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Vinyl Records and Old Computers as Material Culture: Perspectives on Collecting and Donations to Museums

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Résumé de l'article

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Résumé

Cet article vise à élaborer une approche antiréductionniste de deux domaines non élitistes de collections : la musique populaire et les vieux ordinateurs. Il part d'une perspective configurationnelle en se concentrant sur un ensemble psychologique, sociologique, économique et pédagogique des motivations des collectionneurs. Ces quatre catégories de motivations fonctionnent en termes de valorisation de l'ego, de hausse du statut social, de spéculation en vue de faire du profit, et d'acquisition et de transmission de connaissances au sujet des objets de collection concernés. Elles peuvent également se concevoir comme des formes diverses de profit, à savoir profit psychologique, sociologique, économique ou pédagogique. Les amateurs de musique collectionnent des formats de supports, des genres, des interprètes, des maisons de disques ou des producteurs particuliers, ou une combinaison de ces éléments. La communauté des collectionneurs de vieux ordinateurs consiste en collectionneurs et usagers, passionnés et francophones, de matériel informatique original mais obsolète. Cette dernière étude de cas commence et se termine par un conflit au sujet de la fondation d'un musée consacré à l'histoire de la technologie informatique.

Abstract

This article aims to develop an anti-reductionist approach to two non-elite collecting realms: popular music and old computers. The article applies a configurational perspective by focusing on a set of psychological, sociological, economic, and educational collectors' motives. These four motivational categories are operationalized in terms of ego-enlargement, augmentation of social status, speculation in view of profit, and acquiring and transmitting knowledge about the collectibles concerned. They may also be conceived as various forms of profit: psychological, sociological, economic, and educational profit. Music fans collect particular formats of music supports, genres, performers, record labels, producers, or combinations of these characteristics. The community of old-computer collectors consists of passionate, French-speaking collectors and users of original but obsolete computer material. The latter case study starts and ends with a conflict on the foundation of a museum on the history of computer technology.

Historically spoken, two types of private collections and hence two types of private collectors can be distinguished: elite collections focusing on artworks, antiques, and antiquarian books on the one hand, and collections of mass-produced objects such as stamps, dolls, and cultivated plants on the other. Objects of the first type are often unique (artworks, and books predating movable type, for example) and their collectors belong to social, economic, intellectual, and, in the past, royal, aristocratic, and clerical, elites. The second type only appeared after the Industrial Revolution; it includes members of the working and middle classes too, people of all ages (including children), and implies a democratization of the collecting practice. Today, both types of

collections are represented in museums (public collectors), although the first type of collection generally elevates the prestige of the museum (as well as that of private collectors) much more than does the second type, to the point where most of the first type do not wish to be compared with the second—although they may have belonged to the second type in an earlier phase of their own lives. Not everybody is a collector, nor are all human societies in the world museum-focused; however, the number of collectors and museums is important enough to seriously consider collecting as a personal (individual) and collective (cultural or national) identity support (Belk 1995; Pearce 1993[1992], 1995; Pomian 1987, 2003). This latter thesis implies that collecting should be studied as a metaphor for something else, which largely transgresses the limits and actual object matter of the collection. In this article, I focus on the study of private collecting, and compare collectors' motives in two particular domains of material culture—popular music and old computers—in order to illustrate my theses. I start with a brief presentation of the collecting contexts of my case studies, the first one to be situated in the Anglo-Saxon world, the second in France.[1] This will be followed by an elaboration of my configurational perspective on collectors' motivations and, next, an application of this perspective on the two case studies.

Context 1: Music Becomes Material Culture

In 1877, Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, nicknamed the "talking machine," a device with cylinders to record and reproduce sounds. After having worked for ten years on the invention of electricity, Edison improved his phonograph in 1887. At about the same time, Emile Berliner further elaborated this technique and replaced the cylinder by a flat disc, the gramophone made of shellac.[2] In 1899, in the U.S. alone, 151,000 phonographs were produced, while in 1897, 500,000, and, in 1899, 2.8 million gramophones went across the counter. In the 1920s, more than 100 million discs were sold, until the Depression almost killed the record industry (Shuker 2010: 15). The progress of the quickly rising—and then temporarily stagnating—record industry implied a democratization of the possibility of listening to music at home whereby the physical presence of musicians became superfluous. Music became more and more a commodity, a "thing," and thus part and parcel of material culture. Between the First and Second World Wars, collectors focused on classical music (mainly opera) and popular music, such as jazz, big band, country and western, rhythm and blues, and "ethnic" music from the various immigrant groups. Jazz, like blues, came on the market slowly.[3] Collectors posed as archivists and culture defenders, and focused on authenticity, scarcity, monetary value, and completism.

