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The connected collector: Collecting in a Web 2.0 world

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Andrew Hickey, Matt Grant and Bruce Woodward
University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Abstract

The Web opens possibilities for democratic engagement in collecting. Previously closed groups available only to aficionados/cognoscenti are now open to wider networks of collector. This paper argues that a typology of Web collecting is possible to chart. Although not disconnected to offline modes of collecting, or collecting practices that occurred pre-Web, it remains that certain ways of collecting are mediated by Web 2.0 technologies. We see that the Web enables a broader network of collectors to readily access the requisite knowledge surrounding artefacts, provenance and collectability, whilst also provisioning connections with distributed communities of collectors, sellers and brokers in a manner never before available. We suggest that Web 2.0 applications enable capacity for undertaking *reconnaissance*, the *gaining of knowledge*, and *facilitation of exchange* for collectables , as well as furnishing the curation and display of subsequent ownership . These platforms enable the mediated demonstration of one's identity as a 'collector' and point to hallmark features of 'connected collecting'. Taking these elements of collecting practice as foundational to the connected collector's persona, we condense a tripartite conceptualisation that includes *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as an organising typology for considering Web 2.0 facilitation of collecting practice.

Keywords

Artefacts, collecting, curation, digital landscape, interests, social media, technology, web 2.0

> Such a cabinet should contain all significant things and rarities created by nature and man… In short, all that could enlighten and please the eye. (Leibniz 1708, cited in Purcell and Gould, 1992: 17).
>
> A goodly huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art of engine hath made rare in stuff, form, or motion; whatsoever singularity chance and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature hath wrought in things that want like and may be kept; shall be sorted and included. (Francis Bacon, in Spedding et al., 1890: 335).

Corresponding author:
Matt Grant, School of Humanities and Communication, University of Southern Queensland, 487-535 West Street, Toowoomba, QLD 4350, Australia.
Email: matt.grant@unisq.edu.au

> If the battered, cracked and broken stuff our ancestors tried to get rid of now brings so much money, think what a 1954 Oldsmobile, or a 1960 Toastmaster will bring. (Steinbeck, 1962: 43).

Introduction

This paper emerges out of the personal-professional interests of the authors and the shared practices each deploy as *collectors*. We seek to extend the extant literature on collecting by considering the mediating role that the internet and various existing and emerging 'Web 2.0' technologies have on the practice of collecting. Arguing that the tripartite formulation *acquisition-maintenance-curation* constitutes a useful model for considering collecting-as-practice, we will outline some initial insights into how collecting comes to be mediated by (and via) the application of web 2.0 technologies and their attendant social practices.

This paper explores the practices enacted by collectors within the context of the bespoke and relatively small (in term of national population) Australian guitar collecting community, of which the authors are members.

In drawing on the broad typology of *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as an explanatory framework for understanding the nature of collecting, we suggest that the practice of collecting is given specific form and shape when enacted *online*. With regard the respective cases of each of the authors, the speculation, acquisition and trade of items for their collections (in our case, electric guitars) integrally involves the use of Web technologies to enact the practice. Equally, seeking knowledge and insight into specific artefacts, their histories and desirability as collectibles, as well advice on the curation and maintenance of acquired artefacts draws from sets of practices that have quite specific online mediations. It is with these practices deployed under the *acquisition-maintenance-curation* tripartite that this paper presents its analysis.

A brief survey of the nature of collecting

In 1717 Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia acquired the collection of anatomical preparations and natural history specimens from the Dutch preparator and anatomical curator Frederick Ruysch (1638–1731). Once acquired, the collection containing artefacts spanning from preserved human organs, anatomical models and the embalmed bodies of human infants, was installed in St Petersburg as the focus of the newly founded Academy of Sciences *Kunstkammer* or 'room of rarities'. Under the *wunderkammer*, or 'wonder room' mode of display, the collection functioned as a mechanism for the demonstration of Ruysch's anatomical scholarship, and did so with a combined purpose to both astonish and educate. The display of Ruysch's artefacts provided the *wunderkammer* with this important dual purpose; although the captivation that this extraordinary collection of exotica and curios displayed was in itself startling, the collection equally sought to enlighten the viewer through the educative function that the assembled artefacts provoked.

Ruysch had certainly intended for his collection to be both informative and playful, with the displayed artefacts festooned with cautionary narratives, short quotations and moral exhortations, some 'emphasising the brevity of life and death and the vanity of earthly riches' (Purcell and Gould, 1992: 31) amongst other moral-ethical pronouncements. This was a collection that was not simply intended for its preparator – that is, this was no private collection to be hoarded away and kept from view. Ruysch had anticipated for the artefacts to be viewed and engaged, with the sheer spectacle of its content and arrangement providing the wonder necessary to capture the imagination.

Beyond its subject matter, Ruysch's collection was also notable for its scale – over 2000 anatomical preparations that, when installed within the Academy of Sciences, became part of a collection that contained:

> five rooms… of natural and ethnographic objects – anatomical preparations of organs, embryos, and oddities preserved in alcohol and preserved in glass jars, stuffed birds, dried fish, a mounted elephant, and large quantities of ivory. When Peter died in 1725, his curator estimated that undisplayed material might fill another twenty-five to thirty rooms. (Purcell and Gould, 1992: 18).

