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It's not all about the music: Online fan communities and collecting Hard Rock Café pins

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Previous studies of music fan culture have largely centered on the diverse range of subcultures devoted to particular genres, groups, and stars. Where studies have moved beyond the actual music and examined the fashion, concerts, and collecting ephemera such as vinyl records and posters, they have tended to remain closely allied to notions of subcultural distinction, emphasizing hierarchies of taste. This paper shifts the focus in music fan studies beyond the appreciation of the music and discusses the popular fan practice of collecting souvenir pins produced and sold by the Hard Rock Café (HRC) within a framework of fan tourism. Traveling to and collecting unique pins from locations across the globe creates a fan dialogue that centers on tourism and the collecting practices associated with souvenir consumption. Collectors engage in practices such as blogging, travel writing, and administration that become important indicators of their particular expression of fandom: pin collecting. Membership requires both time and money; recording visits around the world and collecting unique pins from every café builds fans' cultural capital. This indicates an internationalization of popular fandom, with the Internet acting as a

connective virtual space between local and national, personal and public physical space. The study of HRC pin collecting and its fan community suggests that HRC enthusiasts are not so because they enjoy rock music or follow any particular artist but due to the physical ephemera that they collect and the places and spaces they visit.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fandom; Heterotopia; Pin collecting; Souvenir; Tourism

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1. Introduction

[1.1] The Hard Rock Café (HRC) is known throughout the world as a themed restaurant chain that promotes music and music fandom through brand loyalty to its merchandise and corporate menu. Music is often central to its promotional strategy, displaying musical props and instruments on its café walls while organizing local band performances and music festivals. However, this article shifts the focus on the HRC from its musical-themed brand identity to its growing fan community that travel to sites and collect unique souvenir pins produced for every city. Therefore, I argue throughout that despite HRC being seen and advertised as an authentic venue for music fans, promoting rock, pop, and alternative music cultures, a large proportion of visitors travel to cafés all around the world to fulfill other passions unrelated to music culture: pin collecting and tourism. While publically HRC appears to be all about the music, this study suggests that HRC fandom is about practices and passions distinct from music and musical tastes.

[1.2] Discourses of fan studies related to music have largely centered on the diverse range of subcultures devoted to particular genres, groups and stars. Within these discourses particular attention has been paid to analyzing the relationships between fans and music institutions, changing musical tastes, and the distinctions expressed in relation to the range of styles and genres that define the industry (see for example Cline 1992; Hinerman 1992; Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992; Cavicchi 2007; McCourt and Burkart 2007). Where fan studies have moved beyond the actual music to examine fashion, concerts, and collecting ephemera such as vinyl records and posters, they have tended to remain closely allied to notions of subcultural distinction and nostalgia, emphasizing hierarchies of taste and the authenticity of the musical source (see for example Straw 1997; Stanley 2002; Milano 2003; Shuker 2004; Reynolds 2011). Indeed, the centrality of vinyl record collecting in the representation of music fans is recognized by Roy Shuker who argues that it "not only embodies personal history, it also represents the original historical artefact: how the vinyl single, EP, LP was originally recorded, and therefore the form in which it should be listened to" (Shuker 2010, 65). Thus the collectible in music fandom not only becomes a symbol of nostalgia and memory for audiences, its value as an object is heightened and legitimated due to its connection to the actual music. However, with regard to HRC pin collecting, I argue that fans are not attracted by the musical ephemera or souvenirs connected to the artists but are fans of what pin collecting entails: tourism, meeting fellow collectors, and the creation of an online profile detailing where one travels and what pins are bought there.

[1.3] HRC is a restaurant, hotel, and casino chain branded to attract all types of popular music fan. Its slogan of "Love All, Serve All" underlines its desire to emit a sense of inclusivity; it is both a family-oriented attraction and a venue where established and new musicians can promote their latest tunes. Its global

reach has allowed its brand to become a mix of the distinctly corporate (the same menu is served worldwide) and the uniquely national, regional, and local (cafés incorporate local architecture and cuisine, celebrate local musicians, and produce merchandise that trades on a particular city's identity). Merchandising has encouraged various loyalty schemes used by customers and music fans to get priority entry and VIP seating, obtain exclusive items, and get a discount. One particular scheme, originally set up by the Hard Rock Café Pin Collectors Club (HRCPPC) in 2000, allows members to create an online profile detailing the number of cafés visited and pins collected. Following a decade of increasing membership and a developing customer loyalty scheme, the HRCPPC and HRC combined their efforts in 2012 and created an official site to record information alongside a Facebook page which allowed members to network and share photos and the company to advertise the latest pins and restaurant offers (https://www.facebook.com/hrcollectorsclub?hc_location=stream) (note 1). The HRCPPC also organizes local collector meetings at various café locations and encourages volunteers to act as club officials who can design new pins, monitor submissions, and update the online pin database.

[1.4] In this article I argue that this distinct fan community represents an interesting intervention in studies of popular fandom. Dialogues within the HRC community do not converge on notions of musical taste and authenticity or issues relating to genre and personality. Rather, traveling to and collecting unique pins from locations across the globe creates a different fan dialogue that centers on tourism and the collecting practices associated with curatorial and souvenir consumption. HRC pin collectors engage in multiple forms of communication and fan practices such as blogging, travel writing, and club administration that become equally important indicators of their particular expression of fandom: pin collecting. Joining and gaining subcultural status within the HRCPPC requires both time and monetary investment; recording

their visits around the world and collecting unique pins from every café builds collectors' cultural capital. The popularity of the HRCPC indicates a growing internationalization of popular fan practices, with the Internet acting as a connective virtual space between local and national, personal and public physical space. The study of HRC pin collecting and its associated fan community offers an important lens through which we might suggest that HRC fandom is not about the music played in the cafés and bars or the brand it promotes through the famous musical memorabilia on its walls, but rather it is about the physical ephemera that fans collect and the places and spaces they visit.