Music fans used to collect particular formats, genres, performers, record labels, producers, or combinations of these characteristics. Cylinders were current at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Shellac 78s, containing three to four minutes of music per side, dominated the market from 1912 and were replaced by vinyl records (33 and 45 rpms) around 1952. Vinyl LPs have 20 to 25 minutes recording volume per side; other popular formats were the EPs and the 10" and 12" dance singles. The C90 compact cassette audiotapes, with 90 minutes' recording capacity, became popular in the mid-1960s because of their small size and convenience. In the 1970s, the audio cassette player was integrated with the transistor radio and that change enabled amateurs to copy music. In the late 1970s, three times more cassettes than records were sold (Shuker 2010: 60). In 1982, Sony introduced the CD (compact disc), with 78 minutes, recording time and in 1988 the sales of CDs overtook that of other formats. MP3players, with their gigantic storage capacity for digital downloads (often more than 10,000 songs), arrived on the market in the late 1990s. Since then, artists no longer depend exclusively on record companies for diffusing their music. However, many consumers, including collectors, now download music for free; in this the artists are the losing party.

Context 2: Old Computers and Video Games

In 2007, a so-called Informatics Museum was inaugurated on the top floor of the Grande Arche

de la Défense in Nanterre, close to Paris. In fact, this "Musée de l'Informatique" was not a museum but a special exhibition about the history of computer technology. At the occasion, the organizer of this event, invited several members of a French community of old-computer collectors to support his follow-up project of a permanent museum: the "Musée de la Défense." Initially, the organizer was completely unknown within the community, and on closer acquaintance, the community had no interest in cooperating with him. The man's perceived inexperience and personality met with insurmountable resistance (Clais 2011: 448-55). This raises the question of what this community of collectors represents, and why its members resisted this museum project, which at first glance seems to be completely in line with their own interests. I start by answering the first question; the second will be answered in the conclusion.

The community under examination consists of passionate, French-speaking users and collectors of original, obsolete computer equipment dating from 1977 to 1995. This period started with the release, in 1977, of the first widely-available micro personal computer (PC), the Apple II, and ended with the disappearance, in 1995, of almost all manufacturers—with the exception of Apple—that competed with the standard PC. Within this community of old-computer collectors, organized around the (francophone) Internet forum Silicium, goods and services circulate but are, technically speaking, obsolete, and thus excluded from the contemporary informatics economy. Community members collect and use old PCs; pocket computers; video games; computer screens; complete pieces of furniture with video games that could previously have been found in pubs next to pinball machines; large metal cases with computers for networks with databases; and the corresponding manuals, publicity, and magazines. Sources for these old materials are eBay; secondhand shops; sidewalks during municipal garbage collection; the dump; cases of enterprises; shops specializing in video games; gifts; and exchange within the community.

At the core of the community is the Internet forum Silicium, a nucleus of specialists with other amateurs moving around like satellites. This fast-growing community is part of a larger world of people passionate about old informatics and video games. It is a universe of so-called geeks (literally: "obsessive," but here used as an honourary nickname) who share a number of cultural characteristics, such as the ideal of the Internet's founders: to make all knowledge accessible for as large a worldwide audience as possible, thanks to the "miracles" of informatics. The community has its origin in a circle of friends that, in spite of its fast growth, tries to maintain itself with a functioning based on gifts of old computer material and mutual services in the form of advice and repairs. The community spirit is preserved in the notion of reciprocity.

Against Mono-Causal Explanations

We are dealing here with collectors within two particular realms of material culture. In his study of a local art market in the U.S., Stuart Plattner (1996) distinguished three axes needed to understand collectors of high art: the motivations of ego-enlargement, augmentation of social status, and investment; in other words, psychological, sociological, and economic drives. I think that these three axes are important for the implication that one cannot reduce the motivations of collectors to one axis (a mono-causal explanation) only. This is why I develop an anti-reductionist or configurational perspective, which can also be applied to non-elite collections. I also would like to add a fourth set of motivations: to acquire and transmit knowledge about a certain category of objects, an axis that I call educational. I developed this perspective in previous publications dealing with other collecting domains (Van der Grijp 2006 and 2014); however, for a good understanding of my analysis it is necessary to present—and thus repeat—some of its major components. So, what is this configurational approach of collecting all about? Here, as a first part of the answer, I will briefly deal with my four sets of motivations, beginning with the psychological or psychoanalytical one.

(1) The psychoanalytically inspired psychologist Werner Muensterberger observes among collectors that, "beneath their longing for possessions there was often a memory of early traumata or disillusionment, which then shifted the need for people to a narcissistic need for substitution functioning as their equivalent" (1994: 229). He adds that "jealousy and a competitive spirit plays a large part in [their] restless search

for personal triumph" (1994: 245), also known as ego-enlargement. Muensterberger defines his research object as "the causality of the drive to collect," and it is his method to "explore the generative conditions leading up to the cause of the collectors' obsessional infatuation with the objects" (1994: 8, 7), which he finally identifies as a lack.