This was a collection that was considered and purposeful, but equally, obsessively constructed and curated. Although macabre in its subject matter, it is clear that Ruysch held an intention for this collection. Each component played its part in relaying a broader narrative, fulfilling a purpose that reflected a bigger picture held in Ruysch's imagination:

> …about a dozen tableaux, constructed of human fetal skeletons with backgrounds of other body parts, on allegorical themes of death and the transiency of life…Ruysch built the 'geological' landscapes of these landscapes from gallstones and kidneystones, and 'botanical' backgrounds from injected and hardened major veins arteries for 'trees', and more ramified tissue of lungs and smaller vessels for 'bushes' and 'grass'… One fetal skeleton holding a string of pearls in its hand proclaims, 'Why should I long for the things of this world?' Another, playing a violin with a bow made of dried artery, sings, 'Ah fate, ah bitter fate'. (Purcell and Gould, 1992: 31)

The obsessive commitment to the collection – in both its detail and scale – provides a striking first point in the consideration of collecting outlined here. Collecting is, in this regard, an obsessive compulsion enacted to meet the demands of an imagined ideal. Far beyond a random assemblage of objects, the collection stands as an organised and pre-considered acquisition of artefacts that illustrates the collector's ideal.

The collection also provides the physical manifestation of a desire for acquisition and containment, in much the way that Bielecki (2012) suggests when noting that 'the importance of the concept of material possession' is central to collecting, whereby the collector is positioned as having a 'privileged relationship with material culture' (3). This relationship with material culture, Bielecki goes on to note, carries with it a dialogic interplay between object and collector, with the collected artefact manifesting symbolically 'as much less a heuristic device, and much more as a fundamentally irrational urge' (4). Noble's (2004) conceptualisation of 'accumulated being' extends this line of thinking, in that it is with the sense of the collector's existential being that a collection takes form. Collections, Noble argues, provide 'ontological proof' of the collector, and offer a material point of recognition of the collector's being (233). Collectors are written into their collections, and far from constituting random assemblages of objects,[1] collections 'embody goals, make skills manifest and shape the identities of their users' (1). Collections are intentioned and stand as considered, curated formations.

The individual artefact as component part of the collection also speaks to the collector's being (and particularly the collector's *knowledge*). Functioning as much as a representation of history as it is a discrete object, the artefact stands as the embodiment of meaningful social relations imbued with meaning, human emotion and an association with other objects, places and individuals. The collector speaks to this reification of the object itself, giving meaning to the artefact's significance and establishing the terms by which it is made desirable; as established by its very *collectability*. Inversely, and following Veblen (1899), the collection manifests equally as a physical expression of

the collector's sensibilities, providing status and a point of observation to the collector's *taste*. In this sense, the collectible artefact's 'principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are simply incarnated signs' (38). This sign-value is complex however, implicating the formations of cultural meaning that are decoded by the collector; often idiosyncratically, if not somewhat *irrationally*.

These are the markers of collecting we draw upon to pose the analysis of Web 2.0 collecting outlined in this paper. Firstly, the obsessive commitment to the practice of collecting and the seeming irrationality of this pursuit presents as a significant first point of analysis. As Meunsterberger (1994) highlights:

> …even a serious and reflective collector is hard put to offer a clear, convincing explanation of his [sic] inclination or the intense emotion that occasionally occurs in the process of obtaining an object (3).

Ruysch in his composition of his anatomical preparations too, displayed a 'tireless and obsessive commitment' to the creation and maintenance of his collection, built on a 'need to explore and capture the bizarre' (Purcell and Gould, 1992: 25). In the always-on world of Web 2.0, this capacity for obsessive commitment to the collection is, we argue, ever present.

Further to this however, a collection presents as a considered response to the material world. Demarcated in the individual artefact is a relationship to history, material culture and the collector's sensibilities, with the collector's acuity in making connections between all three providing the defining markers of a collection. Pearce (1995) draws out these dynamics when noting that:

> …collecting and collections are part of our dynamic relationships with the material world. Object groupings, like all other social constructs, are born from the essentially mysterious workings of the communal and individual imagination, sanctified by social custom. (33)

It is with this commitment to collecting and organising disparate groupings of objects into discernible categories, and the obsessiveness that compiling a collection provokes that the focus of this paper is derived. We will argue that these characteristics of categorisation and obsession find specific application with Web 2.0, with the functions it enables for compilation of knowledge around a specific object and an ongoing scrutiny worthy of attention. The acquisition and curation of collected artefacts enabled by Web 2.0 provides new terrain for considering collecting-as-practice.

Collecting: A short methodological analysis

In applying the term *collector*, we draw on Wadja's (2008) observation that 'anyone who has traded baseball cards, saved birthday cards, or created albums of printed matter dedicated to an event or life has been a collector' (174). Bielecki (2012) extends this further to note that collectors,

> can collect anything – shoes or sea shells, pottery or painting, mummies or musical instruments. These texts approach the collector as a vehicle for the exploration of a certain mode of consumption, and the article being consumed is of only incidental importance. (2012: 24).

Collecting, then, is the activity of 'gathering together and the setting aside of selected objects' (Pearce, 1995: 3), or as Russell Belk (1982) notes, 'to collect is to acquire an interrelated set of possessions' (85). We do however offer further distinction to these definitions by suggesting that the manifestations of collecting positioned here are undertaken within contextually mediated social practices to acquire, maintain and curate. The reader might note that this moves beyond Belk's

(1982) typology of 'acquiring, possessing and collecting', and while we do not disagree with Belk (and note that he had as his remit the definitional distinction between these terms, and not their establishment as an indicative topography of collecting), we use this formation as a framework for considering how guitar collecting is practiced in a country geographically distant from the place of origin of the majority of the makes and models desired.