2. A Hard Rock history of music

[2.1] Founded in 1971 by Isaac Tigrett and Peter Morton, the first HRC was opened on Park Lane in London. Tigrett and Morton were Americans working in the UK who missed the bars and restaurants of home so wanted to recreate the experience of a diner. (See the HRC corporate history: <http://www.hardrock.com/corporate/history.aspx>). Originally intended as a little corner of popular Americana in a London neighborhood popular with tourists, the HRC has grown into a global corporation that owns restaurants, bars, hotels, casinos, and live music resorts on almost every continent. In 2007 the company was sold by the UK-based Rank Group to the Seminole Indian Tribe of Florida for £965 million (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6216292.stm>). At last count there were 175 locations in 53 countries, with just as many opening up as there are closing down. In addition to hospitality, HRC hosts several music events every year: concerts, live performances, and festivals which signal the company's musical roots. HRC also owns several storage facilities in the US where it keeps its vast collection of music memorabilia that is not presently dispersed throughout its café and hotel network. From guitars once owned by

Jimmy Hendrix to the Magical Mystery Tour Bus owned by the Beatles, HRC collects almost anything connected to the history of rock and pop music. A lot of items are donated by artists and groups, eager for recognition in Hard Rock's unofficial catalogue of music's greatest and most glamorous.

[2.2] Besides food, drink, and music, the HRC is known for other kinds of merchandising, including souvenir glasses, T-shirts, soft toys, hats, jackets, and pins, to name the most popular. Everything has the HRC logo on it, becoming instantly recognizable. Indeed, the commodification of music through branding and logos is not unusual. For example, artists have become global brands selling albums, T-shirts, and concert tickets, and their iconic images have remained ever present throughout music history: The Rolling Stones' lips, Elvis's hair and sunglasses, The Beatles' Yellow Submarine and so on. That attempt to connect with fans through branded items develops a sense of brand loyalty. Michele White, in her study of eBay fans, argues that brands have fans: "Brand community members tend to be active fans of particular companies, products, logos, virtual communities, and media texts" (2012, 55). In the HRCPC there is clearly a brand which collectors can actively follow, products they can collect, and a virtual community with which they can engage. White goes on to argue that "Internet settings have methods to tap into and control members' attachments" (83); thus, in the new HRC Web site we see a design that allows collectors not only to add to their record of pins collected but also to promote their attachment to the brand through competitions, newsfeed, and web chats with other collectors, pin designers, and HRC staff.

[2.3] In many ways, this aspect of brand loyalty for the corporation grew out of the founders' original intention to create a welcoming and familiar space for people who wanted to pull up a chair and get a drink. As the first café in London became popular with expats and American tourists, those UK musicians

who were used to a US style bar/dining experience while they were on tour started to regularly frequent the establishment. While not originally intended for the incorporation of music memorabilia, the official HRC story on their Web site says it was supposedly a visit by Eric Clapton to the London café in 1979 that changed the chain's brand ethos. Liking the bar, it is claimed that Clapton asked the owners to put one of his guitars up on the wall above his favorite chair to "mark his spot." Becoming a symbol of HRC's music credentials for other restaurant goers, the guitar also attracted the attention of The Who's Peter Townsend who saw Clapton's guitar hanging up and immediately donated one of his own with the message, "Mine's as good as his! Love, Pete." As more music celebrities visited, the collection grew; thus the official symbol of the chain became a guitar. Used on signage, glasses, advertising, and merchandise, the guitar is an iconic symbol for HRC and an unsurprising image that inspired the designs for the first souvenir pins to go on sale and become collector items in their own right.

[2.4] As more and more cafés opened around the world, the variation of pins and guitar merchandise increased. Collecting the glasses with the name of the location printed on the side became a hobby that offered tourists a little souvenir of their dining experience while on holiday. T-shirts were very popular, and the simple logo on white background design became for some tourists a necessity: what better way to display where you went on holiday than wearing an iconic garment from an exotic locale? Demand for location specific merchandise rose and the number of collectors of particular items grew; the guitar pin became an easily transported and stored souvenir that encouraged collectors to visit new cafés and buy the latest design. Regular customers of their local café began to meet up to swap pins they had bought on holiday from other Hard Rocks. As a consequence, rarity and exclusivity became important markers of distinction for collectors with the biggest and most varied collections of pins. For Russell Belk,

in a consumer society where success is often measured by material gain, the collection itself can often emphasize collector competition where monetary value and the number of objects act as "a way to 'keep score' or monitor growth and progress, even though [collectors] may well have no intention or even a possibility of selling the collection" (1995, 80). Local cafés encouraged this collecting and competition, happily hosting meetings and even producing special pins to celebrate national holidays and local events. Waiters and waitresses got into the act too, proudly displaying pins they traded with visiting collectors and incorporating them into their official uniform. The number of pins staff had from exotic locations (places they might not even have traveled to but instead acquired from collectors) raised their status in the café hierarchy: the fuller the pin lanyard, the more senior they were amongst their colleagues.