For Jean Baudrillard (1968, 1994), who also adopted a psychoanalytical framework, collecting is not a simple substitute for an active genital sexuality, but he still sees it as a regression to the anal stage: accumulation, aggressive retention, etc. I see this perspective as problematic, since it gives quick and easy answers to complex cultural questions, apparently without necessity for empirical verification because the answer is already there. However, we have to admit that there is something sexual about the phenomenon, which already appears in the age of young collectors of both sexes between the ages of seven and fourteen years. Adults may take up their collecting habits again around the age of thirty years, i.e., after having more or less encapsulated their sexual drives in a marriage or other fixed relationship, but at this stage the choice of collections seem to be gendered (Anstett and Gélard 2012).

In this kind of psychological and psychoanalytical proposition (see also Calloway 2004; Stewart 1993), I observe three problems: (a) they tend to reduce collecting to imaginary values; (b) they are searching for a mono-causal explanation; and (c) they tend to belittle collectors' motives—for example, by comparing them to childish behavior.[4] Although the psychological dimension is part and parcel of my own configurational approach, these reductionist tendencies are diametrically opposed to it. If the value of collectibles were only imaginary, how would we ever be able to communicate about it? I wish to contest this reduction of collecting to an act of non-communication: collecting implies social, economic, and cultural communication. Moreover, those reductionist psychological perspectives in terms of innate desires maintained until adulthood explain neither why everybody is not a collector, nor why some collectors specialize, for example, in objects explicitly referring to the past. The motivations of the latter kind of collectors, who populate the case studies in this article, should also be looked for in historical escapism and nostalgia, as they enact a kind of restoration of a lost world by making it manageable, habitable and emotionally compelling in a microcosm or time capsule.

(2) The sociological motive can be characterized as the augmentation of social status. Pierre Bourdieu (1979) demonstrated the link between socio-economic backgrounds and the taste for esthetics, art, and culture. Much earlier, Thorstein Veblen (1934[1899]) had made a socio-economic, polemic, and ironic analysis of a leisure class that does not work—and if its members work, they do so only symbolically. In line with this kind of sociological theories, we could say that the creation of a collection equals—or at least stands for—the creation of culture. A collection is a social identity marker (or identity cocoon) that provides cultural capital and augments the social status of the collector. Although, as an anthropologist, I would not reduce my configurational approach of collecting to this sociological dimension, I think it an error to eliminate it completely from an anthropological analysis, as proposed, for example, by my French colleagues Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudi-Ballini (2008: 272) in their study of tribal-art collectors.

(3) Collecting can also be, and often is, a form of economic investment. Collectors can sell some of their collectibles, generate profit, and reinvest this profit in their collection. In so doing, they can accumulate a reserve of personal capital that may be materialized, for example, after retirement for making extended holidays, and it may also be useful as a reserve in case of economic necessity. There are many illusions about the profit collectors make with their collection, but at least some collectors do have success with their sales—today this can be via the Internet, in particular the eBay auction site.[5] Some collectors even become professional dealers (Van der Grijp 2012). The notion of profit may also be seen as an economic metaphor, which can be applied to the psychological and sociological drives. Then, the ego-enlargement, the augmentation of social status, and the increase of capital are three different forms of profit (Van der Grijp 2006).

(4) The educational drive concerns acquiring and transmitting knowledge about a certain category of objects. Collectors may assume that an increase in knowledge goes hand in hand with the ownership of the objects concerned.

Collectors of books, for example, think that one needs to have the books in one's private library, and thus have access to their contents day and night—it would not be sufficient to go to a public library. This also holds for other collectibles: the daily and physical contact would be a precondition for knowledge. Outsiders can consider this critically as a rationalization for collecting, since it provides collectors with a more socially acceptable explanation for their passion. Collectors, however, do learn about their objects; many become real specialists, and like to diffuse or teach this knowledge to others, and some even donate their collection to a museum intime (Higonnet 2009; Smith Theobald and McCarthy 2011; Van der Grijp 2011, 2014, 2015). Here too, there is a kind of profit: that of knowledge about one's collectibles. Below, I analyze my two case studies, organized around the four categories of motivations distinguished here (psychological, sociological, economic, and educational), in order to illustrate these theses.

Psychological Drives: Nostalgia and Ego-enlargement

This section will deal with the psychological aspects of my two case studies, in particular the dimensions of ego-enlargement and nostalgia. Ego-enlargement indeed plays an important role among private collectors of records.[6] Many record collectors are fans, a term usually associated with teenagers. Shuker (2010) proposes to extend the meaning of the word "fan" and apply it to interest, in an intellectual sense, in the music as such, and thus not to limit it to a focus on the persona of the performer.[7] This also corresponds with the self-conception of a music collector as "music lover," "record collector," or someone who is "engaged" in certain performers or genres. Most record collectors started as adolescents between their twelfth and fourteenth year and intensified their collecting when their available revenues increased. With more financial power, they were able to compensate for their initially timid purchases as a youth.