To provide some methodological nuance, in our own practice we each maintain focused interests represented in specialised collections – the collection of electric guitars.[2] Further, the collections we maintain are collections that are deliberatively (and deliberately) formed, with conscious (albeit sometimes impulsive) decision-making shaping both the maintenance and extension of the collections we house. We identify as 'amateur collectors' and 'passionate subjective consumers' of these specialist artefacts (Belk, 1995). While considerable time, money and effort is expended on our respective collections – collections that have been in our respective cases formed over decades – we nonetheless participate as amateurs, enabled initially by association with the field of practice demarcated by our collections (i.e. as playing musicians) and their communities through long-term contact with the cultures of those instruments we collect.

Aligning with Daent and Katriel's (1994) determination of 'type A' and 'type B' collectors, where the taxonomic collection of artefacts constitutes the *type A* collector's remit, and the acquisition of items for their aesthetic appeal providing the focus of the *type B* collector, we suggest that we each fall into the category of *type B collector*. This, we also argue, is the category that most amateur collectors find themselves. Although we know of fellow amateur collectors who compile their collections based on the careful taxonomic assemblage of those items they gather,[3] the majority of fellow-collectors we encounter are more interested in individual items and the aesthetic appeal these each hold. This extends to concerns around the provenance and associations a specific instrument might have (e.g. the acquisition of an instrument played by a notable musician) as much as it does the physical form and material condition of the instruments we encounter.

In extension to these points of definition, we add that the process of collecting draws with it a desire to maintain the material culture that the collectible represents. Along with the curation of the item according to its associated history and the personal connections and aesthetic qualities that associate the collectible to the collector, the sense of the object's place within a wider context of cultural meaning is also significant. Ownership and maintenance of the object connects the collector to this history and the place the artefact holds in wider cultural registers of meaning (Connerton, 1989). In these terms we agree with Belk's (2006) assessment that collecting involves 'sublime sets of objects, rituals and sacredness' (539), but extend this to also argue, apropos Connerton (1989), that the memory imbued within the collected object stands as a marker of its aesthetic appeal. The collector's desire is bound up in not just the physical manifestation of the object itself, but also in what it represents. *Knowing* your collection is hence an important undertaking for the serious collector.

As 'amateur' collectors, drawn as we are predominantly to the aesthetic and historical value of the artefacts we collect, we seek understandings of the historical and cultural 'place' of the artefacts we gather. Although we each collect certain styles of guitar – for authors Hickey and Grant, the collection of post-Second World War models of 'solid body' guitar (predominantly) from the United States, and for author Woodward, 'archtop' guitars that have their lineage from the 1930s – the role that we each fulfil as arbiters of the legacies of these instruments presents as a significant aspect of our collecting practices. We have, over the course of decades of association with these instruments, generated knowledge of their place as cultural (and *cultured)* artefacts, symbolically imbued as they are with rich historical and social legacies of meaning. While the functional performance of these instruments *as* guitars is important (we each also *play* these guitars professionally), understanding

the place they hold in the history of guitar and the associations these have to certain styles of music and wider popular cultural meanings are just as significant.

Given this privileged relationship to the artefacts we collect and the material culture they represent, we as collectors come to maintain the knowledge that associates with these objects. We do not suggest on this point that we fulfil the role of arbiters of a canon, or prescribe 'official knowledge' to paraphrase Michael Apple's (1993) concept – of these objects, but curate collections that come to be handed down, collector-to-collector and learnt as a right of passage in collecting.

The knowledge associated with these collections is far more loosely moderated and idiosyncratically acquired, but nonetheless there are recognised *ways of knowing* about the collections we curate and with this, ways of speaking about the instruments and their significance. We speculate further on these processes below.

Building the collection: *Acquisition-maintenance-curation*

At the outset we acknowledge the seeming indulgence and perils that building collections such as ours assume and the traits of (Western) consumption habits that these interests might suggest. We note in defence however, that we, like most collectors, do not necessarily see excess in what it is we find our interests in (other than what a comfortable lifestyle will enable in terms of the acquisition of such objects). In these terms we align with Belk's (2014) suggestion that collecting 'may not be as materialistic as it first appears' (140) and indeed go as far as suggesting that the maintenance of material culture that collecting prescribes is in some ways anathema to consumption.[4] On this we agree with Belk's (1982) earlier assessment that 'possessing and collecting are two prominent alternate goals that transcend the act of purchasing and consuming' (85).

We practice a form of collecting that is deeply invested in the preservation of those objects we gather; both in terms of the object itself and in the production and maintenance of knowledge around these objects. In this regard, we adhere to Belk's (2006) view that:

> If collecting is consuming, it is a special type of consuming. Consuming, in its most literal sense, is using up, devouring, or burning. Collecting on the other hand, is about keeping, preserving and accumulating. (534)

We each approach our respective collecting habits as those of *maintaining* and *enhancing* the understandings of the collections we curate, and in doing so have formulated sophisticated practices and knowledges around the guitars we collect. We undertake what Wadja (2008) suggests is the specialisation in 'one form of ephemera' (174), even though our respective interests as listed here overlap (we are all interested in electric guitars *generally*, however recognise that our respective knowledge, collections of, and hence standing as 'collectors' is associated with specific types of instrument, make and brand).

