within an upscale entertainment environment. In many ways, these individuals overtly display the kind of dedication and specialized knowledge associated with the activity of collecting. Moreover, as they are enchanted with what the machine is capable of in a domestic setting, they enable the most vivid connections to be drawn among cinema, new technologies, and home exhibition. In addition to its passion for the cinema, this group has been particularly invested in developments such as home theater (as it promises “theater-quality” image and sound), laser disc, and DVD. As in the case of home theater discourse, the high-end collector is approached through class-based appeals that define not only the entertainment equipment but also certain videocassettes, laser discs, and DVDs as designed for the “serious” film viewer, the “discriminating movie fan” who insists on quality in the film viewing experience as well as in the selection of films for purchase.<sup>21</sup> As the direct legatees of the so-called digital revolution, these collectors are very much a part of high-tech home film cultures that have recently emerged.

Media industries often refer to this type of collector as a “-phile” of some sort—for example, an audiophile, cinephile, or videophile. These various -philes are hailed as serious viewers and media specialists who exhibit a zealous preoccupation with picture and sound reproduction that can be satisfied only through the purchase of the most refined electronic systems. For this group, the desire for cinema is inextricably linked to the desire for the newest and best technology, aligning a passion for cinema with the gadgeteer’s passion for hardware. As we shall see, film collectors often discuss issues that have more to do with technology than with other aspects of the cinema, giving technophilia an authoritative role in this brand of cinephilia.

This predilection for the shiniest new machines on the part of the high-end -phile precipitated, in the early years of DVD, a skewing of playback technologies in terms of gender. Demographic analysis comparing DVD and VHS households showed that adults in homes with DVD players tended to

be male, whereas adults in homes that had only VCRs tended to be female. Further, research suggested that DVD buyers focused on genres traditionally identified with male audiences, such as action and science fiction blockbusters, with those who bought videos gravitating toward fare associated with women viewers and children, such as comedy and animation. In terms of other variables, such as age and class, DVD owners were younger and had higher-than-average incomes.<sup>22</sup> What the industry observed, then, is that "DVDs are a man's world." Because younger, well-to-do white men continue to be important purchasers of DVD players, their tastes, which lean toward such high-octane fare as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *The Fast and the Furious*, continue to exercise strong influence on the ancillary market.<sup>23</sup> Given that DVD sales are the "biggest, most profitable, and fastest-growing component" of the already lucrative income earned from home video, this influential male demographic is expected to gain additional sway over which films are approved for production.<sup>24</sup> Thus, DVD has attracted the kind of consumer who customarily makes up the first wave of patrons for new entertainment technologies, forging along the way a strong link to certain types of cinema.

However, since increasing numbers of films are being released on DVD, and DVD players are more common in households, women as well as families are becoming more substantial DVD viewers. Evidence also exists that the extra features present on many DVDs do not appeal just to film buffs but are also embraced by older viewers and "average Joes" who buy films at Wal-Mart, intrigued by the supplemental information and the sense that they are getting more for their money.<sup>25</sup> Thus, because of the gender, racial, generational, and class mobility implied by the successful dissemination of this technology, the niche audience of prosperous male film collectors has company that will further increase the mainstream status of DVD collecting. Yet, though more diverse groups of collectors have emerged, white men occupy a dominant place in discussions of film collecting online or in other forums and are most often hailed as committed collectors by consumer magazines.

The zealotry of these -philes is undoubtedly characterized by individual whims and obsessions. However, this kind of consumption is also affiliated with the practices and ideologies of an array of social contexts.

### Unpacking the Film Library

Walter Benjamin's essay "Unpacking My Library" speaks eloquently about the private pleasures of collecting. In Benjamin's meditation on his own fas-

cinations with book collecting, he admits that amassing a library has very little to do with actually reading the purchased texts. He writes, "The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them." Ownership, "the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects," enables an intensely personal relationship to develop between collector and collectibles. The books do not, as we might expect, "come alive" in the collector; rather, it is "he who lives in them." For the book conjures memories of its own past, from its original period and region to its former ownership. It also invokes memories of when the collector purchased the book—the time, the city, the store. Ultimately, the possession of a book produces a host of recollections that mingle personal autobiography with the book's history. As Benjamin asserts, "To renew the old world—that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things." The collector "disappear[s] inside" his collection, at once his possession, his intimate terrain, and his connection to the past.<sup>26</sup> Book collecting, then, becomes a form of personal reverie, a means to reexperience the past through an event of acquisition.

Benjamin's account clearly presents the passionate, subjective nature of collecting. Yet, his essay also suggests strong associations between collecting and external considerations, between what appear to be strictly private practices and broader cultural systems. While Benjamin does not explore some central issues, such as why certain objects in this world of connoisseurship acquire value in the first place, he highlights the linkage of collectibles and collecting subjectivities to commodity culture (the thrill of acquisition), to the private sphere (as the collector disappears inside the collection), and to memory and history (to renew the old world). Benjamin's essay, then, invites us to entertain questions left unraised in his meditation about the book collector and to pursue provocative allusions to the social forces latent within the act of collecting. Despite its inescapable personal dimension, collecting cannot be entirely removed from broader dynamics in the public sphere. Like other aspects of the private, it is infused with the concerns of the external culture in which the individual dwells.

As James Clifford notes of personal collections in general, "The collection and preservation of an authentic domain of identity cannot be natural or innocent . . . inclusions in all collections reflect wider cultural rules—of rational taxonomy, of gender, of aesthetics . . . the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies—to make 'good' collections."<sup>27</sup> Any kind of collecting—stamps, war souvenirs, art, books, toys, and so forth—is affected at the very least by notions of value,

systems of classification, and other frameworks utilized by larger cultural provinces and institutions. In the case of post-VCR-era film collecting, classification systems from academia, media industries, and vendors of VHS, laser disc, and DVD intervene in the collecting process. Thus, a collector might arrange films by period, genre, nation, director, studio, actor, or simply alphabetically, demonstrating familiarity with procedures of arrangement employed by other institutions. To assist the collector, software and online sources (such as DVDaficionado.com and Guzzlefish.com) are similarly available to “catalog, search and sort your collection by title, director, genre and other categories.”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, a collector’s selection of particular artifacts may be shaped by the perceived value those artifacts have acquired as classics, rarities, oddities, and other marketable categories of collectibles. For instance, media industries define most of what they sell in special editions as “classics.” The Goldwyn Classics Library advertised a series of Eddie Cantor films under the slogan “These classics just got more classical”;<sup>29</sup> *Vertigo*, available from MCA/Universal Home Video, is Alfred Hitchcock’s “masterpiece” and *Alien* (1979) became an “instant classic” upon its original release, as the copy for both of their collector’s editions tells us. Special-edition marketing in particular provides an opportunity to elevate film to the status of high art, either by cashing in on an existing canon or by attempting to create one by affixing the “classic” label. In addition, through the often extensive background materials that accompany it, a special edition appears to furnish the authenticity and history so important to establishing the value of an archival object.

Since videocassettes, laser discs (in their prime), and DVDs are mass-produced and hence widely available, this type of collecting would seem to hold little potential for pursuing the ultimate collector’s commodity—the rare artifact. Scarcity of the precious collectible—an elusive first edition of a book or a 35mm print of a forgotten work by a noted director, for example—is a condition that appears to be sorely lacking in this context. Nonetheless, the language of scarcity permeates the discourses around film rereleases. When Pioneer Entertainment reissued the seven *Star Trek* feature films on laser disc, its ad stated that these “deluxe box sets are numbered and limited to just 8000 to satisfy the true collector.” This type of limited special edition, which offers relatively few copies to the consumer, seeks to define itself as outside of the excesses of contemporary mass reproduction and therefore more rare. It thus attempts to carve out an aesthetic place by appealing to the conditions of scarcity, conditions so important to constituting an aura of value for collectibles. Further, the box that contains the

discs for *Star Trek: Generations* (designed as a “space dock”) is “deluxe.” The discs themselves are “encoded with Dolby Surround AC-3 Digital” and “utilize THX technologies for the ultimate audiovisual experience at home.”<sup>30</sup> The rare item, then, is complemented by a showcase package and the highest standards (at the time) in audiovisual reproduction, finessing the associations among collecting, value, and aesthetic experience.