Several apparently well-read informants of Shuker referred to Walter Benjamin's thesis that collectors want to put order in chaos (1992[1931]). Some interpret the collecting of music as a mixture of arrested adolescence and clinging to youth. This reminds me of Clais' neology of "*adulescents*" (see below).[8] Shuker concludes that musical taste comes about via nostalgia and personal memory, whereby collecting is a negotiation of the relationship of the collectors with their own past. Cataloguing one's own collection emphasizes a serious engagement in collecting and transforms a cultural mass product into a personal construction, if not a "construction of the self" (Shuker 2010: 128); in other words, ego-enlargement. Collectors may expose smaller collections in their lounge or study, whilst they may stock larger collections in a separate room with the implicit subtitle: "this is part of who I am." Often, this is preceded by a negotiation with one's life partner: "My wife tolerates its notable presence [in our living room] as she is aware of how much music ... means to me" (Shuker 2010: 133).

This theme also returns—in our second context—in Clais' research (2011) on old-computer collectors: the partner or family may or may not be sympathetic toward this form of leisure. Many collectors dream, for example, of a special space where they can unpack their boxes and show their collection of old PCs to their visitors. The Internet forum Silicium includes mainly male amateurs, owners of old computers and players of video games, who started their passion, usually as adolescents, in the 1980s during the early stages of this medium. On the forum, they present themselves ironically as *adulescents*, a contraction of the French words *adolescents* and *adultes,* in other words, persons who reached an adult age without wanting to leave an adolescent lifestyle. The forum members, however, oppose themselves to a genuine adolescent public with stigmatized practices.[9]

They also defend themselves against the prejudice that they would only have one passion and be monomaniac. And yet, they see their passion as potentially pathological. In the words of one collector, Nicholas, this passion would hide itself "as a monster" in every collector, a monster whose greed can suddenly awaken when collectors are facing the object of their desire. One of the reproaches to "ordinary collectors" is their greediness, which is seen as withholding computers from passionate users for whom these would actually be destined. The expression "ordinary collector," including the quotation marks, as

distinct from the passionate user of old computers (who is also a collector), comes from my part. In Clais's (2011) text, this distinction, a paradox, is not always very clear, to say the least. According to Fabrice, another forum member, ordinary collectors are persons "with whom the passion gained the upper hand. They say to be friends, but when the cult object arrives and nothing can stop them any longer, they shoot each other in the back" (qtd. Clais 2011: 197; my translation).

All community members are collectors, but they do not claim this qualification and reject the image of the ordinary collector. This rejection refers to an imaginary opposition between the ideal of exchange of gifts and the practices and urges they suppose that typical collectors have. Another critique of ordinary collectors is that their search for material is frantic and unlimited, that they are only interested in enlarging their egos through a feeling of superiority based on the possession of the largest collection. The final reproach is not that they want to possess old computers, but that they do not use them. An ordinary collector would accumulate old computers and accompanying equipment without any order and let them degrade, unused. Thus, within this discourse, the ordinary collector is associated with destruction, with death. A passionate user would be "rational" because he—rarely a she—studies old computer programs.[10] Fabrice, quoted above, wants to cultivate himself through his old computers. One of his motivations is: "I collect objects about which I dreamt as a child, but which I couldn't afford then financially" (qtd. in Clais 2011: 207; my translation). Here, we again recognize the motive of nostalgia and a compensation for financial constraints of one's childhood.

Moreover, the image of an ideal relation with the computer is hinted at: passionate collectors are the only legitimate owners since they love their old computers because of the particular user experience the computers provide. The Informatics Museum is also judged negatively (see below) because the computers do not function and thus do not produce any physical user experience. This is equivalent to death; "an old computer must live" (Clais 2011: 209). Passionate users bring old computers alive and do justice to that for which they have been made; a museum does not. Clais is right in observing here an essentialist approach to these objects. An old machine would have an essence that results from its function. Moreover, there is an implicit comparison to (human) life: a machine is being used and "lives," breaks down and "dies." Fabrice and his friends save these old computers and video games from death by repairing and using them. The collection also exists and, in a sense, lives independent of the collector, seeming to impose its will as it prompts the collector to spend excessive time and money on it. At times like these the collector must be made aware of this by an outside source.

Sociological Motive: Augmentation of Status

A collection also functions as an identity marker by which the owners are ascribed cultural capital, thus enhancing their social status. The word "record"—in context 1—is usually associated with vinyl, and collectors seem to be motivated rather by nostalgia (the music/medium from their youth), aura (of the performer), and authenticity (first recordings) than by sound fidelity. Vinyl is the collectible of excellence, often combined with CDs and digital downloads, although collectors may not consider the latter as genuine collectibles. The linguistic usage, typography, images, and layout of the cover art have much appeal.[11] From the 1960s until the 1980s, generational subcultures identified themselves with particular music forms, to which the now-adult collectors have remained loyal. Shuker (2010) interviewed seventy record collectors in 2002-2003, with follow-up interviews in 2007-2008, and categorizes his informants in two groups, with some overlap. The first group consists of those forty years of age and up, mainly men with a preference for vinyl who collect rock and pop from 1945 to 1980, exhibiting a love for the music and attention to rarity and connected economic value. The second group is younger (under forty) and collects on CD popular music of the last twenty years, mainly non-mainstream music such as punk, goth, new wave, and rap. There are also the exceptions, who are interested in the music of the 1950s through 1970s. These are still mainly men but, in this second group, the number of women

is considerably higher. Here too, there is attention to rarity and economic value, but the emphasis is rather on the music's aesthetic quality.