A typology of Web 2.0 collecting

Whilst not wishing to reify a claim for an unquestioned democratic potential for the Internet and its incumbent technologies (Blank, 2008; Blank and Reisdorf, 2012, 2013; Brake, 2013; Hargittai and Walejko 2008; Van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009), we pose the following consideration of the participatory potential of Web 2.0 by suggesting that these technologies enable performances of collecting that previously were inaccessible to the majority of people, particularly in smaller, more remote markets such as Australia. In taking this approach, we suggest that the relative accessibility

to collecting markets has been expanded exponentially by the Internet, with the role that Web 2.0 technologies play in mediating the generation of knowledge and providing access to networks of collectors having had the effect of widening participation. But we remain cautious in suggesting that participation is now universal. Hargittai and Walejko's (2008) analysis of participation in social media, for instance provides insight into the complex socio-economic predictors of participation and content creation. As they highlight, participation is linked closely with broader socio-demographic markers resulting in dynamics of inclusion and power in online spaces that parallel those observed in other (offline) social contexts. Further, Blank and Reisdorf's (2012) consideration of the basic 'ability' required to navigate Web 2.0 technologies highlights that a set of requisite technical literacies are also required prior to participation commencing.

Venkatesh et al. (2003)'s Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), building on a range of theories dating back to Ajzen and Fischbein's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action, holds that when using technology such as the Web 2.0 (through whatever platform) the user's behavioural intentions are influenced by four key determinant constructs of effort expectancy, performance expectancy, facilitating condition and social influence. UTAUT, therefore, allows another aspect of online collecting to come into view; the prevalence and ease of access to various guitar collections for sale online, the convenient nature of the payment process, the reliability of freight movement of the purchased item across varying distances and the ease of coordination of what would pre-Web have been a considerably more arduous undertaking.

Further, 'the appropriation of the leisure-oriented, unpaid activities of users by Internet companies' as described by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) effectively places the authors alongside the multitudes of others effectively 'working' for digital vendors of unique or collectable guitars.

These considerations aside, and following Valtysson (2010), we argue that for those with access and the ability to manipulate the mediations of Web 2.0 applications, the prospects for participation as a 'connected collector' are significant. In our own experiences, our practice as collectors is heavily enabled with the affordances Web 2.0 provides; access to networks of collectors globally, along with the capacity to rapidly generate knowledge of a given collectible presents as a major factor in undertaking our collecting, as does the possibility for immediate commercial transaction in the purchase of items. In these terms, we are less concerned with what has been identified in the literature as 'produsage' (Bruns, 2008), and more with the participatory 'climate' that Web 2.0 enables for dialogue and exchange of information. Ours is less about the production of content for entertainment or political purposes – an outward dissemination of produced content – and instead is focused on the acquisition of knowledge and information around collectible guitars as well as the access the internet provides to global markets.

In this regard, we conceptualise the internet and Web 2.0 as 'platform' (O'Reilly, 2005). At its core, our usage is built around the development of dialogic, user-centred communication, with the internet as the platform upon which this occurs. Such an approach to using the internet, mediated as it is in this current moment by Web 2.0 functionality, draws on a sense of communitarianism:

> It is clear that the Internet, and especially Web 2.0 activities, have opened up many new possibilities for *sharing*… Bringing people together for both communal and utilitarian purposes is now greatly simplified compared to pre-Internet days. Before the Internet if you wanted to find others with a passion for mushroom hunting, building model airplanes, preparing foods without cooking, or writing and reading fan fiction for Xena Warrior Princess, it could be a real treasure hunt to find likeminded people. Today they are all a few keystrokes away. (Belk, 2014: 19; emphasis added)

What is particularly relevant within this suggestion is the dynamic social nature of Web interactions. Functioning as more than 'an identified group of technologies' (Anderson, 2007: 5), Web 2.0 corresponds in this regard to modes of exchange between users; or what Belk (2014) characterises as 'sharing'.[5]

It should also be highlighted that in conjunction with the emphasis most definitions of Web 2.0 give to its social capacity,[6] the hyper-commercial functionality of Web 2.0 operates as a prevailing feature of its use. As Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) have argued, the foundations of Web 2.0 have at their core commercial implications, and far from being an entirely 'open' space, Web 2.0 is built upon a sense of 'public collectivism that functions entirely inside commodity culture' (855). Our practice, too, has a clearly commercial implication, and we do of course acknowledge the commercial imperatives that come with the trade and acquisition of artefacts as commodity. Collecting after all, in this late capitalist moment, is deeply invested in the commercial trade of artefacts, with the fallout of this dimension of collecting being that 'it is sometimes difficult to discern where sharing ends and commerce begins' (Belk, 2014: 7). Although the dialogic engagement with networks of collectors is a fundamental component of our practice, so too is the commercial trade of instruments.

This confluence of engagement, sharing and commerce provides the terrain of our practice. In the seeking-out and trading of guitars, we undertake practices of *reconnaissance* and *engagement* with communities of collectors to seek out information around the relative state of 'the market' and availability of certain guitars. While we discuss this in further detail below, the access provided to not only a network of collectors mediated as this is by the internet (and Web 2.0 applications), but equally the capacity to undertake the commercial functions of trading instruments is fundamental to our collecting practice. Web 2.0 provides access to both the 'network' *and* the 'market' in this regard. It is with the functionality that Web 2.0 enables for the access to these networks and the provision of commercial trade functionality[7] that a significant new dimension for collecting is afforded.

While some consideration is given to concepts such as 'audience labour' (Andrejevic, 2008; Fisher, 2012) in relation to social media activity being commodified by digital platforms, many of the sites favoured by collectors are hosted free of expense and without payment required when either advertising a product or purchasing one. Commercial sites, of course, exist but as discussed earlier they proceed in a fundamentally similar way to non-commercial sites with regard the trade of items, but with a discernible difference evident in the provision of greater access and a wider scope of choice.

Indeed, if we term the non-commercial sites as amateur digital noticeboards, albeit often with images of the products being offered, these sites effect a *collector-to-collector* relationship wherein people of similar interests but dissimilar geographic location can discuss and trade guitars and ultimately build personal collections in a way not easily achievable pre-Web.[8]

Shipley and Fish's (1996) assertion of three types of hypertextuality – one leading to the document; another that moves to the same Web page of the media (micronavigation); and another that goes to other websites (macronavigation) –support our own observations of the use of technology to digitally move a potential customer through a virtual 'store'; from noticing a desirable object to eventual acquisition.