However, there is a rarer market than that represented by promotional efforts. Various newsletters (such as the *DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter*) and online sites (such as MoviesUnlimited.com, which promotes itself as having thousands of titles that are impossible to find in local video stores or other mail-order operations) regularly list music and film titles imported from overseas. These include such items as concert albums (e.g., *Sex Pistols: Winterland*), boxed sets of U.S. television series (e.g., *Lost in Space*), and foreign films often not readily available in the United States (e.g., Hong Kong releases before their reissue “boom” in the late 1990s). Crossing high- and low-end tastes, these sources also advertise “rare out-of-print” films for the home market and the “serious film collector.” Thus, for example, Movies Unlimited features on DVD or VHS the Western *Red Sun* (1971), directed by Terence Young and starring Charles Bronson and Toshiro Mifune, an animated version of *Great Expectations* (1983), *Rebel* (1970), an early Sylvester Stallone movie, and *Group Marriage* (1972), a soft-core “classic” directed by Stephanie Rothman. Companies dealing in rare titles also focus both on films not released in commercial ancillary formats and on imported widescreen reissues available only in pan-and-scan versions in the United States.

Hence, forgotten, out-of-print, cult, exploitation, noncommercial, widescreen, foreign, and other types of offerings that fall outside of the exhibition mainstream help to constitute the uncommon, sought-after media object, suggesting that the collector’s trade has found a way to construct the categories of authenticity and rarity for mass-produced film artifacts. The existence of these artifacts also helps to stimulate the competitive gamesmanship and “sport” characteristic of this enterprise in general (i.e., to see who can procure the rarity). As avid film collector Charles Tashiro points out, it is particularly in the acquisition of items without broad circulation “where we can locate the bravado in video collecting.”<sup>31</sup>

We can begin to see, then, how contemporary film collecting is situated within already charged systems of classification, selection, and value, engaged in a pas de deux with market forces. To “unpack” the film library more fully, however, we must explore further how collecting passes through the filter of culture. I am particularly interested in how the discourses of new

media technologies help to cultivate a sense of membership in this world of film connoisseurs and to renegotiate established values for films. At the very least, contemporary cinephilia is shaped by an insider identity for the devotee and a hardware aesthetic that affects the way films are seen and discussed. Because individual collecting is a form of consumption enacted in the home, both of these dimensions of domestic cinephilia are additionally related to dynamics within consumer culture and the private sphere.

### The Insider

Media industries attempt to appeal to the collector as a film industry insider, privy to a secret world of information about filmmaking. Insiders have obtained apparently special knowledge possessed by relatively few others. This special knowledge may take several different forms, influenced by the educational efforts of hardware and software magazines, industry reports, reviews, film reissues, online community postings, and so on. Having done the research, individuals may carefully choose and install the best audio-visual components of home theater in their entertainment spaces. Similarly, they may be caught up in debates about the comparative virtues of emerging technologies that reproduce the cinema—for instance, whether laser disc is superior in quality to DVD or whether Digital Theater Systems (DTS) surpasses Dolby Digital (DD) in audio quality. Those “in the know” are also aware of when certain films will be reissued on VHS or DVD and amass information about the strengths and weaknesses of their transfers to ancillary formats. Culling data from the various sources that cater to the cinephile-collector, these viewers can also recite the facts of cinema, which include behind-the-scenes stories about the making of particular films, gossip about stars and directors, and myriad other historical, technological, and biographical details.

Concentrating on one of these sources—the special collector’s edition—for a moment, we can see how such reissues school the viewer in just this type of information, helping to create a cognoscenti among collectors. Special collector’s editions can be quite intricate affairs. Beyond presenting widescreen feature films in their original aspect ratio, they may also offer the director’s cut with bountiful additional footage that ended up on the cutting-room floor or was reserved for DVD release. In addition, commentary about the feature film provided by its directors, writers, producers, and/or stars is de rigueur. While other items may find their way into these reissues, special editions showcase what they refer to as the “collector’s supplement.” The supplement often provides extensive preproduction, produc-

tion, and postproduction information about the film, including storyboards, different versions of the script, information about how special effects were done, trailers, and documentaries about the film’s production.

As I mentioned, laser discs preceded DVDs in offering viewers the opportunity to become steeped in a plethora of seemingly exclusive behind-the-scenes facts. For example, in Criterion’s special edition of *Citizen Kane* (1941) (along with *King Kong* [1933], the first of the company’s laser disc releases in 1984), the viewer learns that Orson Welles had to wear a prosthetic nose designed by the makeup artist extraordinaire of that film, Maurice Seiderman. Apparently, Welles’s nose was deemed unphotogenic because of an “underdeveloped” bridge and “unusually large” nostrils. Delighted with the change in his appearance, Welles went on to wear the “Seiderman nose,” as it was referred to, in later films, including *Journey into Fear* (1942), *Touch of Evil* (1958), and *Compulsion* (1959). Similar disclosures occur in the commentary on *The Graduate* (1967) laser disc. We are informed that it was not Anne Bancroft/Mrs. Robinson’s leg that graced the famous cover of the sound-track album for *The Graduate* (an image that came to stand for the perverse links between the generations in the late 1960s), but Linda Gray’s, an actress who later played Sue Ellen Ewing in the prime-time television soap opera *Dallas*. In the special edition of *Alien*, we discover that director Ridley Scott’s children took the place of the principal actors in the extreme long shots of the astronauts’ first encounter with the “Space Jockey” aboard the derelict spaceship, so as to make the creature and entire chamber seem larger. Since the replicas of space helmets were not fully operational as efficient oxygen-pumping devices, the children were overcome by carbon monoxide fumes and passed out on at least one occasion. Similarly, we find out that the person playing the monster in *Alien* was a Nigerian graphic arts student living in London, Bolaji Badejo, whose six-foot-ten height and slim build suited designer H. R. Giger’s requirements for the alien.

Voted the best laser disc of all time from 1992 to 1997 by readers of a specialty laser disc magazine, and also the disc with the best supplement, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* vividly represents how detailed and extensive special edition supplements can be.<sup>32</sup> The director, James Cameron, invites viewers to look “behind the curtains of *T2*’s creative process,” revealing elements involved in every stage of the film’s production. Viewers gain insight into the film’s planning process, including the original screenplay, storyboards, casting decisions, location scouting, set design and building, actor training, and decisions about costume, makeup, weapons, and stunts. They are also privy to information on the film’s postproduction, as it involves



sound design, musical scoring, editing, trailers, posters and ads, the music video (by Guns N' Roses), and responses of critics, the public, and international markets, as well as details of the video transfer. But in the sea of images and data, the capstone element of the supplement is unquestionably the section devoted to visual effects. *T2* was considered a breakthrough in special effects technologies, and the supplement demonstrates in great detail the different processes used to create various elements and scenes. Chapters in this section of the supplement are organized according to each company that designed effects for the film, from Industrial Light and Magic's computer-generated imagery for the T-1000 (the advanced, morphing terminator) and 4-Ward Production's simulation of a nuclear blast to Stan Winston's prosthetics, mechanized effects, and stunt puppets (figure 8). The exhaustiveness of *T2*'s supplementary materials, as they have been preserved and expanded in the film's release on DVD, has managed to maintain its place near the top of "Best DVD" lists, even fifteen years after its original reissue on laser disc.

