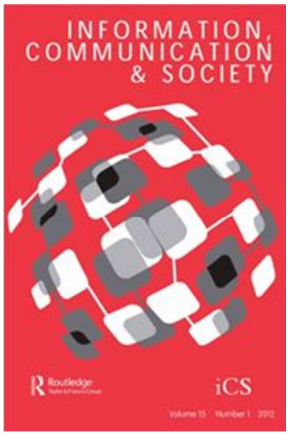

The connected collector: Collecting in a Web 2.0 world

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> 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; whatsever Nature hath wrought in things that want like and may be kept; shall be sorted and included. (Francis Bacon, in Spedding, Ellis and Heath, 1890, p. 335)

> 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. (John Steinbeck, 1962, p. 43)

Introduction

The practice of collecting has taken on new forms in the Web 2.0 world. Within this paper we seek to theorise the broad typology of *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as an explanatory framework for understanding the nature of collecting, and then move to argue how collecting is given specific form under this tripartite when enacted online. With regard the respective cases of each of the authors, the acquisition, maintenance and curation of items for our own collections (in our cases, collections of electric guitars) integrally involves the use of web technologies, with Web 2.0 functionality not only enabling processes for acquiring collectable artefacts, but also mediating the development of specialist knowledge and access to networks of other collectors. It is within this fusion of practices that Web 2.0 enabled collecting takes shape. Collecting, when mediated online, utilises Web 2.0 as a site of reconnaissance, commercial exchange and social interaction, and although these traits of collecting are age-old and (continue to) present in forms beyond the interfaces of Web 2.0, it is with

the ways that Web 2.0 applications mediate these practices that this paper takes its focus.

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*. 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 this extraordinary collection of exotica and curios was in itself startling, the collection equally sought to enlighten the viewer through the educative function that the assembled artefacts were intended to provoke.

Ruysch had certainly anticipated that his collection would be viewed and sought to ensure that it would be both informative and playful. The displayed artefacts were 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, p. 31) amongst other moral-ethical pronouncements. This was a collection that was not simply intended for its owner; this was no private collection to be hoarded away and kept from view. Ruysch expected that the artefacts

would 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 (Purcell and Gould, 1992, p. 18).

The collection was considered and purposeful, but equally obsessively constructed and curated. Each component played its part in relaying a broader narrative, fulfilling a purpose that reflected a bigger picture 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 transciency 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, p. 31)

Two significant features of Ruysch's collection stand as illustrative of the nature of collecting. The obsessive commitment to the collection – in both its detail and scale – provides a striking first point for the consideration of collecting outlined here.

Collecting is, in this regard, an obsessive compulsion undertaken to meet the demands of an imagined ideal. Far beyond being simply a random assemblage of objects, a collection stands as an organised and pre-considered arrangement of artefacts that illustrates an ideal (if only held by the collector).

A collection however also provides a physical manifestation of acquisition and containment. Bielecki (2012) points to this when suggesting 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" (p. 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" (p. 4). Noble's (2004) conceptualisation of the "accumulated being" of the collector as manifest in a displayed collection extends this line of thinking, with the collection providing "ontological proof" (p. 233) of the collector; a material point of recognition of the collector's presence. 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" (p. 1). Collections may well be intentioned, curated formations but they too provide insight into the psyche of the collector.

These are the markers of collecting we draw upon to pose the analysis of collecting outlined here. Firstly, the obsessive commitment to the practice of collecting and the seeming irrationality of the pursuit presents as a first point of analysis. But further to this, the insight offered by the collection to the presence of the collector (the 'ontological proof" of the collector) stands as marked and significant to the act of collecting.

We seek to derive from these points a nature of collecting to expose formations of collecting practice as it presents online. Arguing that these characteristics of categorisation and obsession find specific application in a digital world, this paper will suggest that the functionality that Web 2.0 enables provides a form of collecting practice worthy of attention. With Web 2.0 collecting takes on a certain shape; aspects of the practice of collecting find amplification and increased intensity, with the immediacy and scale that the web provides offering the collector an enhanced field of practice and a site for cultivating a presence as *a collector* liberated from geographic boundaries. The acquisition and curation of collected artefacts facilitated by Web 2.0 applications hence provides new terrain for considering collecting-as-practice, and it is with these dimensions of connected collecting that we focus here.