In terms of our own engagement with Web 2.0 and the maintenance of the collections we curate, we suggest that Web 2.0 applications enable capacity for undertaking the following:

- what we term, 'reconnaissance' of items; the searching for and initial investigation prior to acquisition of prospective collectibles, undertaken predominantly through access to collector and online retail sites,

- the seeking of information and generation around a specific item and its collectability; including not only the seeking of information around a specific guitar itself, but also understandings of specific series models, years of manufacture and so on of a particular guitar, undertaken via collector and enthusiasts wikis, blogs, message boards and similar,
- the commercial trade and purchase of items, completed with e-commerce functionality and usually conducted at significant geographic distance (typically, internationally),
- the subsequent display of artefacts as 'collected', via the maintenance of social media profiles, and indeed in the resale and trade of guitars using online e-commerce applications, in conjunction with,
- dialogue of ownership, sharing of 'expertise' and demonstration of one's identity as a 'collector', undertaken in those message boards, wikis and blogs used in the reconnaissance of guitars, as well as personal social media profiles.

These points function as hallmark features of the 'connected collector'. Taking these elements of collecting practice as foundational to the connected collector's persona, we condense these points into the tripartite *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as an organising typology for considering Web 2.0 facilitation of collecting practice.

In an effort to expand on this categorisation, we cast the following observations, formulated in Figure 1, as an initial survey of this practice.

Discussion

Acquisition

The first major point of definition in understanding a Web 2.0 collecting practice comes in terms of the acquisition of collectibles. Although the process of trading and exchanging items is a major function of this component of mediated collecting, facilitated as this is by a range of generic (such as ebay.com and gumtree.com) and specialist (e.g. https://www.archtop.com/) e-commerce platforms that deal in the trade of guitars, it is also via the access these provide to a market and the acquisition of knowledge that surrounds a particular instrument that has profoundly changed in the Web 2.0 world.

Prior to Web 2.0, usual haunts for collectible guitars included a suite of speciality retail guitar and instrument stores, pawnbrokers and second hand and 'antique' stores and through association with groups of fellow players and collectors. The geographic location of the collector stood as a major factor, with access to instruments providing a first challenge; arranging physical access to an instrument, let alone finding a selection of instruments from which to choose and purchase significantly influenced how collecting proceeded.[9] While it is important to note that it is the community within which the collector operates that is significant, and that pre-Web the communities that collectors associated with (mediated as these were via a physical store or collection of collectors/players) represented an influential factor, it is the reach that Web 2.0 enables that stands as a major difference in contemporary collecting practice.

With the access to global networks of dealers and collectors that the web enables, the landscape for collectors has changed markedly. No longer is physical proximity necessary; one can access and view (and sometimes hear) guitars online, with the affordances of Web 2.0 realised in the provision of an enlarged network for the 'efficient generation, dissemination [and] sharing' (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008: 232) of items. Add to this the multi-media capabilities of Web 2.0 and the ability to see in detail and hear the instrument, and a next best thing to physically 'being-there' is

Period	Dimensions	Observations
Pre Web 2.0	**Acquisition**	
		- In the pre-digital age guitars, like other musical instruments, were predominantly bought and sold in retail spaces. This usually meant a limited supply of prospective instruments, found within geographic proximity of the collector. - Although traditional media dedicated to the collection of guitars- predominantly trade magazines and classifieds- worked to some extent to confound the geographic boundaries of the collector's reach, these media forms were not entirely successful in relaying the sensory experience of the noted guitar. - The physical retail space functioned as the centre of a collector's network. Access to other collectors and the market was mediated via this physical setting. In conjunction with these spaces 'secondary' retail outlets- pawnbrokers and second hand outlets- would offer an alternative to the specialised guitar retail space. - Players, if part of a discernible community, would also sell and trade amongst each other, spruiking instruments principally by word of mouth. Guitars were/are also frequently traded and sold by teachers to their students, and from student to student. - Establishing a price-point and understanding of the relative (financial) value of an item, and its accompanying symbolic capital, was dependant largely on the identification of the guitar as desirable, and prevailing conditions of 'supply-demand'. Particularly in non-metropolitan spaces, simply gaining physical access to a noted guitar could be difficult (especially if that guitar were from a low-volume maker). The price-point would then be set according to the micro-economics of demand generated in that geographic space according to the desirability of the instrument and the 'aura' of its aesthetic.
	Maintenance	
		- As per the acquisition of items, maintaining a knowledge of a collection was largely undertaken within the context of a geographically defined community of collectors (and players). Built predominantly around a physical store-front, the collector's knowledge of specific items and their provenance was heavily informed by association with experienced collector-players within the store. - Although traditional media, predominantly in the form of magazines, offered an insight into a wider context of collecting, it was still via face-to-face communication with the collector's immediate network that knowledge of a guitar and its upkeep was gained.

Figure 1. Collecting practice.