Women are thus a clear minority among record collectors. Michelle Wauchope, for example, says that "there have been times I have had to 'prove' to other collectors that I am not a girl who simply likes collecting because their boyfriend got them into it… which is frustrating and sad" (qtd. in Shuker 2010: 35). Male collectors demonstrate knowledge, cultural capital, and power (augmentation of social status) through competitive display. Successful artists are mainly male, and the most gifted rock musicians, or who are considered as such, are men. Many male collectors identify with their music heroes and associated cultural capital. Rock music is indeed a cultural sector dominated by males, and male collectors traditionally have larger incomes and, according to Shuker, feel less obliged to spend this on home and children. Within Western societies, engagement with technology is seen as typically male, and it would concern "serious music," whereby seriousness is also seen as typically male—earlier, I coined this "serious business" (Van der Grijp 2006). Moreover, the record industry has historically been dominated by men (Leonard 2007). Female collectors in Shuker's study emphasize the use value of the collected music and are less obsessed with quantity, rarity and monetary value. Shuker refers here to Blom's observation (2002: 200) that book collectors place the collected books in their library and they may catalogue them, but do not necessarily read them.[12] Record collectors, in contrast to bibliophiles, do listen to the collected music and, often, are also actively musical. Nine of the sixty-seven informants interviewed by Shuker played in music groups and four were DJs. In contrast to book, stamp, and art collectors, where quality (historic or artistic significance, authenticity, and condition) seems to be more important than quantity, some record collectors emphasize the quantity of recordings. Female collectors, five times less numerous than men (Shuker 2010: 45), are not among the "big" collectors.

During Shuker's first visit with him in 2001, the Australian collector Peter Dawson, for example, owned about 700 CDs, 100 LPs, 200 45s and 50 cassettes. By Shuker's second visit in 2008, Peter had sold many of his old format records via eBay and he now owned, in addition to many concert DVDs, about 1,000 CDs. Geoff Stahl, a Canadian DJ and academic, had 11,000 records in 2001, and in 2008 almost 16,000. Geoff's method: "I probably download about twenty albums/singles/EPs/12-inches a week.... I'm still gathering, hoarding, collecting, scouring, for new music all the time. I constantly want to hear interesting sounds. It's one of the primary ways I relate to the world and other people" (qtd. in Shuker 2010: 179-80). To me, the latter statement echoes with Daniel Miller's observation about his informant Murray, for whom music "also represents a collation of his own past, since it is through music above all that [Murray] relates to particular women he has known, times he has been through, the best parties and the weirdest places" (Miller 2008: 278).

According to Shuker, completism is linked to the hunt aspect: when collections are completed, they are sometimes sold in order to start new ones. One-third of Shuker's informants, however, distanced themselves from accumulation and completism and emphasized selection and (good) taste. With this they implied, in terms of Bourdieu (1979: 326), the development of cultural capital and corresponding social identity and status, particularly within their own peer group. Examples are the use of one's own collection for self-education and scholarship in popular music studies. The personal passion for this kind of music has probably been at the basis for choosing their academic study field. Thus, the private collection becomes an archive and source for research that results in connoisseurship and social prestige. Most informants in Shuker's research collect rock, including genres such as heavy metal, blues, soul, reggae, and punk, and only a small minority collects jazz and classical music. Next to music recordings in their various forms, they also collect rock and pop memorabilia such as music instruments, posters, gold discs, autographs, and a large amount of ephemera—auction houses make good money with it (Doggett and Hodgson 2003). The appeal would be in the romantic aura of musical artifacts that seem to give symbolic access to the original artists and make that collectors partake somehow in the social status (aura) of the performers.