It has also caught our attention that 'the web' itself provides a metaphoric analogue for collecting practice. As a collection of objects, the structures and attendant practices of ordering, cataloguing and sorting 'bits' of information into a discernible whole that define the web draw on much the same sorts of practice that collecting prescribes. This is the modern equivalent, we suggest, of Bacon's 'goodly huge' cabinet noted in the epigraph to this paper, and it is with this neat overlap of the logics of the web and the nature of collecting as an act of acquiring-maintaining-curating that we suggest Web 2.0 collecting might be understood.

Collecting: a short methodological analysis

In applying the term 'collector', we draw on Wajda'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" (p. 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 (p. 24).

Collecting, then, is the activity of "gathering together and the setting aside of selected objects" (Pearce, 1995, p. 3), or as Russell Belk (1982) notes, "to collect is to acquire an interrelated set of possessions" (p. 85).

To provide some methodological nuance for this paper, our own practices of collecting are focused on the acquisition-maintenance-curation of specialised collections – the collection of electric guitars[2]. Further, the collections we maintain are assemblages of individual artefacts that are deliberatively (and deliberately) formed, with conscious (albeit sometimes impulsive) decision-making shaping both the maintenance and curation of the collections we house. We identify as 'amateur collectors' and 'passionate subjective consumers' of these specialist artefacts by Belk's definition (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 (that is, as playing musicians) and their communities through long-term contact with the cultures of those instruments we collect.

Aligning with Danet 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 provides 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 (for example, 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 to the acquisition-maintenance-curation of a collection. 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" (p. 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 collections we maintain. Although we each collect certain styles of guitar – for [AUTHOR 1] and [AUTHOR 2], the collection of post-Second World War models of 'solid body' guitar (predominantly) from the United States, and for [AUTHOR 3], 'archtop' guitars that have their lineage from the 1920s – the role that we each assume as arbiters of the legacies of these instruments presents as a prominent 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 of, to paraphrase loosely Michael Apple's (1993) concept, "official knowledge" of the object; something that comes to be handed down, collector-to-collector as a right of passage in collecting. The knowledge associated with these collections is far more loosely moderated and idiosyncratically acquired. Nonetheless there are prescribed and 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 defense 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 (1995) suggestion that collecting "may not be as materialistic as it first appears" (p. 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) assessment that "possessing and collecting are two prominent alternate goals that transcend the act of purchasing and consuming" (p. 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 (p. 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[5]. We undertake what Wajda (2008) suggests is the specialisation in "one form of ephemera" (p. 174), even though our respective interests as listed here overlap (we are, for example 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 the democratic potential of the Internet and its incumbent technologies (Brake, 2013; Blank, 2013, 2008; Blank and Reisdorf, 2012; Van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009; Hargittai and Walejko, 2008), 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. In taking this approach, we suggest that the relative accessibility to collecting markets has been expanded exponentially by the Internet. The role that Web 2.0 technologies play in mediating the generation of knowledge and in providing access to networks of collectors has also had an effect of widening participation. Previously 'closed' collecting cultures have now become far more participatory, with access to the information sources required to build a knowledge of certain forms of collectible and associated commercial infrastructures to participate in the acquisition of collectibles greatly expanded.

But we remain cautious in suggesting that participation is now universal. As a comparison, Hargittai and Walejko's (2008) analysis of participation in social media, for instance, provides insight into the complex socio-economic predictors that compliment participation and content creation. As they highlight, participation is linked closely with broader socio-demographic markers resulting in online dynamics of inclusion and power that parallel those observed in other (offline) social contexts. Further, Blank and Reisdorf's (2012) consideration of the basic technical ability and

literacies required to navigate Web 2.0 technologies highlights the sets of requisite skills required prior to participation commencing.

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, with access to networks of collectors globally, along with the capacity to rapidly generate knowledge of a given collectible presenting as major factors in the conduct of our collecting practices. Further, the possibility for immediate commercial transaction in the purchase of items and point-to-point freight results in a collecting practice that can literally be convened from the desktop.