	Curation	
		- Extending the dynamics of maintenance, the curation of a collection and relay of one's expertise as a collector was similarly undertaken through the immediate network. The development of one's standing as a collector and as knowledgeable about the guitar (or aspects of a particular model) were negotiated as a process of peer mediation. As one became 'known' as knowledgeable, expertise was sought through the network, often with this mediated by a central moderator (a guitar store owner, for example). - Knowledge about a collection and a collector's standing would be communicated through the network, reinforced with public demonstration of the collector's expertise (for example, through the collector's own live performance and playing of instruments, or through assistance of others with the acquisition or maintenance of their collections). Invariably however, the interactions provoked through the curation of collection were undertaken physically as a face-to-face interaction.
Web 2.0		
	Acquisition	
		- e-Commerce has fundamentally changed the ways that collector's gain access to collectible instruments. Specifically with the advent of specialist guitar online retail and collector sites, access to a global market of instruments is now possible. Specialist online stores (for example www.archtop.com or guitarsnjazz.com) list significant inventories, and have built around them communities of collectors and players similar to those once built around a physical storefront retail space, but now with global reach. - Further to the increased reach of access, the capacity to verify the relative value of a guitar is a major feature of the Web 2.0 collecting context. Collectors now can readily ascertain the relative value of comparable instruments without the need for an extensive knowledge of the instrument, the experience of a knowledgeable other within a defined community, or the vagaries of local market economics. - The capacity of contemporary freight services, some specialising in the shipment of guitars, has also streamlined the process of acquisition. Developed in parallel with e-commerce, it is now of only passing concern that an instrument would be shipped internationally where once this would have caused major misgivings. - Many specialist user-groups and community pages also support dedicated trade and 'for sale' sub-pages. These secondary retail spaces fulfil something equivalent to the traditional media 'trading post'; a second hand commercial space not attached to a retail storefront. As well as advertising the guitar, the interactive nature of

Figure 1. Continued.

	the space allows for questions and comments. In this way, these spaces act as a space in which members can show their expertise and competencies – transmitting their knowledge to the group and opening up possibilities for dialogue. Groups such as the Facebook group High-end Guitars Australia (https://www.facebook.com/groups/662762150502678/) combine a group moderated sales classified with broader discussion around valuations of individual instruments and technical advice.
Maintenance	
	- Online communities dedicated solely to the guitar are prolific. This extends from older 'usenet' and 'blog' based forums to social media groups. As with the proliferation of online e-commerce and retail sites, forums dedicated to the discussion and maintenance of guitars provide space for enthusiasts to interact and share ideas around the playing, maintenance and upkeep of instruments. No longer limited to the geographic reach of the collector's physical location, or linear transmission of information via traditional media, the web 2.0 collector has immediate access to information in real-time. - Multi-media applications (as a hallmark of web 2.0) enable individuals to also access (and upload) material dedicated to the guitar. Where previously the experience of the guitar was invariably mediated physically, one can now hear clips of a guitar being played, and see detailed images (including those of its general aesthetic, construction and build quality). - Descriptions of particular models on Archtop.com are detailed and thorough, often referencing features and specs of the instruments, stories about provenance, and giving descriptions of tone.
Curation	
	- The ability to reach a global audience and demonstrate one's knowledge of guitar has increased significantly through Web 2.0 applications. Newsgroups such as rec.music.makers.guitar.jazz and www.jazzguitar.be offer a specific 'jazz guitar' nuanced forum (as distinct from archtop guitar generally). In addition to broad discussion, these spaces also detail the musical form of the instrument, and its histories, but importantly enable subscribers to list their own collections of guitars and

	discuss the nature of the instrument. An important aspect of this type of forum is the capacity for individual members to be 'ranked' according to seniority, expertise, knowledge or level of engagement with the group. Expertise is now distributed beyond the centre of a geographically located community.

Figure 1. Continued.

afforded. For the knowledgeable collector, having the capacity to see and hear an instrument located on the other side of the globe presents as a significant opportunity for making an informed decision on purchase.

Further to this, with an enhanced reach and availability of instruments to select from, the capacity to determine quickly the relative value of an instrument is enhanced. No longer limited by personal knowledge or the vagaries of local market economics, the connected collector is able to quickly ascertain the value of an individual instrument through the search for comparable items globally. One of the authors, through his recent experience of acquiring a specific model of Fender Stratocaster (a 1989 'Made in Japan' guitar) notes the capacity that lays in establishing the relative value of items. Where previously, prior to the interconnection of networks that Web 2.0 enables, values were set against age-old measures of 'supply-demand' and the basic 'cost-value' of the item within a small and predominantly geographically defined 'market' (typically markets centred around a notable physical store-front or network of geographically situated collectors). With Web 2.0 the rapid ability to establish a price point and locate comparable items is presented.

Beyond this 'reconnaissance' for instruments, the capacity to negotiate and purchase items is also made available. In all, this aspect of the collecting tripartite is profoundly affected by the functionality of the modern internet. Collectors now have ready and immediate access to a global network of collectors, retailers and dealers. e-commerce and global freight services (services that have paralleled the emergence of Web 2.0) enable the acquisition of items from the desktop. Each of the authors has undertaken the reconnaissance and acquisition of guitars in this way, and accordingly, we suggest that this first component of the Web 2.0 collecting tripartite stands as heavily influenced by the presence of Web 2.0 applications.

Parallel development in the freight of guitars and the enhanced understanding of how to ship guitars within collector communities also present as additional development of Web 2.0. With the enhancement and ubiquity of freight as a support industry of Web 2.0 powered e-commerce, the practice of shipping a guitar internationally is now no longer as fraught as it once was. Where shipping a guitar (especially a rare or expensive instrument) caused trepidation, familiarity with shipping instruments is now virtually universal; many companies will offer advice on freighting a guitar (such as How to Ship a Guitar|FedEx).