Old-computer collectors, in context 2, acquire recognition as a specialist by composing

a reference collection, studying it, creating one's own website, and frequenting forums and thus delimiting one's territory. Passionate types love to extend their knowledge about their collection, and anybody who can contribute to such knowledge earns recognition. Computer collectors start their career because of their passion and are usually not driven by career desire in order to gain prestige. Eventually, the latter drive can come to the fore, although not every collector acquires the status of specialist.[13]

Economic Drive: Pursuit of Profit

The economic motivation concerns the idea of investment. The acquisition process of music—context 1—from second-hand and new shops, flea markets, record fairs, and the Internet would, for many record collectors, yield more pleasure than the actual ownership of the music. Like in other collecting realms, eBay is popular among record collectors. As an informant expresses it concisely: "[I like] eBay because it makes searching so easy and because you can find things in 20 minutes that you've never seen in 20 years of record-store-going" (qtd. in Shuker 2010: 123). The trade via Internet is not entirely positive, according to another collector: "[it is] opening up many new opportunities to find records but it's also negatively affected prices upwards because of increased demand on a still-limited supply" (Shuker 2010: 190). About half of Shuker's informants buy one to three records a week. The rise of eBay, often used in combination with "traditional" record shops, has widened the search potential considerably. Many collectors trade their records, but according to Shuker, this is to extend their own collection rather than for financial profit.

The members of the computer collectors' community, in context 2, think that they are the only legitimate ones to determine the "right price" for old computers. During the legendary community's origin from 1995 to 1999, there was, according to forum member Philippe, "no standard price, no Argus; that was completely unknown; at that time hardly anybody was interested in this kind of thing" (qtd. in Clais, 2011: 315; my translation).[14] After this Golden Age, i.e., a kind of pre-modern economy,[15] followed an age of a market with speculation. Philippe says:

> Since it didn't cost anything at the time, I was able to construct a collection of 130 machines [computers]. Now, all this has stopped. I don't receive anything for free any longer. At the time, I had my own website. When people looked on the Internet for information about old computers, they immediately chanced upon my site. If they had something to give away, they automatically came across me. Often, they were computer scientists and they found it marvelous what I did and so they sent me all kind of boxes with computers and equipment. Sometimes, they even paid the postage. (Qtd. in Clais 2011: 315-6; my translation)

In other words, generous donors sent obsolete objects without any financial value to someone who was able to value their non-financial aspects. At the time, collectors such as Philippe felt that they had control within the market. As the market developed they felt deprived of this power and, now, they point to organizations who contributed to that. One of them is eBay, which published an Argus with prices that, according to the the members of the computer collectors' community, have no basis. Now, not only collectors but also secondhand dealers, who know very little about informatics, use eBay's Argus for reference. On the forum Silicium, eBay has a negative image, captured in the oft-used expression *eBaise*, a French play on words referring to the presupposition that it is a rip-off ("*qu'on s'y fait baiser quoi qu'il arrive*") (in Clais 2011: 340).

In spite of the criticism of eBay, members of the community still use this auction site. Extra criticism is reserved for snipers—those who cunningly make an offer during the last seconds, in contrast to the expected attitude of solidarity. Rhod says: "If I see that a member of our forum or another has made an offer already, I would leave it like that and wouldn't overbid" (qtd. in Clais 2011: 390; my translation). Rhod voices a sentiment held by the community. The community members consider the total of existing old computers with accompanying equipment as a collective source from which they should be the only ones to draw, like fishermen ideally treat a marine resource. Although the latter may fish a part out of it, they also preserve the resource

as such in order to be able to continue their particular activity in the future. This is also why members protect their own old computers against destruction and oppose themselves against any action, such as the treasuring by ordinary collectors, that would obstruct their own "legitimate" access to old material.

The forum Silicium bans internal auctions to prevent the driving up of prices. A price system with three layers came about within the community: (a) Members buy an old computer from secondhand dealers for a low price; for example, 10 to 15 euros.[16] (b) If necessary, they repair the computer, which, when it is in good order, they may resell within the community for 30 to 40 euros. (c) In so doing they help the other members, since they decline a profit via eBay, where prices are some twenty to fifty euros higher. Transactions opposing such profit are motivated by the argument that if I sell to X an old computer for 30 euros that would make 70 euros on eBay, I also know that Y would do the same for me, that is, sell me a computer for 30 euros whose actual value is 70 euros. This system is based on the trust within the community that no one resells the acquired computers via eBay. Moreover, this internal price system is published on the forum so that outsiders can get to know about it, including the economic model of reciprocity against cost price plus free mutual help.

And yet, some community members transgress this anti-speculative norm and do resell old computers with profit via eBay, or they publicize a high price on the forum. Other members tolerate this as long as it happens incidentally and discretely. Moreover, community members try to prevent nasty tricks among themselves (see the quotation of Rhod, above). Some semi-dealers operate within the community and sell with a modest profit, thus enlarging everyone's access to the shared inheritance. A recent phenomenon that has occurred more than incidentally since 2007, according to Clais (2011: 464), is the sale of one's entire collection. Although such selling out is a public taboo within the community, the members also know that this may happen under pressure of a partner, provoked by the accumulation of several dozens of cubic metres of old computer material in their home.