In this regard, we conceptualise the internet and Web 2.0 as "platform" (O'Reilly, 2005) for our collecting practice. At its core, our usage of Web 2.0 is built around the development of dialogic, user-centred communication, with the Internet providing the technical 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, has:

> …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, p. 19; emphasis added)

What is particularly relevant within this suggestion is the dynamic social nature of these interactions. Functioning as more than "an identified group of technologies"

(Anderson, 2007, p. 5), Web 2.0 corresponds in this regard to modes of exchange between users; or what Belk (2014) characterises as "sharing"[6]. The possibility for engaging and sharing with a globally located network of fellow-collectors is a major point of development in the practice of collecting in Web 2.0.

It should also be highlighted that in conjunction with the emphasis most definitions of Web 2.0 give to its social capacity[7], its hyper-commercial functionality 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 orientations, 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" (p. 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 the blurring of lines between commercial transaction and altruistic sharing of knowledge. Although the dialogic engagement with networks of collectors is a fundamental component of our practice, so too is the commercial trade of instruments.

Fuchs (2017) for example contends that social experience-oriented sharing platforms (which include the various e-commerce sites we discuss for the purposes of this document) promise a "radical makeover of the world and to reverse commodity fetishism" (p. 294), in effect providing a human face to online interactions and a reverting to the pre-Industrialisation 'market and stall' style of commerce where a buyer would deal face-to-face with the maker of certain goods (say, for example, a shoemaker). This intimate exchange of monies for desired goods is imitated in the social experience-oriented sharing platforms of modern times, however Fuchs (2017)

argues that "capitalist sharing is in many respects not social at all, but rather highly instrumental" (p. 314). Pointing to the commercial operation hidden behind the socially-engaging online presence of many online traders, Fuchs (2017) highlights that the buyer may feel they receive personalised service, but in reality the 'shoes' were manufactured by contracted labour in a different location while other commercial entities provide the Internet connection to begin with, the commercial transaction and freight solutions (amongst other functions).

These considerations aside, this confluence of engagement, sharing and commerce does provide the terrain for an engaged and expanded collecting practice. In our own practices for seeking-out and trading guitars, we undertake *reconnaissance* and *engagement* with communities of collectors to seek out information around the relative state of 'the market' and availability of certain guitars. We peruse collector pages and discussion lists for information on maintaining our guitars and write-back to these same lists when curating our public presence as collectors. While we discuss this in further detail below, the access provided to not only to a network of collectors, mediated as this is by 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.

With regard to these considerations, we suggest that Web 2.0 enables capacity for undertaking the following:

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

- the *seeking* of information and generation of knowledge around a specific item and its collectibility; including not only the seeking of information around a specific guitar itself, but also more generally understandings of specific series', models, years of manufacture and so on, undertaken via manufacturer, collector and enthusiast wikis, blogs, message boards and similar;

- the commercial *trade* and purchase of items completed with e-commerce functionality, often conducted at significant geographic distance (including internationally);

- the subsequent *display* of artefacts as 'collected', via the curation of the public display of our collections (or aspects thereof);

- the *dialogue* of ownership, sharing of 'expertise' and demonstration of one's identity as a 'collector', undertaken in social media, personal websites and specialist message boards, wikis and blogs.

We suggest that these points function as hallmark features of the connected collector's practice. In an effort to expand on this categorization and offer some comparisons to collecting practice pre-Web 2.0, we cast the following observations, formulated in *Figure 1*, as an initial survey of connected collecting.

Figure 1: Typologies of Collecting practice

Period	Dimension	Observations
Pre-web 2.0	**Acquisition**	
		- In the pre-digital age guitars, like other musical instruments, were predominantly bought and sold in 'brick and mortar' retail spaces.

- 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.

- 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.

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). Often built around a physical 'brick and mortar' store-front, the collector's knowledge of specific items and their provenance was heavily informed by association with other geographically proximate collector-players.
- Although traditional media, predominantly in the form of magazines, offered an insight into a wider context of collecting, it was still predominantly via face-to-face communication

with the collector's proximate network that knowledge of a guitar and its upkeep was gained.

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 proximate network. The development of one's standing as a collector and as a person knowledgeable about the guitar (or aspects of a particular model) were negotiated as a process of peer mediation. As one became 'known' as knowledgable, 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 a collection were undertaken physically as a face-to-face interactions.