[2.5] Rival collector clubs were established early on but HRC, clearly spotting the marketing potentials of having an official club just for pin collecting, encouraged the creation of the unified HRCPC in 2000 and with that started to make pins just for members. So, alongside the city specific pins that collectors could buy at cafés across the globe, they could also receive annual membership pins through the post—marking their loyalty with a specially designed, limited edition souvenir (figures 1 and 2). From local beginnings, where two musicians used their guitars as symbols of their growing celebrity status, HRC has integrated music memorabilia and merchandising into their brand identity. Fans of the restaurant travel there to experience an American style diner but to also see the famous objects hung on the walls and kept in glass cases. While drinking a hurricane cocktail in a souvenir glass they can listen to music and get close to their favorite artist's guitar or iconic outfit. At the same time, they can buy a pin that literally embodies the physical experience they just had: the design incorporates famous landmarks and images from the location city and references the musical objects seen on the café's walls. Indeed, as White argues

about brand communities, "members...are inclined to celebrate and buy the brand's products and to identify with the associated corporation" (2012, 4–5).

Figure 1.

12th Year Membership Guitar Pin – HRCPCC Club Pins/Pin Craft, 2012.

Figure 2.

12th Year Membership Logo – HRCPCC Club Pins/Pin Craft, 2012.

[2.6] It may seem odd that mass-produced products, one-off purchases bought by tourists as well as die-hard collectors, might be cherished as personal objects but the ubiquity of the collectible is not important: "Collecting can be seen as a means of individualizing the uniformity of the mass-produced. In a consumer society, we all look for ways to alleviate the routine of the functional. In collecting, a certain depth or another dimension is found" (Martin 1999, 146–47). Collectors are encouraged to recognize the unique elements of each pin and thus accumulate a collection that represents not only monetary investment but also geographical movement. HRC pin collections do in many ways pay homage to the musical roots that inspired the memorabilia and merchandising but, moreover, they symbolize the collector's journey through time and geographical space as they visit more and more café locations around the world. The success of HRC in creating a brand loyalty and creating a fan following is due in part to what the Internet allows users to do online: "Whereas television and print transmit and push goods and services into the home to audiences via a one-way line of communication, the Internet enables individuals to access information at their own pace, build their own Web pages, and ultimately become producers and promoters of their own popular culture artifacts" (Smith Feranec 2008, 10). In the commodification of HRC fandom through pin collecting and tourism, we can identify an increasing array of fan identities—

partly defined by what people choose to collect and partly determined by where they travel and what they do when they get there.

3. Online collecting communities, the pin passport program, and fan tourism

[3.1] To track visits to cafés and hotels throughout the world, collectors can swipe their membership cards on purchasing food and merchandise and their online profile will be updated with café location information. Online, collectors can then see where they have been on a map and plan where to go next to gain another swipe. To reward loyalty and the number of cafés visited, the online system records the number of cafés as well as their location; the more visited, the higher the online profile rises. Known as the Pin Passport Program, HRC pin collectors track number of visits and receive special pins to celebrate landmark totals: 10, 25, 50, 75, 100 (HRC instituted special 125, 150 and 175 pins named to individual collectors who have been to more than 100 cafés) (figure 3). Clearly status within the HRC collector community is dependent on the number of cafés visited but also what pins are acquired when visiting. In this case, displaying a large collection online to others collecting the same thing "brings the collector heightened status (within his or her collecting sphere) and feelings of pride and accomplishment" (Belk 1995, 68).

Figure 3.

Award for Visiting 50 HRC's – Pin Passport Series/Pin Craft, not date.

[3.2] Furthermore, visiting on a national holiday or during a special event taking place in the city (for example, the Fourth of July in the United States or the San Diego Comic-Con) means fans have likely access to limited edition pins that are designed especially for that café. Thus, their collection is enhanced by the

unique experience of visiting on a particular day and getting a pin made for the occasion. For example, both the café and hotel in San Diego sell commemorative pins to celebrate the annual San Diego Comic-Con held in July at the Convention Center. Encouraging collectors to seek out different pins at both sites means that they have to go that little bit further to get the exclusive souvenirs that make up the set. These in turn are made all the more unique for the collector as they incorporate different superhero-themed designs every year to tie into the Comic-Con buzz and aesthetic which takes over the whole city for that week (figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4.

ComicCon 2012: Super Hero Band Full Set – Specialized Local Café Series/Pin Craft, 2012.

Figure 5.

ComicCon 2011: Green Girl Pin – Specialized Local Café Series/Pin Craft, 2011.

[3.3] Also, because Hard Rock tries to incorporate local themes and landmarks, holidays, and personalities into the designs of the city pins (regularly updating these in limited batches), collectors may have visited and bought from a location but another collector at another time might have a completely different set of pins to represent their experience. The Boston HRC releases a new pin to celebrate the running of the annual marathon in the spring, a new design every year, and in 2012 it commemorated the 100th anniversary of Fenway Park with a limited edition "Love That Dirty Water" pin that references the song sung by fans of the Boston Red Sox (figures 6 and 7). While the marathon and Red Sox might be synonymous with the city of Boston, therefore appropriate for the café to pay tribute to on its pins, exclusivity can also be found in a one-off event that warrants a special pin.

Figure 6.

2012 Boston Marathon – Pin USA, 2012.

Figure 7.