However there remain limiting aspects to the opened reach of trading guitars internationally. For example, the 2017 prohibition in the commercial trade of rare and exotic timbers by the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) list Brazilian Rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*) – a timber used in the construction of guitar fretboards and bridges – as a prohibited timber. Shipping of guitars with Brazilian rosewood components as part of a commercial transaction was barred. In this instance, international law held precedent over the otherwise 'open' nature of the internet.[10]

Maintenance

Beyond the acquisition of an item, the development of understandings around an instrument's provenance and upkeep can also be readily accessed via Web 2.0 applications. An array of message boards, user groups, wikis and blogs devoted to guitars exist, with several dealing explicitly in the discussion of collectible guitars.[11] The focus of these groups, beyond the broad social dimensions they have, is to purvey information about the instruments they deal with. One example, the 'Friends of the Archtop Guitar' group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/5744428469/) has in excess of 16,000 members, with discussion including detailed specialist knowledge about instruments, their

construction, history, appreciation and aesthetics. As detailed earlier in this paper, this provision of what we call here 'knowledge' about the instrument is a profound aspect of Web 2.0 and its influence on collecting.

As with the notes detailing the limited reach that pre-internet commercial trade of instruments had, so too was the trade of information. Pre-Web 2.0 exchange of information was typically limited to the sharing of word-of-mouth expertise from an individual/s (usually attached to a physical music store, or local 'expert' collectors/players), or old media (with guitar magazines and instructional videos representing predominant examples of this form). By contrast, Web 2.0 enables immediacy of contact with expertise globally. While it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the politics and poetics of establishing expertise within the space of the online forum,[12] we do point to message boards and forums as an example of the ways that information is shared and expertise established. For example, the 'Strat-talk.com' forum dedicated to the Fender Stratocaster guitar, like many forums of this type, utilises a measure of expertise based on 'seniority',[13] with these status identifiers featuring as part of the user's avatar.

Curation

Curation, we argue, is associated with the presentation of an online presence. In line with commentary that suggests that Web 2.0 is marked by the capacity for user-generated material (Brake, 2013; Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007), this component of the tripartite involves relaying an online persona and the presence of the collection (or at least, a suggestion of it).

While not something that all Web 2.0 collectors would engage with (and we are clear in making the point that Web 2.0 collectors may in fact stop with the *acquisition* stage of this tripartite and might rarely engage in the *maintenance* stage once items have been gathered and so on), this stage manifests in the form of the provision of expertise. Through such actions as the provision of advice and expertise in forums and similar, the outright presentation of a collection (such as that presented by the Dutch Archtop Collection), and formulation of one's presence as a focal point for the development of an online community (such as that presented by the founders of the 'High-End Guitars Australia' Facebook group), curation involves the presentation of an organised and cohesive sense of one's collection and collecting persona, along with the intentioned display of knowledge as expertise in the history and form of the collection.

This component of the tripartite is closely connected to the dialogue that provides the impetus for the maintenance of a collection, but again, we stress that this act of curation is geared toward the outward display of a collection. It is with this that the 'accumulated being' of the collector is drawn out of the 'ontological process' (Noble, 2004) of displaying a collection (and hence, one's identity as a '*collector*'). The facilitation of an online identity is made at this point, and via the affordance Web 2.0 provides in making claims for expertise (e.g. through physical mechanisms such as a 'status' descriptor, or more informally through shared recognition of expertise), the curation of a collection as the foundation point of the collectors' knowledge and expertise is given.

Curation corresponds with this intentioned display of an identity online, and the status of being a 'collector'. Although we recognise that principles of peer mediation of identity and online narcissism (Mehdizadeh, 2010) feature as prominent components of this practice of presenting one's Self online, our interest is more with the facilitation that Web 2.0 provides for the establishment of expertise and the global reach the internet provides for establishing one's claim to knowledge.

Conclusions

The principal contention of this paper is that Web 2.0 technologies enable an enhanced practice of collecting, and that, in extension to the preceding discussion on the broad nature of collecting, function as technologies that afford a participatory collecting experience. We assert that pre-internet, collectors of guitars were limited to (predominantly) geographically situated communities of collectors, typically congregated around specialist boutique stores.[14] In this regard, and to draw attention back to the 'goodly huge' cabinet denoted by Bacon and Leibniz in the epigraphs for this paper, the internet might be characterised as such a repository, defined by its capacity to enable immediate connection to geographically dispersed artefacts and collecting communities. When mediated via Web 2.0 applications, the immediate access to collectables (or at least, their mediated visual and aural display), mechanisms for refining the knowledge required to seek out and acquire objects, and forums for the mutual engagement and participatory dialogue of collecting and collectables stands as an important marker of the facilitation of collecting in the current moment.

We suggest that the tripartite *acquisition-maintenance-curation* forms a useful model for considering collecting broadly, but when overlaid onto the practices of Web 2.0 collecting specifically, offers a means of considering the nuance that Web 2.0 collecting practices engage. For instance, we noted that the capacity for *reconnaissance* of items, the establishment of value comparisons, the seeking of information from multiple points of expertise and presentation of Self as 'collector' all draw from the specific functionality that Web 2.0 applications provide. It is with these features that collecting within the context of Web 2.0 operates.

