

The Mummy Returns (2001)

I still have the VHS player from when I was a child. I buy VHS tapes at the op-shops for fifty cents each, and I watch them on the player. There is something about the quality of the VHS, its image, its sound, that makes it special to me. I also have a very real anxiety about the archive I am collecting; a lot of these films have not been re-released on DVD or Blu-ray, they have not been uploaded onto the internet. There is a finite amount of them available in the world, and I have at least one copy; they might disappear forever if I do not save them.

I go around to the various op-shops in my suburb and I purchase all of the VHS tapes they have in stock. Even if I already have multiple copies of the VHS they have, I still buy them. Some people buy the tapes just to look at, as interesting objects. They claim that they have no function anymore, that they are purely aesthetic. I have disconnected my television aerial, unplugged my modem and torn the phone-line out of the wall. Now, for me, the tapes have function. My only source of entertainment, of interaction.

I got to video stores as they go out of business. I buy all their stock. I go to Blockbuster and I buy one thousand VHS for three hundred dollars. I dive into the local cult/arthouse store's skip bin, as they are going out of business, and I retrieve two copies of *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965). I now own at least three copies of every Arnold Schwarzenegger movie released before 2000. I own an extensive collection of Japanese 'girlfriend' tapes, a variety of exercise instructional videos and a fairly exhaustive range of smut. It is all the same to me, all a precious, limited commodity.

I set up six rear-projection televisions in a row in my living room. Each one is attached to a VHS player. I am watching six different versions of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) at the same time, looking for inconsistencies. The points of difference between the versions of the film make them unique. Here; this one dissolves into white noise for a moment, while this one loses its vertical hold during this scene. The unique qualities of each copy of *Beauty and the Beast* are not flaws; they are beauty spots, scars; like people they give their owners character, a visual biography, a story to tell.

My collection is growing. I throw out my sofa and replace it with tapes. I throw out my books and replace them with tapes. Now the bookcase is tapes too. Then the table and the chairs, my bed, my wardrobe, my nightstand, all the furniture is now made from piles of tapes. I am adding up the time it would take to watch them all, and it is longer than I can reasonably expect to live. I am wondering if I can replace my body with tapes, if I can transfer myself into a stack of blank tapes, or even record over some of the films I have exact copies of (checked against each other on the television set-up in the living room), and then live forever amongst my collection.

I have purchased a video camera from the op-shop. It records onto VHS. I am trying to record all the parts of myself onto tapes so that I will not die. Rather than recording over entire tapes with information about myself, I have decided to disseminate myself amongst as much of the collection as possible. Many of the tapes have excess space towards their ends. I watch each tape all the way through, carefully noting the amount of space available on the end of the tape, then I decide which aspect of myself will fit into the gap. This tape contains the information about my right knee. This one, my experience of a beach in the summer of 1995. Another, over here, contains a list of teenage crushes. This one is about my left nostril. And so on.

Information recorded onto VHS tapes is stored magnetically. I do not have an erase head, which would have allowed me to completely clear the end of the tapes, sanitising them in preparation for my body, but this does not matter, as I would never do anything to detract from my precious archive. As a consequence, I am blending into my collection. I am becoming something more than myself. Ascension, transmutation, transcendence. I am a great god constrained by a mortal frame.

Now I have recorded all the parts of myself onto the ends of VHS tapes. I have aged significantly. I have not recorded anything about my life since I began recording, otherwise the task would

become an infinite loop, a series of tapes about making recordings on other tapes. Only so much information can be stored in one lifetime. My collection is now so large that I can barely move around my house. I have to crawl on my belly through tunnels I have left in the vast ocean of film and plastic I have created.

I am crawling to my burial chamber. Like an Egyptian Pharaoh, I have dissected and stored my physical body in preparation for the afterlife. The chamber is a rough hemisphere just short of being tall enough to stand in. The ceiling has been constructed using a keystone technique I saw in a documentary about the history of architecture (part of one of the BBC omnibus VHS series I own). In the middle there is a slab I have constructed out of the tapes containing my most important features; brain, heart, reproductive organs, eyes, tongue. I am laying on the slab, waiting to die. I am staring at the ceiling, at the light that is filtering down through the tapes above. It is beautiful, like the Sistine Chapel. I am crying. I am crying because I am dying happy, a person with a finite amount of life, dealing with a finite archive, undertaking a finite project. It has been nice, to not have to deal the infinite. No doubt, when they find me, they will wonder why I did what I did, but it is not for them to understand. Mine is a project for the ages, a time capsule, a remembrance. It is not for the people of tomorrow, who I hope will simply seal me away. It is for the people a thousand years from now, so that they will discover again my collection, so that they might see the humanity expressed in such a short lived, fragile and ephemeral technology. And so that they might know me, the collector, the librarian, the pharaoh, and wonder at the person who cared so much about something so limited.

- Kieron Broadhurst, 2016.