Dirty Water – Pin USA, 2012.

[3.4] For example, the Yankee Dental Convention inspired a pin which proved a rare find for collectors visiting Boston just in 2007 (figure 8), and in 2012 for the 75th anniversary of the Hindenburg flying over the Boston Custom House, collectors could get a special pin to commemorate a rarely known fact and a very famous airship (figure 9). These examples of different and specialized HRC pins are thus commodities which, as Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe (2003, 112) acknowledge, "have histories and geographies which create and alter meaning and value" and tie collectors closer to the HRC brand.

Figure 8.

Yankee Dental Convention: Tooth Pin – Pin Craft, 2007.

Figure 9.

Zeppelin Guitar – Pin Craft, 2012.

[3.5] HRC pins are therefore physical evidence of a fan collector's trip planned and successfully made. Cities traveled to are often new and unfamiliar but the actual café remains ever present and familiar. In many ways, HRC as site of collector pilgrimage performs a role similar to that of the fan convention, filming location, or other media fan settings. It brings fans together in an attempt to get closer to the object of fascination and affection. In the HRC, the location draws collectors but the city also acts as a backdrop from which the holiday experiences of the traveling fans are drawn and upon which their memories of every pin bought and displayed are based. Jennifer E. Porter sees

fan convention attendance as a form of physical pilgrimage in a secular context. Using the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, she argues that the pilgrimage to a shared site is a liminal journey of transformation to find *communitas*, "communal fellowship," with other fans (Porter 1999, 252). The site of fan tourism, whether it be specifically tied to the fictional text like filming locations and theme park rides or neutral and generic sites like hotel ballrooms and convention centers, provides "a time and space for fans to be free to explore their love of something deep and meaningful in their lives" (267). As a consequence, these atypical fan sites become important places for popular veneration.

[3.6] If *communitas*, as mentioned above, is defined as "intense bonding and sharing of the pilgrimage and the connection with the sacred place" (Brooker 2005, 18) then I want to argue in the remainder of this article that while places like the HRC might be seen to control and limit the fan collector experience (through the mass commodification of goods bought and sold in homogenous leisure establishments) they are in fact shaped and defined by the physical surroundings in which they are located. Cafés take on the flavor of the city, and the pins and other merchandise are therefore evidence of the localization of the global Hard Rock brand. What is more, and of greater significance for larger questions about fandom and collecting, HRC restaurants, hotels, and casinos are sites that through fan enshrinement and pilgrimage become venerated memorials to popular culture: "Traditional elite institutions build shrines to symbols of faith, patriotism, and knowledge. But popular shrines communicate the legitimacy of popular experience, even if it is lurid, frivolous, or downright kitsch" (Combs 1989, 74). When bought, each pin is incorporated into a collection that represents an individual's identity and sense of self. The interaction between people and objects within a real space enhances both the

emotional and physical relationship that pin collectors have with their collected items.

[3.7] All members of the HRCPCC have pin lockers online where they can list the specific pins collected (note 2). Pictures of every pin are accompanied by a description (often written by the first collector to buy it) and once they add it to their locker they can append extra information like price, condition (mint or good), and whether they are willing to trade for it. Both the passport program (which lists where one has visited and rewards achievements with special pins) and the pin locker (which records one's entire collection and is open to other collectors to look at) combine to give the individual collector a virtual presence that displays their physical travel experience and demonstrates their collecting prowess and status. Like the Weblog as discussed by P. David Marshall, an HRCPCC online profile "is an elaborate presentation of the self...the personal website with all its meanderings becomes a public testament, a proclamation of significance and an expression of individuality" (Marshall 2004, 56). In the following examples I examine how the online spaces of HRC pin collectors is evidence of both the individual's traveling experience (offering a biographic narrative of their Hard Rock fan tourism) and their increasing status as a collector (accumulating pins from a variety of locations). The virtual and the physical, space and place, image and object come together to offer the collector a sense of identity and self; the virtual and actual collection not only stand as monuments to personal and financial investment but also become imbued with unique memories of the collector's traveling and collecting experiences.

4. Pin tales as fan travel writing

[4.1] As part of the original HRCPCC Web site, collectors could upload stories and pictures from their travels to the various cafés and cities around the world.

The blog, *Pin Tales*, took the form of a monthly newsletter and described the collector's journey and also their acquisition of pins (note 3). However, it often revealed more about the collector's personal story, why they went to a particular city, how it fits into a life narrative. After all, as Mieke Bal suggests, collecting is a form of narrative where "a subjectively focalised sequence of events is presented and communicated" through the acquisition, cataloguing, and reordering of objects (1994, 100). The pin tale is a written record of the tourist experience and the pictures alongside act as visual memories of their physical presence in the HRC location. The city visited is captured at a particular moment and the collectibles associated with that place forever connect those memories with a physical object. As will be shown through a survey of blogs posted on the Web site, these so-called pin tales are not just about celebrating the brand (as in the case of Michele White's theory previously discussed); they are about creating a collecting community. The pin as object becomes a touchstone for collectors who meet in cafés and attend collecting conventions. The community is competitive but it also helps to build a social network of new friends that extend beyond the commodity and its consumption. Pins become objects that symbolize fan tourism as outlined above. They are markers of the physical relationship that the HRC collectors have had with an international place and are souvenirs of the touristic desire to consume the spaces through which they pass. The moderator of the *Pin Tales* newsletter, Chris Fairbairn, prefaces the first issue in June 2004 (note 4) with:

<blockquote>[4.2] By now your [*sic*] wondering what to expect, what direction I'll be taking. That's entirely up to you. To answer a few questions I'd like to put the newsletter out around the first of every month so anything you'd like to submit needs to be in by the end of the month. I'd like to run a couple monthly features "Café Profiles" where you get to give everyone a look inside, the history and the local collectors from your

local café. Especially those closed cafés, if you have the story and some pictures please share it with everyone so we can see what we missed. The other regular feature will be "The Other Side Of The Magnifying Glass" profiles of Pin Masters, along with a Q & A section. Then there are your stories and lastly with so many Pin Events this is another opportunity for you to brag about what a great event your café hosted.</blockquote>

[4.3] As a call to collectors to write, post, and share stories and pictures of their travels and events hosted at cafés, Fairbairn's aims for *Pin Tales* suggest that HRC pin collecting is both communal and individual, competitive and supportive. Fairbairn is also the first collector to contribute a story about his pin-collecting experience. It is telling in his choice of topic that he acknowledges both critically and favorably the joys of collecting HRC pins. They give him the opportunity to meet new collectors and make new friends, but they also become objects of frustration as he struggles to get the ones he wants before they sell out. In this world of accessibility, where sites like eBay make almost anything available to everybody, Fairbairn bemoans how it also creates an imbalance in the collecting community: individuals (often not collectors) buy up the limited stock and sell them online—making them rarer and taking away the physical pleasure of traveling to a café to purchase them for HRC fans. He even questions the very nature of the HRCPC as he states that once collecting pins became popular and more people joined the group, the intimacy of the hobby was ruined by mass consumption:

<blockquote>[4.4] There was a time not long ago there was no real organization to collecting pins. You got what you could when you could and were happy always looking for your next big score. With a bit of luck you knew a few locals with the same interest and you worked together to help each other...Time moved on to a point where if you were not on-line

you were the odd one out. With the creation of the HRCPC and a computer in every home its [sic] made the world a very small place and along with that the dark side of the hobby emerged "evil-bay." Or what has come to be known as pins for profit...I was in Washington a few weeks ago and was fortunate to have a number of the locals come out for an evening of food, fun and pins. It was so refreshing as they came in the café, they each pulled out small bags of pins that they had picked up for one another. YES friends helping friends. No money changing hands just a sincere thanks.</blockquote>

[4.5] He goes on to list a number of things that he wishes would change or happen in the HRC collecting community, including restricting the number of specific pins bought at one time to stop "evil-bay" sellers making a profit; rerunning pins so that people who missed them in store can buy them again to fill gaps in their collections; allowing collectors to suggest designs for new pins; not making more T 'n' A pins (pins which usually depict a scantily clad waitress in an energetic pose); making more musically inspired pins more faithful to HRC history; and instituting a collector of the year pin that can be awarded to members. Collecting pins, for Fairbairn, is highly motivating—he has achieved the status of creator and moderator of the *Pin Tales* pages on the Web site—and it obviously stimulates quite strong feelings about commercial sites such as eBay and the commodification of women seen in the T 'n' A pins. Thus, pins mean more to him than just consumption—they are items of deeper meaning and contemplation: "An object can thus become more than simply a 'metaphor for the self.' It becomes a pivot for reflexivity and introspection, a tool of autobiographic self-discovery, a way of knowing oneself through things" (Hoskins 1998, 198).

[4.6] It is clear from Fairbairn's contribution in 2004 that the HRCPCC had come a long way since its inauguration in 2000—becoming more professional and coordinated in how collectors acquire pins and more diverse in the types of collectors who join and the individual pleasures they get out of collecting. The writing of pin tales, posting them online to be read by other collectors, is also characteristic of new digital cultures and the practices of remembering. As Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading (2009, 132) argue, "The often cathartic narratives demonstrate digital memory practices as global narrative witnessing, allowing participants to share a story told internally over time with an unseen audience able to connect with that story personally (again literally) and publically (by posting a response to the story on the website)." In the same issue of *Pin Tales*, Leona King reflects on the positive potentials of pin collecting and the transformative effect of going to pin-trading events held at cafés. For her, it would appear that the act of collecting offers more than the simple pleasures of accumulating commodities—it is about the people met in the process and the locality of the café that makes the community of collectors feel welcome, accepted, and like part of a family:

<blockquote>[4.7] It had crossed my mind on occasion about how great it was that these pieces of metal and enamel that we all love so much can bring people from all walks of life together and unite them in their love of music, the HRC and all that it stands for...Sure we all collect pins, bears, beanies, t-shirts, shot glasses and now of course our swipes to help build up our collections into something that we're all proud of, but what about all the great people that we meet and get to know along the way?...It doesn't matter where you come from or what you do to earn your living, what matters is we all share a love for the same things and we pull together to help each other get that special pin that we'd really love to have in our collections.</blockquote>

[4.8] King's view of collecting displays a realization that there is more to the object than its form or simply collecting it; the object becomes almost like a gift that brings with it the joy of social connection and a pride in one's own achievements. She goes on to explain:

<blockquote>[4.9] Not many hobbies are like that, that's something else that I think makes us keep the HRC close to our hearts, we're proud of our local café's [*sic*] and we should also be proud of those who choose to get involved and help each other out...The HRC collectors make this hobby a much more personalized one so to speak, where instead of thinking of the people that we trade with simply as a way to get the pins we need, we count them as friends. Sure a lot of these friends we might not ever get the chance to meet unless we are lucky enough to attend the same event or visit each other's home café's [*sic*], but, even if we don't meet them, and I hope I can speak for most of us when I say this. To us our fellow collectors mean a whole lot more to us than simply an email address and packages in the post.</blockquote>

[4.10] In the second half of her blog entry, King points to the importance of the local café for resident collectors—they can swipe their membership card at cafés around the world and visit new cities but being a local collector means that their nearest café becomes a focal point where other travelers can visit them. For Gregson and Crewe, "consumption occurs in sites and spaces that are ordinary and mundane in their location and in their situation within everyday life, and that consumption is frequently practised here in relation to some very ordinary sorts of goods" (2003, 2). However, by extension, the trading experience in a local café to one collector is enhanced because foreign collectors bring new and rare pins that will add variety and something out of the

ordinary to their own collections. Also, in the regular events organized and held by resident collectors at their local café, a sense of community is established with the HRC staff who are themselves more than happy to accommodate collectors as it further establishes brand loyalty.

[4.11] A lot of the pin tales blogs serve as itineraries for planned and recently completed trips to several HRCs at once. Collectors look forward to and revel in the opportunity to swipe their cards, get credits on their online accounts and, of course, add to their pin collections. Entire holidays and business trips are often scheduled around fitting in as many different cafés as possible; sometimes collectors go out of their way to visit a hard-to-get-to café, incurring higher than normal travel costs to take time out and swipe. Being there counts and collecting a souvenir pin specific to the city is physical proof of their efforts. While their online map of café visits gets more complete, their pin collection naturally increases in size. Yet, more importantly, the number of memories and experiences they have gathered on their travels builds more meaning into the physical, autobiographical collection. For Susan Pearce there are three predominant modes of collecting—souvenir, fetishistic, and systematic (1995, 32)—but it is the first of those modes which most describes the kinds of pin collecting done by HRC enthusiasts. As she says of souvenir collectors, "the individual creates a romantic life-history by selecting and arranging personal memorial material to create...an object autobiography" (32). As a consequence, "the souvenirs of a lifetime serve to make time itself personal, familiar and tamed" (244). For the HRC pin collector, these objects are clearly personal and represent a life-long investment in traveling and buying, but they also confirm to the individual and other pin collectors (through the collection at home and the pin locker facility online) that the journey took place—they are a little bit of a foreign city brought back home. Pearce makes this point in her reconsideration of collecting: "Souvenirs speak of events that are not repeatable, but are

reportable; they serve to authenticate the narrative in which the actor talks about the event" (1994, 196).

[4.12] The photos taken at each stop on their journey also stand as visual reminders and proof of their geographical race to be bigger and better collectors, and the virtual blog space allows them to share and boast about their achievements. Online collector profiles, with a map to record visits and a locker to list pins, and the pin tales pages, with travel stories and pictures, represent what Viviane Serfaty calls "a connecting space between the diary-writer and society." The screen itself becomes "a symbolic space where dreams and fantasies can be projected" (Serfaty 2004, 471). However, pin collectors use the online screen space to project reality—their trips and collected items—and thus it serves as more than just a site for dreams and fantasy—it acts as a record of dreams fulfilled and fantasies experienced.

[4.13] The trip written about by David Rodriguez in *Pin Tales* highlights the extraordinary efforts that he and other collectors make to get more pins and visit new cafés. Over 17 days he traveled to 10 cafés in eight countries: Detroit, Chicago, London, Cardiff, Cairo, Sharm El Sheik, Beirut, Bahrain, Dubai, and Cologne. Some places served as mere stopovers (he was in Bahrain for only 4 hours) and in other cafés he spent an entire evening trading with other collectors (in Cologne he reunited with collectors from London whom he had previously met when he had passed through a few days earlier). Interestingly, his diary of cafés visited and pins bought extends to include reviews of the restaurants themselves, their environs, and the local amenities of the cities. With tips and advice for fellow HRC collectors, travel stories on the *Pin Tales* blog act just like a Rough Guide for tourists at the same time they also represent the collected memories and personal experiences of the individual collector. The pins bought and traded while on holiday, like other souvenir objects, "help to

comprise tourism"; moreover, "it is not simply objects-in-motion but also objects-that-stay-still that help make up tourism" (Lury 1997, 76). The pins are clearly important—they are the reason collectors travel to cities they might not have ordinarily been interested in visiting—but the pin tales that describe the act of consumption within the contexts of travel and tourism follow the approach offered by Arjun Appadurai in his discussion of commodities and value: "From a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (1986, 5). After being in Beirut, Rodriguez writes,

<blockquote>[4.14] I was very surprised with the city. I guess I was expecting a city in ruins, but the truth is that I found a great city with lots of new construction. I felt like I was in Europe again, you can see the a lot of the French in Beirut, yet they have their own flavor. I didn't have to pay for a visa since I was staying less than 2 days (for up to 2 weeks, you can get a visa at the airport for \$17) I didn't have any problems going in or out, no one ever asked me whether I had been to Israel or anything like that...I know that Beirut has a long history, but if you ever make it to the Middle East, I highly recommend that you make a stop there. Don't spend much time at the Hard Rock, and be sure to avoid the Bayview hotel. Other than that that [*sic*], I had a good time!!!!</blockquote>