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 online guitar retail and collector sites, access to a global market of instruments is now possible. Specialist online stores (for example *www.archtop.com*, *www.myjazzzhome.com* and *guitarsnjazz.com*) list significant inventories, and have built around them communities of collectors and players similar to those once built around a 'brick and mortar' storefront, but now with global reach.
- Further to this increased reach of access to instruments, 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 according to 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.
- 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 per se, but associated with groupings of knowledgeable collector/owners. As well as advertising the guitar, the interactive nature of these spaces allows for dialogue. In this way, these spaces act as a space in which members can show their expertise and competencies – transmitting their knowledge to the group. Groups such as the Facebook group *High-end Guitars Australia* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/662762150502678/) combine a group-moderated listing of instruments for sale 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 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 and networks of others 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 according to physical proximity, one can now hear clips of a guitar being played, and see detailed images (including

those of its general aesthetic, construction and build quality).

Curation

- Web 2.0 provides an ability to reach a global audience and demonstrate one's knowledge of guitar. Newsgroups such as *www.rec.music.makers.guitar.jazz* and *www.jazzbuitar.be*, for example, offer a specific 'jazz guitar' nuanced forums. 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, with recognition of this expertise now distributed beyond the centre of a geographically located community.

Discussion

Acquisition

The first major point of definition in understanding a Web 2.0 collecting practice presents in terms of the acquisition of collectibles. Although the process of (commercial) trading and exchanging items is a major function of this component of Web 2.0 mediated collecting, facilitated as this is by a range of generic (such as *eBay* and *Gumtree.com*) and specialist (for example, *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 capacity for the acquisition of knowledge around a particular instrument that is profoundly changed in Web 2.0 contexts.

Prior to Web 2.0, usual haunts for collectible guitars included a suite of specialty 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[8]. 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*.

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 searches for comparable items. Where, prior to the interconnection of web 2.0, values were set against age-old measures of 'supply-

demand' and the basic 'cost-value' of the item within relatively small and geographically defined 'markets', the rapid ability to now establish a price point and locate comparable items is present. This also includes the capacity to surveil, via mobile technologies, prices of comparable items whilst 'in-store' at physical retail outlets.

This aspect of the collecting tripartite is profoundly affected by the functionality of Web 2.0. Collectors now have ready and immediate access to a global network of collectors, retailers and dealers with the acquisition of instruments now conducted with global reach[9]. Parallel development in the freight of guitars and the enhanced understanding of how to ship guitars within collector communities combines with this functionality for the enhanced reconnaissance of the market and acquisition of artefacts[10].

Maintenance

Beyond the acquisition of an item, the development of understandings around an instrument's provenance and upkeep is also be readily accessible via Web 2.0. 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; as one example, the group *Friends of the Archtop Guitar* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/5744428469/) has in excess of 8,500 members, with discussion including detailed specialist knowledge about instruments, their construction, history, appreciation and aesthetics. As detailed earlier in this paper, this provision of knowledge about the instrument is a profound aspect of Web 2.0 and its influence on collecting.

As with the comments above detailing the limited reach that pre-internet commercial trade of instruments had, so too was the *trade* of information. Typically limited to word-of-mouth expertise of an individual/s (usually attached to a physical music store, or local 'expert' collectors/players), or old media (guitar magazines and instructional videos as predominant examples of this form), 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, but also, how expertise is 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 suggest is associated with the presentation of an online presence as 'a collector'. In line with commentary that suggests that Web 2.0 is marked by the capacity it enables for user-generated material (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007; Brake, 2013), this component of the tripartite involves relaying an online persona through 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 some Web 2.0 collectors may in fact stop at the *acquisition* stage of this tripartite, or 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, the outright presentation of a collection and formulation of one's presence as the focal point for the development of

an online community. 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 we note that this act of curation is geared toward the 'outward' display of a collection and collecting persona (as opposed to the seeking of information, advice and guidance). It is with this that the "accumulated being" of the collector is drawn out (Noble, 2004), with the curation and display of a collection denoting something about the collector and the authority for expertise that might subsequently be claimed.