Educational Motive: Transmission of Knowledge

The educational motivation concerns the active search for knowledge about the collected objects as well as the desire to transmit this knowledge to other people. Shuker has this to say about the knowledge transmission in record collecting:

> Record collectors constantly refer to both the effort and the pleasure involved in systematically gathering information from other collectors, the music press ... and now the Internet, and then searching for particular recordings.... Once items are acquired, they must then be ordered and classified, and stored as part of an ongoing process.... Then there are the pleasures of displaying and sharing the collection: showing, lending and playing records to others, [and through] vernacular scholarship, writing and producing fanzines, magazine articles, books and discographies, ... blogs, websites and ... participation in on-line groups. (2010: 109-10)

Many of Shuker's informants are professionally pre-occupied with music, run radio shows, and work as DJs, work for recording companies or in music shops; others specialize in scientific research and education, whereby they turn their passion into their profession through transmission of knowledge and vice versa.

Within the community of old computer collectors (context 2), the legitimacy of the ownership of old machines is based on the affectionate use of them and the willingness to provide information about them freely (the educational drive). This corresponds with the models of the amorous collector and the erudite collector, as opposed to the model of the businessman (Van der Grijp 2006: 282). According to Clais, this attitude is inherited from the founders of the Internet who, as American university students within the euphoria of the counterculture of the 1970s, wanted to develop a tool to share the knowledge that would lead to the progress of humankind (2011).[17] In order to diffuse knowledge, in terms of the computer collectors' community, one must first possess an important collection from which to draw knowledge and information, to be transmitted via the forum or one's own website. This

transmission process is accompanied by a moral discourse via verbal exchange on the forum. The war of the computer brands and the confrontation, before the mid-1990s, between aficionados of different brands continues today in the form of value judgments about the "authentic" object. Within the community, this rivalry is expressed by the use of the original material. Users do not limit themselves to the material that they have known before, but also purchase other old material. This material is not only the witness of an era or the support of memory, but the support of a practice. It concerns not only a historical but a sensorial collection. During annual meetings, a number of computer collectors put the most interesting part of their own collection at the disposal of the public—consisting of fellow passionate collectors—to be used on the spot. Other computer collectors do not do this, for fear of theft or damage.

Collectors of popular music, as in context 1, conceive of themselves as culture protectors, and they donate their collections to cultural institutions to make them accessible to a large audience, which is part of the educational motive. Shuker (2010) points out a parallel with book collectors giving their collections to libraries, and art collectors donating their paintings to museums: "Several [informants] commented on this aspect of collecting, with two mentioning quite detailed provisions for donating their several collections (records, music ephemera, books) to educational institutions" (49). It is a pity that Shuker gives no examples to illustrate his observation, although he does distinguish four categories of institutional record collectors (205). These are (a) museums that specialize in music instruments, for example, the Horniman Museum in London; (b) rock museums dedicated to the history of popular music, such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland; (c) sound archives with collections of sound recordings and sheet music, for example, the Library of Congress and the British Library Sound Archive; and (d) public- and university-library specialized music collections, such as the University of Chicago Jazz Archive.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion of my case studies, I would like to return here to the conflict about the museum project, with which I began this discussion on old-computer collectors in context 2 and answer my second research question related to that matter, namely, why none of the community members wanted to cooperate with the organizer of the museum project in the Parisian *Arche de la Défense*. The members of the community reproached the organizer's amateurism; this included errors in his texts, his presentation of non-functional, non-cleaned computers, without any explanation, during the temporary exhibition; and the fact that he had a commercial vocation. But this is not all. They also reproached him for (a) trying to confiscate the legitimate place of the community; (b) wrongfully referring to the community; (c) discrediting the community by diffusing false information in its name; (d) showing extreme forms of megalomania and paranoia; and (e) emphasizing his support from politicians and other personalities instead of their years of work on the collections. Based on his own experience, Clais (2011: 451) makes the argument that the initiator of the museum project would have liked to cooperate with the community; however, his overall attitude was a deterrent to obtaining support and donations in the form of computers (old "machines") from the community.

For the community, this concerns a "social patrimony" to be used by its members.[18] An institutional version of this social patrimony, such as a museum, should tell the history of computer usage in the past, which is a history of passion and discovery, the electronic tinkering by adolescents without money, the piracy of video games, and the making of demos. The discourse of the failed museum founder, however, was focused on the industry and the valorization of informatics enterprises and their inventions. Not only were his *Maecenases*[19] to be found among that kind of private enterprise but, according to Clais, his discourse was also punctuated with sneers at the administrative slowness of the French authorities that would hinder individual initiatives (2011). The collectors' community maintains traces of the countercultural imagination of the founders of the Internet and, later, hackers. Between these

two world views there is territorial struggle as well as a cultural opposition. The collectors' community feels deprived of its right to open the first informatics museum for which it has struggled for many years. If a passionate computer user had undertaken such an initiative instead, the community would have likely supported it. The present candidate museum founder, however, developed a discourse about innovation by private enterprise, while the community defends a history based on the daily practice of amateurs who became professionals. For the community, only its own members are competent to engage in the making of cultural heritage in this realm, focused on a past of active use of old computers; in short, a history of personal passion for informatics. For this reason, related to feelings of hurt pride and to the lack of recognition of social status, the expected donations in the form of old computer material, services, and information were not realized.