These earlier efforts on laser disc were apparently not in vain. Trade association DVD Entertainment Group reports that after the superior quality of its picture and sound, DVD extras are now a major drawing card for consumers.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, DVD viewers appear willing to buy multiple copies of the same film, as long as they are offered different, expanded attractions. The original 1999 widescreen reissue of *The Matrix* on VHS, for example, featured key extras such as a "making-of" documentary with behind-the-scenes explanations of bullet time and kung fu sequences. The DVD release the same year contained the "making-of" documentary, commentary by cast and crew, and a music-only track discussed by composer Don Davis. In addition, it included several concealed elements, or "Easter eggs." No longer available through an obvious spot on the menu, the bullet-time piece was accessible through a hidden image of a red pill in the supplement's "Dream World" segment (figure 9). The same segment featured another Easter egg, a "Follow the White Rabbit" sign that was hidden behind a "continue" command. To follow the white rabbit—a reference to the *Alice in Wonderland* allusions in *The Matrix*—the viewer must press "enter" on the DVD remote or mouse click when the rabbit periodically appears on screen to get an in-depth look at how a particular stunt and/or special effect was done. If the viewer does not act quickly, the rabbit disappears. This same DVD contains interactive DVD-ROM elements for PCs that continue this kind of gamesmanship and puzzle solving. Yet another DVD spin-off from *The Matrix*, "The Matrix Revisited" (2001), is advertised as "A Mind-Expanding Look at 'The Matrix' from Conception to Phenomenon." It includes an



Figure 8. Special effects master Stan Winston and two of his stunt puppets for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, as featured on *T2*'s supplemental disk.

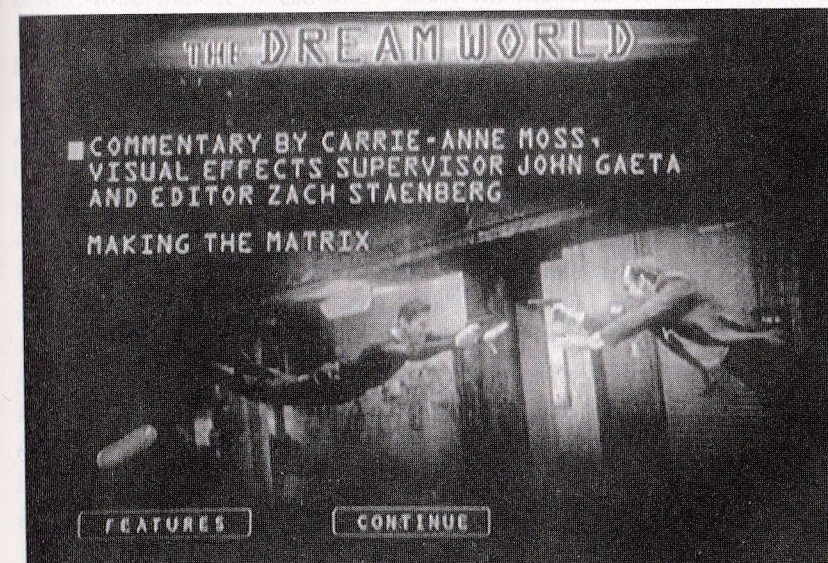


Figure 9. *The Matrix* supplement: "The Dream World" segment and the red pill Easter egg (in the lower left-hand corner), which leads to a short documentary on bullet time.

"in-depth exploration of the filmmaking process, a sneak peek on location of the upcoming sequel, a first look at 'The Matrix' anime, never-before-seen footage, hidden features, and more." Thus, not only do the supplemental features serve to differentiate one version of *The Matrix* from another, they also promote associated media products, including the anime and an upcoming sequel.

Such is the health of this market that ancillary variations do not necessarily require a staggered time line. Initially released in both full screen and widescreen versions in August 2002, Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* saw a holiday release a few months later in two special editions—the first, a "platinum edition" of the film (priced at \$39.99), with thirty minutes of extra footage restored and thirty hours of additional attractions; and the second, a "collector's DVD gift set," with more extras and deluxe packaging (priced at \$79.92). Rereleases of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* (2003) have followed a similar multiple-version strategy.

In their ability to "remake" a film, successive special editions enable the kind of product differentiation so important to repurposing, that is, to the strategy of repeatedly reselling the same titles. In the process, through shifting supplemental materials, the feature film has an instant built-in and changeable intertextual surround that enters into its meaning and significance for viewers. Special collector's editions are as suggestive for textual study as they are for theories of reception. As feature films appear in new cuts with added footage, their definition as texts becomes unstable. Which is the authentic film—the version initially theatrically released or the DVD director's cut? Given that films today are often shot with the idea of saving certain footage for DVD release, the notion of the expandable text has become an intimate part of the production process, at the very least making it necessary to reframe the issue of authenticity with respect to the home market.

The details of how these intertexts shape and reshape film meaning through kaleidoscopic perspectives are important. Here, however, I want to focus on a presumption that oversees the encounter between edition and viewer more generally: the media industry address of the specialized consumer as an "insider." The special edition trades off the revelation as a key ingredient of its appeal. Each of the above examples exposes an assumption (e.g., that it is Welles's actual nose) or provides answers to questions (e.g., how did the filmmakers create bullet time or a morphing Terminator?) by dispensing behind-the-scenes information that reveals the cinematic tricks behind appearances. Revelations about the execution of

special effects are particularly important to collector's editions. Because many of these effects deploy digital technologies, the viewer gains admission to a relatively new, highly specialized, and complex sector of the motion picture industry. This aspect of the address is especially evident in the hidden features of *The Matrix* DVDs, where viewers are invited to use skills derived from playing video games or surfing the Web to "crack" the puzzles offered them by the DVD designers. Let in on industry "secrets" and capable of mastering further enigmas if need be, the viewer enters the world of filmmaking to reside in the privileged position of the director and other production personnel—the puppet masters—who are responsible for such effective illusionism.

Far from demystifying the production process, these revelations produce a sense of the film industry's magisterial control of appearances. Rather than inciting critical attitudes toward the industry, then, behind-the-scenes "exposés" vividly confirm Hollywood as a place of marvels brought to the public by talented film professionals. As viewers are invited to assume the position of an expert, they are further drawn into an identification with the industry and its wonders. But this identification, like any identification viewers may have had with the apparently seamless diegetic universe of the film itself, is based on an illusion. Viewers do not get the unvarnished truth about the production; they are instead presented with the "promotable" facts, behind-the-scenes information that supports and enhances a sense of the "movie magic" associated with Hollywood production.

This kind of appeal to viewers suggests that one of the major foundations of fandom—the accumulation and dissemination of the smallest details involved in the production of media objects—is substantially informed (though not wholly determined) by industry discourse. Whether the media industries or fans first introduced the importance of trivia to mass cultural pleasures is unimportant; trivia has become a significant part of the feedback loop between industry and fan, with the industry recognizing the importance of the mastery of obscure details to enthusiasts and dutifully producing massive amounts of this kind of information.

Thus, while trivia is, as Henry Jenkins argues in his study of television fandom, "a source of popular expertise for the fans and a basis for critical reworkings of textual materials," it is doubtful whether it can be considered a transgressive brand of "unauthorized and unpoliced knowledge."<sup>34</sup> In comparison to academe and other official cultures of taste, trivia may seem at first glance to produce a culturally disenfranchised kind of knowledge. But, for many viewers, trivia often appears as a source of vital information

that is more important and authentic than the “stuffy” intellectual accounts issuing from official sources. Ultimately, however, the types of knowledge generated and embraced by academe may not always be clearly distinct from those of the industry—as, for example, the information gleaned from DVD commentary and supplements increasingly becomes part of both faculty and student discussions.