[4.15] As a HRC pin collector it might seem surprising that Rodriguez recommends not to spend too much time at the café, but get out and explore instead. However, what this suggests, as I intimated earlier, is that collecting HRC pins is not the sole objective for collectors. The potentials of traveling, getting out and seeing new things in new cities, are just as much part of the collecting experience as the purchasing of merchandise. Meeting others, swiping visits, and seeing the sights go hand in hand with the accumulation of

pins for HRC collectors. In John Urry's discussion of the consumption of tourism he suggests that "satisfaction is derived not from the individual act of consumption but from the fact that all sorts of other people are also consumers" of services and souvenirs they buy while traveling (Urry 1995, 131). In Rodriguez's pin tale there is a social aspect of travel and collecting HRC pins that gives him satisfaction—he clearly enjoyed meeting other collectors, seeing new places and new cafés, and offering advice and suggestions in his recounting of the trip. Again, the personalization inherent in a collection (memories attached to the objects collected) is augmented by physical places and virtual spaces—being in Beirut and recalling the experience in a blog online.

[4.16] For both Joli Jenson and Paul Booth, fan communities (particularly those online) offer a number of potentials that extend the experience of being a fan. They are "supportive and protective" because "they are believed to offer identity and connection" (Jenson 1992, 14). The blogs, chats, and posts that fans exchange encourage "collectivity and unification" (Booth 2010, 60) that stem from a shared passion; in the case of pin collectors this passion is for collecting pins, traveling to new cafés, and a desire to be further immersed within the HRCPC community. The pin tales that people can contribute to thus represent attractive travel guides that display and advertise to other online members an individual's enthusiasm, knowledge, cultural capital, and, most importantly, personal identity. Whether this virtual identity is entirely accurate or a facsimile, an exaggeration, or even false, it is a personal reflection of how club members want to be seen by others and thus stands as a marker of personal meaning: "To represent their own conceptual sense of self—their "me" identity—as it applies in the 'real world'" (Booth 2010, 163).

[4.17] Indeed, it would seem that one identity the pin tales are promoting is that people who travel to cafés, buy pins as souvenirs, and represent the connection

between fan tourism and collecting are the most authentic and legitimate type of HRC collector. Their lockers, blogs, profiles, visit maps, and pictures are signs of the fact that not only is HRC fandom about the physical ephemera that fans collect and the places and spaces they visit, but it is also about the convergence of the physical and virtual, the collector and the tourist, the local and the global. In this way, the mass-produced objects at the heart of this confluence become signifiers of an intriguing story, of the merging between all aspects of the collecting process, and of what it means to be a fan within a culture of the mass consumption of commodities. Or, as Igor Kopytoff explains in the "The Cultural Biography of Things,"

<blockquote>[4.18] In complex societies, by contrast, a person's social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting, and there is no clear hierarchy of loyalties that makes one identity dominant over others. Here, the drama of personal biographies has become more and more the drama of identities...The biography of things in complex societies reveals a similar pattern. In the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context. (1986, 89–90)</blockquote>

5. Conclusion: Pin collecting as heterotopic experience

[5.1] The HRCPCC, its members, their travels to collect more pins, and the use of the online profile and the *Pin Tales* blog present us with different perspectives on how space is used, consumed, and manipulated by collectors—those who have a working knowledge of the real places (cafés across the world) and the online spaces (pin locker and visit map). Indeed, what we have seen

from the pin tales is that collectors from all over the world shrink distances between those places by using the virtual space as a meeting point with other collectors; this meeting point, at the same time, also becomes a site for revisiting HRCs and the city-specific pins bought and traded there. An individual's memory of traveling to cafés around the world, collecting new pins, and attaching significant memories to these objects becomes a signpost of recognition for other collectors who have done the same, or plan to do it in the near future. As blogs do, collector memories are built up as an extra layer of meaning on top of the original collectible object and thus collectors can share and experience new café visits and stories about buying pins with others at the same time they engage with their own consumption practices. One person's experience of traveling to a café or attending a local collecting event then adds to and frames another person's who went there (or will go there) for similar reasons but may not have necessarily seen or done the same things.

[5.2] In the HRC we see non traditional fan spaces such as the more tourist focused shop, restaurant, and bar utilized by collectors alongside more business and commercial-oriented spaces in the city such as hotels, office blocks, and other high street stores. HRC varies in its location and accessibility. Some cafés are in the middle of the downtown or business districts while others are attached to hotels in huge leisure complexes. Almost all spaces in which cafés are located, apart from those in theme parks, are generic and often mundane in their appearance: a city street corner or market square. What marks out a café as uniquely Chicago, Boston, Barcelona, or Brussels is the decor and merchandise on the inside. An empty and blank space, or "non-place" to use Marc Augé's (1995) term for generic places like airport lounges, stations, and hotels that are used year round for various business and leisure activities, the HRC becomes an active and real fan space through fan tourism, collecting, and personal interaction. Most sites of pilgrimage are "*multiply coded*" (Brooker 2007, 430),

and thus fandom connected to place differs for each fan. Locations that inspire fan pilgrimage have real world uses; they are not just used or visited by fans or collectors, therefore fans have to actively make these places special—either through physical transformation of the space (adding familiar objects) or performance in that space (costume and cosplay). According to Will Brooker, fan pilgrimage is about pretending, performance and making the new from "the familiar and quotidian" and so fan collectors travel to a café, borrowing Brooker's phrase, approach "the location with their own agenda," and "are able to transform 'flatscape' into a place of wonder. They bring their own urban imaginary, their own maps of fiction and their own angles on the everyday" (443).