A final question remains to be answered. Why would an anthropological perspective in terms of configuration be relevant to understanding the phenomenon of collecting? Collectors engage in the construction of sets or totalities, collections that are more valuable and meaningful than the sum of the constituting parts. Often, the meanings of these sets or totalities are expressed in terms of metaphors (e.g., identity cocoons, microcosms, and time capsules), as is the collecting process itself (hunting, business, science, love, creation, etc.). The objective of anthropology in general is to observe and decode (or "deconstruct") social and cultural totalities and, in so doing, we use a wide spectrum of metaphors, beginning with Mauss' (1923-1924) total social fact. This closeness in vocabulary and in the use of metaphors as heuristic means is not the only reason. Collections are certainly dynamic totalities. What is desirable in the beginning of a collecting process may subsequently become ordinary or even banal. I call this the shifter principle: a collector's desire shifts from one focal point to another, from a stamp collection to a collection of old computers, for example. For Sigmund Freud, a great collector himself, a completed collection is no longer a real collection (Ucko 2001; Van der Grijp 2006: 54-60). A genuine collection, at least for the collector, is a living collection that is still in the process of expansion. A real collection gives the owner satisfaction, enjoyment, and provides opportunities to escape from the ordinary routine of daily life, such as work and family. It also provides a pretext to make trips in search of lacking items. In this, a collection may be considered as a metaphor for human life.

Notes

1. The main sources for my case studies are Shuker (2010) and Clais (2011), respectively.
2. Shellac is a kind of resin, also used in varnish, secreted by the lac beatle, *Laccifer lacca*.
3. Already starting in the early 20th century, record companies such as Victor, Zonophone, and Columbia produced catalogues in order to sell their merchandise. Another marketing strategy was the production of celebrity discs, sold for considerably higher prices than the ordinary ones.
4. For a more elaborate critique of the perspectives of Baudrillard and Muensterberger, see Van der Grijp (2006: 14-21). For the distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, see Godelier (2007: 37-43).
5. Initially under the name "Auction Web," eBay started in 1995 (Hillis, Petit, and Epley 2006; Sinclair 2004).
6. The notion of "record" is often limited to vinyl recordings, but Shuker (2010) uses it in the wide meaning of shellac 78s, vinyl LPs and 45s, audiotapes, CDs and digital downloads (see also Day 2000).
7. The word "fan" has its origin in "fanatic," with the condescending connotation of youths uncritically following the latest musical fashion. According to Lewis (1992) and Sandvoss (2005), however, fandom is also related to the formation of social identities, a form of "affective consumption" linked to sexuality.
8. Or, as Shuker's informant Steve Mallet expresses it:

> I've seen 40-year-olds being happy as a child because they had finally found that original Iron Butterfly album they couldn't afford when they were young. Just like rock music itself, it is a way of sticking to your youth, and a pleasant escape from

the dread of everyday life. (Qtd. in Shuker 2010: 56)

To which I would add myself another reference to Benjamin: the liberation of the "drudgery of usefulness" (qtd. in Arendt 1992[1970]: 47; see also Benjamin 1973[1931]: 169).

9. Stereotypical characteristics, according to Clais (2011), are nostalgia for one's early youth; refusal to engage in serious discussion and debates; being apolitical, uncultivated, utilitarian and consumerist; incapacity for an intense inner life; the culture of chatter; having no opinion and not knowing what is going on in the world; being used to writing SMSs, and not being able to speak perfect French. The forum members, however, do not write SMSs and used to conceive of themselves as adults who cultivate the French language.
10. In contrast to Shuker, Clais (2011) makes no effort to explain the gender-specific character of this collectors' realm.
11. Julian Dibbell (2004) observes among contemporary teenagers, as compared to adults, less identification with the physical characteristics of their music recordings in the form of CDs and still less with those of digital downloads on MP3 players.
12. A comparable observation has been made previously by Benjamin (1992[1931]: 63-4).
13. A specialist can manipulate information and thus gain prestige (social status), a position, according to the anthropologist Clais (with reference to Sahlins 1963), similar to the political system of the Big Man current in New Guinea.
14. An Argus is a yearly publication providing specific information on the topic, including current "standard" prices.
15. It was a Golden Age compared by Clais with Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* (1972), translated into French as *Age de Pierre, Age d'Abondance*, thus a time of abundance.
16. On April 6, 2014, 1 euro = $1.5 Canadian.
17. For danah boyd (2008), for example, the Internet is both a cultural artifact and a place where one produces culture.
18. A patrimony is a social construct based on various procedures. Michel Rautenberg (2003) defined a "social patrimony" as a collective heritage that constructs itself without paying attention to institutional procedures and systems of representation.
19. Lavish supporters.

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