More important, special editions remind us that trivia has a substantial presence in popular culture, which is materially influenced by the media industries. From the earliest days of the film industry to the present, entertainment facts have achieved a particular visibility and viability as a type of knowledge and discourse in mass culture. Crossword puzzles, board games such as Trivial Pursuit, television game shows, and online movie Web sites are just a few of the public forums that ask participants to marshal their knowledge of Hollywood. A traffic in trivia created by various culture industries, both authorized and policed, plays a strong role in negotiating the audience’s relationship to the media. As purveyors par excellence of such microdata, special collector’s editions give viewers a still-mystified account of the cinema as a part of the cultural capital they possess as “masters” of the cinematic fact. The identity of trivia as a kind of sub-rosa knowledge possessed by the privileged few only enhances the effects of this mystification. In online and other forums, viewers are encouraged to become disseminators of trivia, a process that inevitably helps to secure the place and importance of the media industries in culture.<sup>35</sup> Hence, while film trivia may lack respect as a form of knowledge in certain circles, it is not genuinely marginalized or unsanctioned; it is a major form of currency that helps to build relationships not simply among fans but also between fans and media producers and promoters.

Beyond the appeal to the viewer as insider, the collector’s culture is also shaped by the various machines designed to reproduce films in the home. As we have seen, technology already figures as a major component of the insider identity, since various technologies involved in filmmaking are responsible for creating the illusionism so enthusiastically elaborated by the special edition’s supplemental sections. But technology also plays an important role in the collector’s culture as a series of commodities to be purchased. The “secret” world of the collector is enhanced additionally by the primacy that machines and their capabilities of reproduction have as purveyors of quality and indicators of cinematic value. The machines involved in the high-tech collector’s world help to create a film aesthetic that can transform a film’s previous value (created through film reviews or academic criticism, for example) for domestic consumption.

### The Hardware Aesthetic

As they circulate in mainstream magazines as well as within the community of collectors themselves, discourses on home entertainment technologies tend to evaluate films through the lens of hardware priorities, through what I refer to as a “hardware aesthetic.” The hardware aesthetic conceives of value according to imperatives drawn from technological considerations. The prominence of these imperatives in assessment results in a number of different effects, including the enshrinement of the action and/or special effects film, a reversal in aesthetic fortune for titles regarded as either classics or failures, a rereading of films through the ideology of the spectacular, and the triumph of a particular notion of form over content.

In his essay “The Contradictions of Video Collecting,” Tashiro reveals the critical importance of technology in the mentality of the collector. Inspired by Benjamin, Tashiro is primarily interested in elaborating Benjamin’s “lyrical approach” to collecting, which he argues is “the only legitimate [approach] to what remains a highly private process.” Nonetheless, Tashiro’s discussion of his own collecting habits demonstrates a telling shift from Benjamin’s reverence for books as gateways to the past to a reverence for technological excellence and the presentism this standard embraces. For example, like many film collectors in the mid-1990s, Tashiro preferred laser discs over videos; videotapes are “second-class citizens” because they degenerate. Unlike books or videocassettes, laser discs (as well as their successor DVDs) do not embody their own histories by showing age. It is in fact the physical appearance of the disc that forms a large part of the appeal: “Discs fascinate as objects, their clear, cool surfaces promising technical perfection . . . discs promise modernism at its sleekest, the reduction to pristine forms and reflective surfaces.” Rather than being a signifier of worth, age signals that a replacement disc should be ordered.<sup>36</sup>

Tashiro contends that this preference for new versions of the old—a distinct departure from other collecting aesthetics—is partly driven by a faith in “the potentially perfect copy . . . expressed in the exploitation of ever-newer technologies, striving always to get closer to the film’s original. . . . As a result, change is valued for itself, and with each new technical capability, both collectors and producers feel compelled to improve on what has come before.” Further, progress is defined not so much in terms of the films themselves as in terms of “the technical capabilities of the disc medium.” Thus, quality is judged according to “the number of dropouts, the amount of hiss, the degree of fidelity in digital reproduction. The logic of the surface of the disc spills over into its production and consumption: the cleaner,

sleeker, shinier the image, the purer, richer, clearer the sound track, the better the disc." As Tashiro continues, "This technical 'reason' serves as a perfect rationalization [for staking] an emphatic claim to the importance of picture and sound over story and character, to those *technical* aspects of film best served by laser disc reproduction. . . . That claim . . . lay[s] the groundwork for the overall structure of the collection, its bias toward those films that favor visual style."<sup>37</sup>

Though striving to depict collecting as irrational and subjective, Tashiro's perspective is exemplary in expressing the technocentric nature of contemporary film collecting. A film's worth is judged by the quality of the transfer, the aura of the digital reproduction of sound and image, and even the pristine surface of the disc itself. These priorities in turn lead to a preference for certain kinds of films over others—that is, films that have visual surfaces and technical features that appear to highlight and reinforce the capabilities of digital technology. Hence, when Michael Grossman, a Canadian school-teacher with a collection of more than seven hundred DVDs, chooses to buy a DVD, it is typically an action-adventure film distinguished by copious special effects that will optimize his large screen and powerful speakers.<sup>38</sup> This kind of material pleasure also characterizes other technophiles whose film collections are based on the mutually reinforcing ability of their equipment and films to provide compelling audio-visual experiences.<sup>39</sup> As the rise of DVD has seen the preference for quality in sound and picture "mainstreamed" beyond the niche audience of laser disc collectors, issues of film reproduction have assumed an unparalleled centrality in home film consumption.

Along with collectors and consumer magazines, producers of entertainment hardware put a premium on obtaining the newest and best technological rendition of a film. Typical ads for home theater components mix technical details with promises of spectacular effects. For example, Faroudja's Laboratories' TV enhancer offers adaptive color processing, edge detail processing, and color alignment correction to "make images from big screen TVs jump off the screen!" Polk Audio's LS f/x high-performance surround speakers "can transform the surround channel from a typically flat monochromatic noise to a detached, spacious, and coherent soundfield" and "are excellent for space-ships flying overhead or the growls of moving tanks and cranes, just the stuff of which impressive home cinema is made."<sup>40</sup> The technical considerations that dominate promotions for home theater systems or playback components make reproduction itself into the prime aesthetic criterion while privileging a type of reproduction that favors verisimilitude mingled with spectacle. In this context, the film experience is

composed of spectacular visuals and sound that bring seemingly authentic sensory perceptions to the forefront. Thus, collectors and producers of home entertainment equipment tend to discuss film and the film experience in similar ways, contributing to and reinforcing a hardware aesthetic.

The evaluation of films in a variety of forums that address collectors, from consumer magazines to online chat groups, illuminates how this kind of aesthetic more specifically affects film reception. As I have mentioned, newspaper accounts and consumer magazines characteristically refer to certain films as "perfect DVD movies." This moniker has at least two meanings. When it refers to blockbusters such as *The Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it indicates the achievement of a perfect harmony between cinema and the quality expectations of the digital era as they are incarnated in DVD technology and home theater. That is, when action blockbusters with a high quotient of CGI (computer-generated imagery) meet DVD, the thundering sound and magisterial illusionism of the film in its theatrical presentation are able to be captured by the superior sound and image quality of digital playback, particularly when it is part of a surround-sound system. Although blockbusters are not the only kinds of films that translate well into DVD, public commentary depicts them as best able to realize the sheer capacities and capabilities of the digital. Thus, film appreciation is based on the appearance of a seamless marriage between certain feature films and home formats through a mutual articulation of digital standards of excellence.

The importance of this union is already forecast in evaluations of films on laser disc. In a review of the laser disc reissue of Walter Hill's *Last Man Standing* (1996), a remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), the writer explains that he hadn't cared for the film in the theater. But listening to the reissue "in our home, with the sound turned way up, made it a lot more appealing, regardless of the ridiculous plot." The new digital soundtrack makes the difference: Ry Cooder's score "takes on more detail and omnipresent vibrancy, while the gunfights on the DTS disc make the Dolby Digital gunfights on the earlier disc sound monophonic." The reviewer continues, "Throughout the film, subtle touches of sound—the wind seeping through a crack or a creaking door down the street—are given more clarity, stimulating your senses and making the tough questions, like what is a sheriff doing in a town that doesn't have any people in it, not matter."<sup>41</sup> The convergence of film and home technology can inspire reappraisals, then, even of films considered to be "duds" in their initial runs.