[5.3] In transforming generic spaces like HRCs into recognizable places through collecting city-specific pins and other merchandise, fans are creating self-styled identities from a corporate brand. However, notions of space and place are also changed so that foreign cities become familiar sites for HRC pin collectors who regularly travel to build their online profile and add to their locker. The Hard Rock becomes a destination that confirms what fans like and, more importantly, who they are. Merchandise and city contexts combine to make HRC a safe place in which fans revel, or, as Yi-Fu Tuan argues in his book *Space and Place*, "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (1977, 73). In reconciling the contradictory nature of HRC pin collector experiences—their relationship with the objects, traveling to the physical place, blogging on a virtual space—we might use the work of Michel Foucault and his conception of the heterotopia. In opposition to the nonphysical spaces of utopias, which Foucault feels are "unreal spaces," heterotopias are

<blockquote>[5.4] real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites,

a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986, 24)

[5.5] Following Foucault, Ken Gelder sees the heterotopia as imagined "but it also has some kind of realisation, somewhere" (Gelder 2007, 81). For Hard Rock pin collectors then, the heterotopia is realized in the object itself as it combines and simultaneously represents, contests, and inverts the physical real place of where it was bought and the virtual space of the web. Pin collecting is therefore both things at the same time. Ultimately, all spaces that collectors inhabit are lived spaces, spaces of possibilities that are at the same time non-places (as defined by Augé) and real places. They offer a dialectic space important to communal life and community: absolute, relative, and relational (Harvey 2007, 45). For collectors of merchandise and travel souvenirs like HRC pins, place and space are in constant flux as individuals within the community move between the object, cafés, and the multiple space of their online presence. Collectors, in their pin tales and pin lockers, report their experiences and confirm their efforts yet concepts of the fixed space are no longer relevant, particularly in an age of convergence where all things and all people can play with and interpret objects in different ways through different media. The collection represents a heterotopia, containing real objects from real places, in which and through which collectors can access new worlds, meet new people, and travel to different geographic spaces.

[5.6] In *The System of Objects* Jean Baudrillard proposes that the collection is personal and "what you really collect is always yourself" (2005, 97). As in fan studies, there is a clear link between identity and object of fandom—one reflects

the other. In that respect, Cornel Sandvoss argues that fandom is "a symbolic resource in the formation of identity and in the positioning of one's self in the modern world...and the integration of the self into the dominant economic, social and cultural conditions of industrial modernity...it is, in every sense, a mirror of consumption" (2005, 165). In the HRC pin collection, then, we see personalized depictions of history—mirrors to the self and the self transformed as it travels the world. Objects therefore embody memories of things past and inform activities and what one does with the collection in the present and future. There are necessary components of life as it is defined by the historical trajectory from birth to death. Baudrillard continues, "It is in this sense that the environment of private objects and their possession (collecting being the most extreme instance) is a dimension of our life which, though imaginary, is absolutely essential. Just as essential as dreams" (2005, 103). However, if fandom and collecting are about formations of the self, then they are also products of the cultural environment—how we are influenced by culture and what parts of culture we take into our own lives. Jenkins defines fan culture as a "culture that is produced by fans and other amateurs for circulation through an underground economy and that draws much of its content from the commercial culture" (2006, 325). In this way we can also understand practices of HRC pin collecting where mass-produced and public objects are taken into the personal collection of the individual. Again Baudrillard recognizes this:

<blockquote>[5.7] As for collecting proper, it has a door open onto culture, being concerned with differentiated objects which often have exchange value, which may also be "objects" of preservation, trade, social ritual, exhibition—perhaps even generators of profit. Such objects are accompanied by projects. And though they remain interrelated, their interplay involves the social world outside, and embraces human relationships. (2005, 111)</blockquote>

[5.8] Once collected, these pins are made into talking points and allow for social and commodity exchange between individuals on the web and in store as they become highly valued and desirable within the wider Hard Rock fan collecting community.

6. Notes

1. As of August 2013 there were 2,273 friends of the Hard Rock Collectors Club Facebook page.

2. As of August 2013 there were 1,725 members with personal pin lockers that were open for all members to view. Individuals can opt to share their pin lockers so others can see what pins people have, contact collectors, and offer to trade or buy pins.

3. *Pin Tales* ran for 2 years with 11 issues between June 2004 and September 2005. Originally created to act as a sort of travelogue for pin collectors, its use and functionality were superseded by other avenues of communication and interaction on the Web site. As already mentioned, as of 2012 HRCPC has had an official Facebook page which now allows for greater accessibility and networking with other collectors. Individuals can post photos, tag favorite images, and use the site to describe their recent trips to cafés and what pins they purchased.

4. *Pin Tales*, June 2004. All subsequent blog entries discussed come from this edition. It is available online (<http://www.hardrock.com/estore/buzzpower/asps/user/non-frames/#a>). I have chosen to focus on this first issue because it established the terms of reference

for subsequent issues. Also, Fairbairn as moderator clearly set out what kinds of collector stories were deemed suitable for publication and even the type of collecting methods he saw as legitimate and worthy—that is, not buying from eBay. As moderator and collector, Fairbairn is clearly distinguishing between forms of and reasons for collecting HRC pins, and therefore this first issue is important evidence of the motivation of the HRCPPC.

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