Conclusions

The principle contention of this paper is that Web 2.0 technologies enable an enhanced practice of collecting. We assert that pre-internet, collectors of guitars were limited to (predominantly) geographically situated communities of collectors, typically congregated around 'brick and mortar' stores. With the advent of the Internet, and more specifically Web 2.0 and its capacities for dialogic interaction and exchange, collecting now assumes a global reach. When mediated via Web 2.0 applications specifically, the immediate access to collectables (or at least, their mediated visual and aural display), combines with a capacity for refining the knowledge required to seek out and acquire objects, to shape collecting practice and the conduct of the individual collector.

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 curation and presentation of the Self as 'collector' all draw from the specific functionality that Web 2.0 applications provide.

To draw this paper to a close, we offer the following summary 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':

- *Observation 1:* As implied by the case study of Frederick Ruysch noted earlier in this paper, and in conjunction with pronouncements in the literature (Purcell and Gould, 1992; Muensterberger, 1994) we suggest collecting at its core is an *obssessive* compulsion; or as Clifford (1988) notes, collecting functions as "an excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to have" (p. 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 the affordances offered by an *always-on* internet[14].

- *Observation 2:* Collectors are defined by their collections, and far from constituting random assemblages of objects, collections "shape the identities of their users" (Noble, 2004, p. 1). Collections are intentioned and stand as considered and curated formations. When activated via Web 2.0 however, the prospect for reaching a widened (global) network, and 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.

- *Observation 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 similarly comes through one's collection and prowess in speaking authoritatively through the formation of the collection. Curating a collection is in this sense as much about curating an online persona, with Web 2.0 functionality for displaying expertise and seniority enabling this process of generating authority to proceed.

In drawing on the tripartite of *acquisition-maintenance-curation* as a framework for considering connected collecting and as a foundation point for these observations, we do not seek to suggest that collecting, in principal, is *fundamentally* different in Web 2.0 contexts. We do however suggest that the affordances Web 2.0 provides variously enhance and provoke aspects of collecting that are age-old. The observations outlined here indicate this. We similarly do not seek to suggest that this typology is complete, nor that connected collecting as detailed here is a 'new face' of collecting, or other such radical transformation. 'Older' modes of communicative interaction 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* still offering a valuable capacity for making judgments on a prospective acquisition. What the internet and particularly Web 2.0 applications provide however is a greater reach in collecting practice, access to enlarged networks and ultimately, enhanced provision of collectible artefacts from a far wider circle than was previously possible.

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 [AUTHOR 2] and [AUTHOR 1] this expertise is focused on solid-body electric guitars and for [AUTHOR 3], 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 (1995) 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 are, in the case of some of our own instruments, 50 years old has far more to it than the celebration of blind consumption.

[5] This is in itself not without conflicts. Simon Garfield (2016) argues in his work *Timekeepers: How the world became obsessed with time* that the collection of wristwatches and clocks held its own pitfalls and that having more than one timepiece operating simultaneously is "...un-nerving: one watch provides us with the confidence that we know the time accurately; two watches, each showing a slightly different time, surely shatters this illusion. And then there's the cost: spending tens of thousands of pounds on an item that was once essential but is now redundant requires, one would imagine, a fair bit of persuasion" (p. 203). The authors can and have been asked similarly 'If you can't play more than one at a time why do you need so many?'

[6] 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" (p. 7).

[7] In fact, as Constantinides and Foundation (2008) suggest, Web 2.0 and 'social media' are often used interchangeably as concepts (p. 234).

[8] [AUTHOR 1] 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!

[9] In contrast with the pre-Web collecting world as noted by Landes (1983) when observing a clock and wristwatch sale at Sotheby's auction house where deals were struck behind closed doors before the auction even began, effectively controlling the flow of collectible items at the discretion of a comparatively few, elite registered dealers.

[10] However there are aspects of the acquisition of guitars and the opened reach of trading guitars internationally via Web 2.0 that still carry caveats. For example, recent prohibition in the commercial trade of rare and exotic timbers by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (2016) 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 is hence barred. In this instance, federal law still holds precedent over the otherwise 'open' nature of the internet.

[11] Examples include generic forums such as *www.harmonycentral.com*, *www.musiciansfriend.com* and *www.vintageguitarhp.com*, through to specialised groups including the 'Fender Stratocaster Players Group', a facebook group.

[12] On this, research undertaken by Ginsa and Popescu (2013) and Li, Ma, Zhang and Huang (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] 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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