Conversely, when there is a "disconnect" between film and digital standards, the aesthetic axe falls. Such is the fate for the DVD release of Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), a film by a director whose oeuvre is inimical to

Hollywood's sonorous, eye-popping spectacles. Assessing the soundtrack, the reviewer for consumer magazine *Total DVD* writes, "There's a great bit where a fleet of helicopter gun ships attacks the Martian invasion party with missiles, and another where the nuclear silo explodes just as Woody escapes on a jetski. No, just kidding. As we have come to expect from Allen movies, you just get mono sound, with perfectly clear dialogue and the usual smooth jazz soundtrack, but there's really nothing here to get excited about."<sup>42</sup> Since Allen's film does not measure up in a world of multichannel sound reproduction, it is vulnerable to send-up through the hardware aesthetic and its implicit association with action genres.

The second meaning of the "perfect DVD movie" lies in the greater storage capacity of digital technology—its ability to contain the feature film and some supplementary material on one disc (although special editions often run to several discs). Films on DVD are rated on the number and quality of the extras they provide. Because *Annie Hall's* DVD offers only a trailer and a choice of subtitle and soundtrack languages, it is judged as "pretty poor, though much what we've come to expect from Allen films."<sup>43</sup> On the other end of the spectrum lies what *Entertainment Weekly* judges as the "50 Essential DVDs" (among them *Fight Club*, *A Bug's Life* [1998], *Brazil* [1985], and *Terminator 2*). The magazine makes it clear that these are not "the greatest movies ever or the coolest vintage-TV collections." Rather, the list is a "celebration of unique-to-disc extravaganzas that best exploit DVD's massive storage capacity and multiple-choice, chapter-surfing flexibility to somehow radically enhance whatever the main event is."<sup>44</sup> We have already seen how extensive these extras can be. While the film itself is the "main event," these other features represent DVD's extraordinary inclusive capabilities. In addition, given the greater, more precise kinds of manipulation afforded by this technology, viewers attain a level of control they are accustomed to having with the computer mouse and the selection of menus and features available on the Internet.

However, along with the breadth of behind-the-scenes elements, the complexity and imaginativeness of supplemental features are substantial indicators of the reissue's worth. Thus, of *A Bug's Life*, the reviewer writes:

The computer-animation maestros at Pixar take the multi-gigabyte-supplement idea seriously and send it up at the same time. Thus you get golly-gee director John Lasseter and snarky Stanton [the co-director] making gag-me faces behind editor Lee Unkrich as he explains the wonders of storyboarding. . . . And nifty extra features just keep marching by, from effects-only audio to concept art to jokey interviews with the insect stars. The retina-rattling transfer of the main event comes directly from

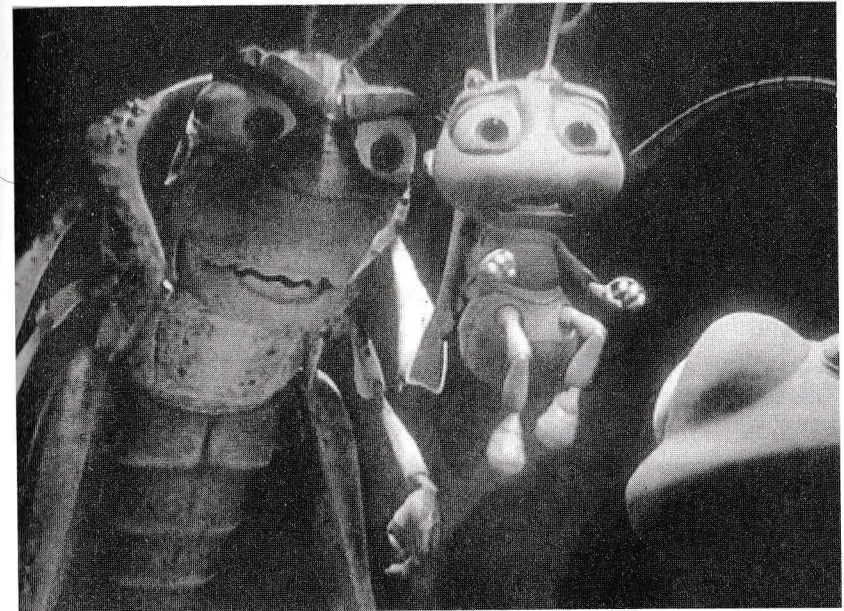


Figure 10. The all-digital *A Bug's Life*.

digital computer files, so it doesn't just outdazzle VHS—it stomps theatrical prints, too. . . . The whole package makes the DVD-movie interface feel totally, digitally organic.<sup>45</sup>

Not only does this disc present extras, it also strikes a self-reflexive, parodic relationship to the genre of DVD supplements, marking it as a knowing and clever addition to DVD releases. Moreover, as a Pixar animation, *A Bug's Life* (figure 10) is totally digital. The reviewer thus depicts it as able to fuse with DVD more seamlessly than films based on live-action with CGI components; in this way, *A Bug's Life* achieves the oxymoronic ideal of organic digitality. In the process, the film on DVD represents the great digital hope of home theater: it surpasses older format VHS, and, better still, it results in film reproduction that outstrips theatrical presentation.

Supplements sport other features that testify to the filmmaker's or DVD designer's creativity. As we saw in the case of *The Matrix* with the red pill and the white rabbit, some DVDs feature Easter eggs, a term named after a practice in computer programming wherein the designer plants hidden features for ingenious users to discover. On DVD, such features, once uncovered, provide ambitious viewers with more behind-the-scenes secrets or other special information to which those less ambitious or less familiar with

computer gaming will not be privy. Although the list is long, some other DVDs that contain Easter eggs include *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *X-Men* (2000), *Gladiator* (2000), *Terminator 2* (The Ultimate Edition), *Magnolia* (2000), and *Boogie Nights* (1997). With the exception of the last two titles, which are Paul Michael Anderson films with an independent flair, each is a blockbuster dependent on special effects. In the case of the blockbuster, Easter eggs simply reinforce what is already enunciated by the theatrical film—that it is a masterful display of Hollywood's digital pyrotechnics. With both blockbusters and independent films, these features also testify to the creativeness of the filmmakers—their savviness about digital technology and the gamesmanship its complexity can so ably accommodate (even when others may actually be responsible for executing the DVD design).

Thus, the hardware aesthetic makes several interventions in aesthetics and reception in relation to contemporary cinema. Films are rated not only for how they fulfill digital standards of sound and picture but also for how their reissues realize to the fullest extent the physical capacity of the disc itself, especially when this capacity is deployed to render DVD as an autonomous art form. Thus, it is not surprising that with the arrival of laser disc and DVD, a canon of "reissue" auteurs has been established. When James Cameron and George Lucas are enshrined as kings of laser disc and DVD release, this canon often acts to confirm and extend existing technocentric systems of value in popular culture. But new LD and DVD auteurs have also been born; for example, collectors consider Terry Gilliam's science fiction film *Brazil*—not a great success in theatrical release—as among the most interesting and sophisticated of all "behind-the-scenes" reissues featuring multiple cuts of a film. Similarly, the reputations of auteurs such as Woody Allen may suffer if their work appears as increasingly less salient because of a lack of attention to digital expectations. In relation to its impact on authorship, DVD also enhances the public standing of action films, science fiction, independent films, and a few other genres, because they have been translated so effectively for this new ancillary market. At the same time, viewers continue to be addressed as insiders; their ability to unlock the mysteries of the Easter egg or navigate successfully the sometimes intricate menus on DVDs testifies to their special access to industry or technological secrets.