To draw this paper to a close, we offer the following observations of Web 2.0 collecting. In an effort to provoke further research on the nature of collecting and the affordances that Web 2.0 offers, we suggest that the principles of collecting outlined here stand as foundational to the consideration of 'connected collecting':

- **Principle 1**: As implied by the case study of Frederick Ruysch noted earlier in this paper, and in conjunction with pronouncements in the literature (Meunsterberger, 1994; Purcell and Gould, 1992) we suggest collecting at its core in an *obsessive* compulsion; or as Clifford (1988) notes, collecting functions as 'an excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to have' (143). When mobilised via Web 2.0 however, the obsessive aspects of collecting are enhanced. Access to larger markets of collectibles and bigger networks of collectors combine with an *always-on* internet.[15] The internet enables the obsessive behaviours practiced in collecting more generally to reach a greater level of intensity.
- **Principle 2**: Collectors are defined by their collections, and far from constituting random assemblages of objects, collections 'shape the identities of their users' (Noble, 2004: 1). Collections are intentioned and stand as considered, curated formations. When activated via Web 2.0 however, the prospect for reaching a widened (global) network, and of subsequently engaging-with and establishing expertise within such networks are also markedly enhanced. Web 2.0, with its emphasis on dialogic engagement, opens a forum for the trade of knowledge and expertise, as much as it does the trade of guitars.
- **Principle 3**: following Veblen (1899), we argue that the collection manifests as a physical expression of the collector's sensibilities, providing status and a point of observation of the collector's *taste*. Status online comes through one's collection and prowess in speaking authoritatively through the formation of the collection.

In drawing on the tripartite of *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as a framework for considering connected collecting and as a foundation point for these principles, we do not seek to suggest that collecting, in principle, is *fundamentally* different with Web 2.0.

We do however suggest that the affordances Web 2.0 provides variously enhance and provoke aspects of collecting that are age-old. The principals outlined here indicate this. We similarly do not seek to suggest that this typology is complete, nor that connected collecting as detailed here is the new face of collecting, or other such radical transformation.

'Older' modes of communicative action and face-to-face engagement still hold value in collecting, with the bona fides of physically meeting a fellow collector or encountering a collectible *in-the-flesh* offering a valuable capacity for making judgements on a prospective acquisition.

What the internet, and particularly Web 2.0 applications afford however, is a greater reach in collecting practice, access to networks that are global, and ultimately, provision of artefacts from a far wider circle than was previously possible.

ORCID iD

Matt Grant https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0830-9646

Notes

1. And are hence definitionally distinct from 'hoards' in Pearce's (1995) sense.
2. Noting however that these interests do overlap and intersect. We each have interests in guitars generally, but for two authors this expertise is focused on solid-body electric guitars and for the other, archtop guitars. Ours is not the collection practice of the 'collector-bricoleur' of Levi-Strauss (1966), but a nuanced and specific practice of collecting an artefactual 'type'.
3. A prominent example is that of the *Dutch Archtop Guitar Museum*, and its carefully assembled collection of Epiphone archtop guitars by date and model.
4. On this point, we draw from Belk's (2014) survey of collecting habits through The Great Depression and the way that the building of collections was both distinct from and a resistance to prevailing consumption habits. In a small way, maintaining in useable order guitars that were, in the case of some of our own instruments, 50 years old has far more to it than the celebration of blind consumption.
5. We do of course also acknowledge the commercial imperatives that come with Web 2.0. As Belk (2014) highlights, 'it is sometimes difficult to discern where sharing ends and commerce begins' (7). Although engagement with networks of collectors is a fundamental component of our practice, with the seeking of information and 'knowledge' presenting as core to this, a major provocation in our use of Web 2.0 to facilitate collecting is built around the commercial trade of instruments.
6. In fact, as Constantinides and Foundation (2008) suggest, Web 2.0 and 'social media' are often used interchangeably as concepts (234).
7. Or simply, 'e-commerce'. Mata and Quesada's (2014) commentary on this aspect of Web 2.0 is particularly relevant.
8. A famous anecdote concerning British blues guitarist Eric Clapton underlines how this type of collecting has changed the experience for guitar enthusiasts. In November 1970 while on tour in Nashville, Tennessee Clapton purchased six mid-1950s model Fender Stratocasters from a second hand music store (first built in 1954 the 1950s models are amongst the most sought after Stratocaster.) He kept three to construct a hybrid guitar that would become known as 'Blackie' and his main stage guitar for some years, and gave the others to Pete Townshend of The Who, Steve Winwood with whom he'd played in the supergroup Blind Faith and George Harrison. Why a Beatle needed a gift of a mid-50s Stratocaster in 1970 becomes more an exercise in availability, rather than affordability. (Fender Musical Instruments Corporation website. Viewed

2.38 p.m. 12 April 2024 https://www.fender.com/articles/behind-the-scenes/in-1970-eric-clapton-bought-6-strats-at-a-nashville-music-store).

9. One of the authors for instance recalls encountering a (then rarely seen) 1966 Fender Mustang guitar at a pawnbrokers store in Brisbane, south-east Queensland in the early 1990s. Having physical contact with a guitar like that was rare enough; having the chance to purchase it was even more remarkable!
10. The CITES convention sought to reduce the amount of endangered woods being used in production of all manner of products however provided an exemption for musical instruments in November 2019, noting the relatively small amount used as compared, for example, with the production of furniture.
11. Examples include generic forums such as harmonycentral.com, musiciansfriend.com and vintageguitarhp.com, through to specialised groups including the 'Fender Stratocaster Players Group', a Facebook group, and https://www.jazzbuitar.be/.
12. On this, research undertaken by Ginsca and Popescu (2013) and Li et al. (2012) is particularly insightful. The discussion by Hughes et al. (2014) also offers useful discussion on how expertise is tested and claims of authority come to be discredited.
13. With descriptors including 'Most Honoured Senior Member', 'Senior Stratmaster', 'Strat-O-Master', and 'Strat-Talker'.
14. In Australia, a prominent example was represented by (the now defunct) Jackson's Rare Guitars.
15. On this point we note, from personal experience, the compulsion that checking favourite e-commerce sites provides, and the chagrin of partners kept awake by the glow of a computer screen late at night.

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