Since a studio's back catalogs have such importance for repurposing, the hardware aesthetic is also mobilized in relation to classic Hollywood and foreign films. In the case of these collectibles, the hardware aesthetic might entirely displace the canonical status of the legendary film (as it did with *Annie Hall*) or reify it to suit the demand for spectacle.

For instance, the 1995 laser disc reissue of Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* (1962) occasions this comment from a critic for *Widescreen Review*: "The Tohoscope framing has been recomposed at 2.11:1, although the transfer credits proclaim 'its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1.' The picture lacks detail and sharpness, shadow detail is poor, and generally negative dirt artifacts are prevalent throughout." In addition, "the original soundtrack theatrically was Perspecta Stereophonic Sound . . . but this edition has been dubbed from a mono optical track which is undistinguished and characteristically noisy."<sup>46</sup> A review of another classic film, *The Fly* (1958), reissued to the home market in 1996, similarly addresses the fine points of its digital reproduction. The film is "framed at 2.35:1, exhibits inconsistencies in color fidelity with mostly dated and subdued colors and fleshtones. Overall the picture is out of focus, except for the occasional close up shots of a fly. Noise and artifacts are apparent. . . . The overall sound is on the bright side and never sounds quite right."<sup>47</sup>

Such unfavorable criticism is not, of course, the fate of all classics. If the transfer is good or the supplemental features intriguing, the "old" film more successfully negotiates the requirements of the aesthetic. Thus, a reviewer judges *Judy Garland: The Golden Years at MGM*, a "lavish" box set of three Judy Garland films—*The Harvey Girls* (1946), *The Pirate* (1948), and *Summer Stock* (1950)—as looking "absolutely gorgeous. This is especially true of *The Pirate*, which accents director Vincente Minnelli's exotic use of color in lighting, sets, and costumes, greatly intensifying the mood of scenes like the fiery 'Pirate Ballet.'" But, the reviewer notes, "it's a shame . . . that the audio track for *The Pirate* was often marred by a harsh, scraping, practically vibrating tone."<sup>48</sup> The excess and grandeur of Minnelli's trademark style of *mise-en-scène*, preserved and perhaps even heightened in the transfer process, coordinate felicitously with the superior, vivid visual experience associated with digital entertainment technologies. But in this case the experience is qualified because of the flawed reproduction of the musical's soundtrack.

Perhaps even more than for contemporary films, supplemental features can be a distinctive signifier of worth for the classic film. At times, it is possible for the classic film to be deemed as less important than the extra features. Thus, in one reviewer's estimation, the DVD version of *The Sound of Music* (1965) is "awesome," although he or she admits to never having seen the film. The rating is based not on the film but on the difficulty and ingenuity of the games on the disc, which the reviewer was unable to beat.<sup>49</sup> More often, the classic film is further authenticated by its accompanying materials. Although opening to mixed reviews in 1939, *The Wizard of Oz*,

for example, has since gained renown as a family classic and star vehicle for Judy Garland. As a sign of its continuing status, it has appeared in multiple special collector's editions in deluxe packaging that offers the viewer an extensive array of extras. Thus, supplemental features for the 1999 DVD gift set (priced at \$43.99) include the theatrical trailer, original script, rare still photos, color theatrical poster reproductions, a behind-the-scenes documentary ("The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: The Making of a Movie Classic") hosted by Angela Lansbury, outtakes (including the rarely seen "Jitterbug" dance), interviews with secondary stars, special effects stills, stills from the Hollywood premiere, original sketches and storyboards, costume designs and makeup tests, excerpts from previous film versions of the L. Frank Baum novel (such as the 1914 and 1925 silent films, as well as a 1933 cartoon), five rarely seen trailers, newsreel excerpts, and a series of audio supplements (such as hours of recording-session material and the first public performance of "Over the Rainbow" on a 1939 radio broadcast). From this list, one can see the significance of the all-inclusive nature of the supplement to the film's value as a collectible, especially when materials are defined as rare or never before seen or heard. The collector has a sense that he or she owns not only the film but also its history; further, the more arcane the history, the more the film appears as a worthy archival object, deserving of a place in the personal library.

In the land of new technologies, the past is reborn to exacting standards that demand pristine visuals in original aspect ratios and crystalline soundtracks. It is not enough for a film to be made by Kurosawa; the terms of the transfer must reproduce the correct aspect ratio, picture resolution, and sound quality of the celluloid version. Furthermore, the classic film must live up to another set of standards that are an integral part of the home theater experience with its large-screen TVs and surround-sound components. Ideally, films from the past should have lively, vigorous visuals and a bold (or subtle and nuanced) soundtrack amenable to digital enhancement and/or astonishing supplemental materials that amplify their historical importance. In some cases, technical updating proves to be difficult, since, aside from the practice of sloppy transfers, the original internegatives may have deteriorated or be possessed by "dirt artifacts" and other demons involved in the improper storage or aging process of celluloid. As we have seen in the reviews of *Sanjuro* and *The Fly*, the hardware aesthetic has little room for the cinematic equivalent of the dusty, dog-eared volume. Thus, while recapturing the standards of the original remains important to collectors, their sense of authenticity is more compellingly influenced by the nature of the upgrades performed on a film to render it suitable to the digital eye and ear.

In these estimations of films, sound and image may displace other tried-and-true priorities in critical criteria, such as auteurism and existing canons. This not to say that such traditional critical criteria are unimportant in the world of collecting. Auteurism and the canon carry enormous weight as a means of marketing reissues and as factors that enter into a collector's decision about which films to select for the archive. In fact, the film industry routinely produces boxed sets of the works of specific directors, one sign among many of the continuing influence of authorship on the constitution of archival value. At the same time, quality is not always a deciding factor in collecting. Collectors may buy videocassettes or DVDs that are inferior in quality just to own a coveted title or complete a sector of their media libraries. But the clarity of the transfer and the film's delivery of the kind of audio-visual spectacle that best exhibits the prowess of the playback equipment are pervasive and potent aspects of the hardware aesthetic shared and propagated by collectors.

As the reviewer's minimization of the incoherent plot of *Last Man Standing* suggests, this aesthetic often harbors a certain disregard for content. Thus, a writer for *Video Magazine* acknowledges that *Forrest Gump* (1994) is "a certified phenomenon" but suggests that we "not fret over 'What It Says About Us' and get right down to the chocolate, er, heart of the matter." The heart of the matter is that "*Gump* . . . boasts a wide-screen transfer of about 2.1:1, and though it is done up to THX standards (the image is quite good, if not exceptional), it displays a tendency toward soft colors. *Gump* isn't much of a surround-sound showcase, either, since the intimacy of the story line dictates that most of the dialogue, musical score, and ambient sounds must be positioned front and center."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Pioneer Entertainment's special edition of *Platoon* (1986) presents "a motion picture that defined for many Americans the inhuman, hostile and futile act of the Vietnam War" as an "impossible-to-resist hardbound, display-quality volume designed with the look and feel of a Vietnam Veteran's scrapbook, complete with embossed silver images of 'dog tags' hanging from the top edge of the cover." Further, the film is "matted at 1.85:1. Detail and sharpness are exemplary. . . . Fleshtones are accurate and blacks are deep and solid for an exceptionally natural rendering. The soundtrack also is impressive over that of the theatrical mix . . . the original discrete six-track elements have been re-mixed and encoded for a more potent surround effect and greater dynamics."<sup>51</sup>

As we have seen, films and their transfers must ultimately meet the standards of home theater excellence. Thus, *Forrest Gump* "isn't much of a surround-sound showcase," while *Platoon*'s soundtrack "is impressive over

that of the theatrical mix." Within this orientation, the issue of content is swept aside as secondary by more pressing concerns: the quality of the transfer, the film's suitability for maximizing the capabilities of home theater, and the opportunity the reissue presents for commodification—in the case of *Platoon*, deluxe packaging.

Such modes of evaluation differ significantly from those characteristic of Anglo-American moral criticism. This tradition, personified in the 1950s by such critics as Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* and Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review* and still pervasive in contemporary writing on film in the popular press today, judges films on the basis of the relevance and worth of their social messages. In the above reviews, the collecting sensibility clearly sees such messages as a mere backdrop or even as a potential distraction to what is really noteworthy about the films—accurate fleshtones and resonant multitrack sound. Despite both *Forrest Gump's* and *Platoon's* concern with the 1960s, one of the most hotly debated eras in U.S. history, and the protracted discussions both experienced in the press about their depictions of this era, reviewers of their digital rereleases produce a detailed technical vision of these films, describing them in an alternative language seen as vital to their consumption by the cinephile.

It is important to point out that the reviews in consumer electronics magazines and other sources do not just echo the industry's unqualified hype about its rereleases; they exist as guides to buyers and collectors. Internet groups devoted to collecting take this role of consumer watchdog seriously, spreading the word about superior or deficient discs, debating the comparative merits of playback equipment, and generally soliciting advice from fellow subscribers. As one participant writes, "I remember renting *The Silence of the Lambs* Criterion/THX CAV version and the rolling dropouts were the worst I have ever seen. I want the new CLV Criterion version. Does anybody know if this disc suffers from the same HORROR?" Another writes, "I have just purchased the new THX *Apocalypse Now* and I am VERY impressed with the EXCELLENT transfer[;] video and audio wise it is beautiful, but I am concerned with the 1.9:1 ratio. I always thought the film was 2.35:1. It does not state anywhere on the disc why the director of photography recomposed the film to the ratio it is at on this transfer." Another subscriber answers the question: "The transfer is presumably the same as the older version. Storaro (the DP) felt that the 2.35:1 ratio would shrink the image too much, resulting in loss of detail. . . . Incidentally, the film wasn't necessarily 2.35:1. The 70mm version would have been 2.2:1."<sup>52</sup>

The detailed interrogations of industry products by online groups and other consumer guides provide an alternative source of information for con-

sumers. Yet, industry promotions, consumer magazines, and Internet groups tend to embrace the technology involved. Debates among consumers in the second half of the 1990s often concerned aspect ratios, transfers, and home theater technologies—the pros and cons of laser disc versus DVD, the superiority of AC3 sound systems to Dolby Pro Logic, and so forth. Films become vehicles for the performance and assessment of these technologies (as one online commentator succinctly puts it: "You want to test your THX and AC3 hardwares? Watch *Strange Days*").<sup>53</sup> What is noticed, valued, and appraised about films in this part of their afterlife is how their characteristics—mise-en-scène, special effects, sound, supplemental features—either exploit or fail to realize the capabilities of the machines of reproduction. This aesthetic mechanism allows the generic horror of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) to become the technological horror of the rolling dropout.

### The Thrill of Acquisition

The fact that cinema can be acquired and taken home opens up vast possibilities for its use and its meaning in the post-VCR era. As one example of these possibilities, collecting represents a distinct instance of the impact that new technologies have had on film reception in the home. In the constitution of the "insider" identity and the coordinates of the hardware aesthetic, we glimpse part of the elaborate world inhabited by the high-end and, increasingly, mainstream film collector. Positioned by the industry as a privileged subject and captivated by the machines of reproduction, the collector is the new film connoisseur, the cinephile existing outside of the motion picture theater. Recent technological developments have helped this film culture to flourish, providing bountiful films for sale and shaping the terms of their consumption within a domestic environment in which both the television set (via home theater and HDTV) and the films themselves have been reinvented to meet the expectations of digital quality. Within the high-end collecting sensibility, films from different national traditions, canons, and eras are transformed into signs of the technical proficiency and potential of the contemporary arts of electronic and digital reproduction. Particularly in this sense, this kind of cinephilia is inextricable from technophilia in home film cultures. In turn, technophilia is made possible by acts of consumption that enable collectors to experience such rapport with machines and mass cultural artifacts.

In an exemplary instance of the bond between producing and consuming cultures, the domestic world of the cinephile is constructed from a se-



ries of purchases: tapes, VCRs, DVD players, DVDs, AV receivers, surround-sound speakers, large-screen television sets, monster cables, and so forth, each purchase justifying the others. These are not simply instrumental acts; as we have seen, the goods that enter the home are saturated with meaning and significance that enter into the field of reception. As they always have, media industries attempt to shape the consumption of cinema—in this case, by catering to collectors and attempting to define them as industry insiders who gaze upon the cinema through high-tech eyes and ears. While these industries have not invented film collecting or these elements of suasion, they capitalize on existing trends, striving to educate viewers and organize their consuming desires in certain ways. Although high-end collectors may indeed domesticate their machines and films through personal means, a strong component of this home film culture responds with the same language and same modes of evaluation that characterize producing cultures.

Patrons not only watch films, then; they also own them and situate them in relation to their entertainment centers and other less luminous household items. Owners who are collectors intensify this sense of possession by selecting films on the basis of their technical quality, among other criteria, and then by organizing individual titles according to systems of classification. An excitement about both of these processes signifies the thrill of acquisition and the accompanying pleasure involved in creating a homemade universe out of such cinematic trophies. In this way the collection is a sterling example of what Baudrillard refers to as the peculiar “passion for private property” that marks our relationship to the objects populating our home environments, a passion that can be every bit as intense as that more commonly associated with relationships that humans have with one another.

This sort of possession imposes a certain abstractness on collected media objects. Within this abstracted state, the collected object undergoes a kind of surgery with respect to its historical origins. As the case of *The Wizard of Oz* suggests, the historical context in which a film initially appeared can be partly resurrected in the reissue; in fact, this context is a prized commodity. Materials used to historicize a title invite the viewer to reexperience the past, selling the film through appeals to authenticity and revelation (e.g., the inclusion of a rarely heard 1939 radio broadcast of the first performance of “Over the Rainbow” in the film’s gift set). This information, in turn, bestows upon the collector the special, obscure knowledge so valued in the trade. In the process, rather than focusing on the sociohistorical or political dimensions of the bygone era, this mode of historicization emphasizes the entertainment past; tinged with an aura of nostalgia, it tends to romanticize

that past. At the same time, such a reified history obscures the power of the contemporaneous context to affect perceptions of the object. As in the remastering of analog musical recordings for CD, digital technology resurrects old media and gives them to audiences, ostensibly in new, improved forms that realize their full potential for vivid reproduction of sound and/or image.

Thus, part of the process of abstraction involves a selective, nostalgic historicization of the film that is embedded ultimately in the presentism of the digital aesthetic. In a fascinating mix of the antiquated and the new, collector’s editions of silent or classic-era films are remade according to sellable high points of their past and an overall modernizing visual and aural facelift. In contradistinction to Benjamin, renewing the old world in film collecting today involves a complex interplay of nostalgia and presentism that glories in the past and its acquisition only if the past has been renovated through the newest technological standards. Presentism and nostalgia both vigorously repackage the past, demonstrating the force that the diachronic positioning of a text has on its public reappearance and estimations of value.

Scholars addressing the phenomenon of collecting are often deeply concerned—and divided—about the effects it has on time and history. Susan Stewart argues that collecting represents a loss of origins for an object as it is repositioned within the logic of the museum or personal collection. By contrast, Maurice Rheims claims that the “passion for collecting is joined to a loss of any sense of the present time”; that is, the collector, in seeking immersion in the past through the historical references offered by an artifact, is of necessity disconnected from the present. Still another view is offered by Baudrillard, who contends that the collection “abolishes time” altogether; that is, “*the organization of the collection itself replaces time.*” Because the collection reduces “time to a fixed set of terms navigable in either direction,” it represents an opportunity for the owner to travel anywhere historically with complete control.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the collection’s temporal dimension points neither to the present nor to the past but ultimately to the internal logic and order of the collection. Like Stewart, I argue that the dynamics of film collecting operate ultimately in the “presentist” mode, especially given the nature of evaluation within the high-end film-collecting world. In this world, contra Rheims, the viewer’s access to the past is filtered through a shiny new machine ethos, and, contra Baudrillard, the high-end collection itself, although it mixes and matches texts from different historical moments, is still muscularly underwritten by the priorities of the digital aesthetic.

Another substantial level of abstraction worth discussing takes place as

films join private collections. The shift in exhibition contexts removes them from the public sphere, inserting them into a private totality. Most obviously, this means that films will enter certain systems of classification that affect their identities. In the clearest markings of organization, films within private collections can be faithfully assigned places that accord with their histories, echoing the blend of nostalgia, presentism, and mass media expertise embodied by the formula of the collector's edition. Thus, *The Wizard of Oz* might be classified under "MGM musicals" or, alternately, "the films of Judy Garland." Films can also, à la the video store, be regrouped in private collections under more "consumer-friendly" categories; thus, along with films of every other generic stripe and time period, *The Wizard of Oz* might be shelved with "Hollywood classics" or "family and children's films." Conversely, little organizational logic may be in evidence; the collector may simply collect favorite films, meaning that individual titles become part of a potpourri. While these cases of organizing personal collections seem to present a spectrum of possibilities that range from affiliations with "official" systems of organization to more haphazard and personal methods, each signals a meaningful adoption of the film into the household, an adoption that displaces the film's original historical context, either through an enthusiastic crystallizing of that context into a number of elements (e.g., the studio, the star) or through a purposeful remotivating of its generic identity through alternative labels. Whatever the particular system of organization or disorganization, a film is given a particular resonance and identity that makes it useful within the collector's universe and alters whatever affiliations it may have had when it appeared initially to the public.

As the owner-collector becomes the maestro of his or her film library, this role comes to have an importance that surpasses and obscures the person's function as a consumer in the marketplace. As Stewart remarks, the collecting self "generates a fantasy in which it becomes producer of those objects, a producer by arrangement and manipulation." In "subsuming the environment to a scenario of the personal," the collection thus "acquires an aura of transcendence and independence" in relation to larger economies of value that it actually mirrors.<sup>55</sup> The joys of collecting, then, are bound up not merely with acts of consumption but also with the powerful sense the collector has of being the source, the origin of the objects purchased and organized into a system. This is a psychology that clearly recalls Metz's theatergoing cinephile. The enchantment with machines, the false sense of mastery that indulges a fantasy of control, and the recognition of "I" as the origin of the show are characteristics of contemporary film collecting that resemble theatrical cinephilia. The possibility of analogous fascinations is

enhanced by the ultimate inseparability of theater and home: the experience of cinema at home is not isolated from public moviegoing; nor, conversely, is the multiplex divorced from the household encounter with films. The same viewers inhabit both spheres, meaning that reciprocity, rather than discontinuity, better defines the relation between the fascinations found in public and private movie consumption.

As the theater-home analogy suggests, self-reference is a key ingredient in the individual's relationship to and pleasure in commodities.<sup>56</sup> In the case of cinema, collected objects ultimately refer to the collector as a kind of auteur, a producer of an intelligible, meaningful, private cosmos—a dynamic that occludes the relations the collection has to the outside world, particularly to the social and material conditions of mass production. A chain of logic among property, passion, and self-referentiality helps to explain the collector's zeal and also the significant place films have attained in the home as personal possessions. Subject both to the collection's particular organization and to the collector's apparently self-contained world, the collectible thus offers the radiant pleasure that an investment in one's domestic space can bring.

Relying as it does on a slippage in the collector's identity from consumer to producer, cinema's domestication within this particular film culture tends to minimize awareness of the alliances between cinema and public institutions, between home film cultures and broader spheres of influence. As we have seen, while the world of the collector seems exclusive and personal, it is strongly influenced by discourses of media industries and their technologies. As media industries offer consumers the rhetoric of intimacy (i.e., "secrets" of the cinema) and mastery (i.e., technological expertise or media knowledge), they enhance the sense of owning a personalized product. Owning and organizing films into a library further emphasize the private dimensions of the experience by giving the collector the sense that he or she repossesses, transforms, and remakes in some way the industry product. Solipsism is central to the pleasures and the paradoxes of collecting: considered a most private, even eccentric, activity, collecting is unavoidably tethered to public enterprises and discourses.

Contemporary high-end film collecting gravitates, then, toward apolitical modes of evaluation. Further, it upholds standards forwarded by a white male technocentric ethos, functioning, as does home theater discourse, to support technocratic visions of media and consumption and, by implication, the "good life" in U.S. society. In the process, this taste culture inspires a certain clublike identity, from which women, people of color, and individuals without the means to "digitize" their homes are excluded. However, by

pointing to these characteristics, my intention is not to define collecting as a demonic Other to some pristine set of ethics or ideals. All aesthetics are influenced by cultural forces and operate through a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. As but one mode of evaluation, high-end collecting represents a set of interpretive priorities that enter into the inevitable war of aesthetics that takes place publicly and privately every day. Through these priorities, contemporary high-tech cinephilia embodies a particular means of constructing subjectivity and history and of maintaining an association between masculinity and technology that signals the role new technologies subtly play in perpetuating the cultural status quo. However, as high-end collecting becomes democratized through the continuing dissemination of DVD, the cultural implications of this manner of textual appropriation will change; the variables of technology, cinema, ownership, and the personal archive are bound to interact differently in relation to increasingly diverse audiences.

In the next chapter, I address in more detail the ramifications that the home recycling of Hollywood films has for the public construction of history. I examine cable television as a venue that is especially revealing in this regard. All manner of cable channels, from premium channels and superstations to basic cable channels, have long been central to the ancillary exhibition of Hollywood titles, substantially enhancing the sense that movies lie easily within the home viewer's reach. Some channels, such as American Movie Classics (AMC) and Turner Classic Movies (TCM), have attained distinctive identities as showcases for the cinema of yesteryear. In resurrecting "old" films in large numbers, the dedicated classic movie channel provides a particularly intriguing case for studying how the Hollywood past is presented and remembered within the context of today's media industries. Lacking the solemnity and architectural grandeur of other sites dedicated to the preservation of the past, this kind of channel nonetheless functions as a museum, incarnating a space in which the past is both commemorated and rewritten in accordance with contemporary national values and concerns.

### 3 Remembrance of Films Past

#### Cable Television and Classic Hollywood Cinema

The procedure which today relegates every work of art to the museum . . . is irreversible. It is not solely reprehensible, however, for it presages a situation in which art, having completed its estrangement from human ends, returns . . . to life. . . . [Museums] have actually transformed works of art into the hieroglyphics of history and brought them a new content while the old one shrivelled up. No conception of pure art, borrowed from the past and yet inadequate to it, can be offered to offset this fact.

**Theodor W. Adorno**, "Valery Proust Museum," 1967

As we enter the second century of great American filmmaking, AMC will, through its commitment to preserving this unique portion of our cultural heritage, continue to be the Museum of Classic Hollywood.

**American Movie Classics promotion**, 1994

Deanna Durbin smiles an impossibly sweet smile as she convinces the famous Leopold Stokowski to conduct an orchestra of down-on-their-luck musicians in *One Hundred Men and a Girl* (1937). Lupe Velez prevails, through sheer charisma, over a society matron trying to break up Velez's marriage to the matron's nephew in *Mexican Spitfire* (1939). The Ritz Brothers get hopelessly drunk toasting all of the French kings named Louis in their version of *The Three Musketeers* (1939). Cornell Wilde, square jaw firmly set in place, flees through the African bush from a tribe bent on killing him in *The Naked Prey* (1966). These scenes may not have the mythic resonance of the burning of Atlanta from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or Kane's utterance of the word *Rosebud* at the beginning of *Citizen*