

## 7 Making 'Atomic' History: Consuming Historical Narratives in the 'Unofficial' Digital Archive

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In 2014, an article entitled 'Let's Get Spherical', in the UK-based *Vintage Explorer* magazine proclaimed, 'The design world . . . is again awash with atomic balls!'<sup>1</sup> The revival of the 'atomic balls' to which the magazine refers concerns the twenty-first-century fashion for a kind of post-war household furnishing distinguished by a 'ball-and-rod' form, often comprising metal rod and wooden or rubber ball-feet or finials (Figure 7.1) Today, the so-called atomic magazine racks, chairs, coat hooks and other objects sharing this distinctive construction serve as archetypes of a brand of future-facing, optimistic post-war British design for collectors, aficionados, historians and museum-goers alike. But the passage of time and changes in the technologies mediating post-war ball-and-rod objects have corresponded with great shifts in the status of these furnishings since the period of their original production. Their most recent resurgence as a commodity has seen them eagerly snapped up by retro enthusiasts in Britain, for whom online platforms, principally eBay, constitute an important site of consumption.<sup>2</sup> The contemporary life of these 'atomic' objects on eBay constitutes an important stage in their long and dynamic history as a commodity, one that illuminates the site's character as a contemporary technology of archivization with the power to shape, collapse and overlay historical timelines.

This chapter focuses on the mediation of ball-and-rod objects for sale on eBay's UK site, eBay.co.uk, in the mid-2010s, when this research was carried out.<sup>3</sup> It explores the role of ball-and-rod furnishings within popular narratives about the post-war past and its design and science today. But it is also about larger questions concerning eBay's role in the development of popular memory, particularly where design histories are concerned – questions that the twenty-first-century history of 'atomic' furnishings make difficult to ignore.

Retro consumption is an important way in which those who are not professional historians engage with narratives of the past. In recent decades, this function has been taken up by online platforms. In her ethnographic study of contemporary British retro, Sarah Elsie Baker writes of the recent shift in retro exchange from 'spaces like jumble sales to ones like eBay'.<sup>4</sup> eBay has reshaped British retro consumption, contracting geographies, providing a database of current retro commodities, and altering how sellers describe objects.<sup>5</sup> On eBay, second-hand exchange



**Figure 7.1** British ball-and-rod magazine rack sourced from eBay, most likely produced between the late 1950s and early 1960s, and in a style sold at Woolworths in the period. © Emily Candela.

is structured by technologies and interactions that did not shape previous forms of retro consumption. The site's operations as an online shopping application are therefore crucial to understanding the solidification and mediation of the historical narratives in which ball-and-rod objects have been embedded as twenty-first-century commodities.

eBay is a site of 'public history', one of the places in which history is 'made' – or 'written' in a metaphorical sense – outside the penning of texts by historians working in academia. 'Public history', a designation broader than 'popular history', includes history texts written for non-academic audiences, museum display, documentaries and films, historical re-enactment, and forms of second-hand consumption.<sup>6</sup> Yet, aside from a few key studies that examine or acknowledge eBay as a platform for the consumption of histories and the 'narrativization' of objects, there is little in-depth research on eBay as a site for the generation and communication of

histories – especially design histories.<sup>7</sup> The narrativization of ball-and-rod objects on eBay, however, prompts questions about the digital public histories mediated by designed objects from the past, and about the practice of design history at a time when issues of who, and what, writes history become more pressing.

## Icons and archetypes

British iterations of the ball-and-rod style, produced primarily from the late 1940s through early 1960s, became attached early on to the ‘contemporary’ or ‘Festival’ style promoted by the government-sponsored Council of Industrial Design (CoID) in the early 1950s. This association, which endures today, was due in part to the 1951 Festival of Britain debut of designer Ernest Race’s ball-footed Antelope chair, which maintains a status in academic histories and museum collections as an icon of post-war British design. Later in the 1950s, after the style had fallen out of favour with the CoID and the modernist design establishment generally, retailers, including Woolworths, began selling cheaper, mass-produced ball-and-rod furnishings. These account for many of the ball-and-rod objects produced in the period, and are the ‘atomic’ furnishings most commonplace on eBay today.

In their twenty-first-century lives as second-hand commodities, ball-and-rod objects – primarily the cheaper, marginal furnishings, such as magazine racks – are among the archetypes defining the ‘mid-century modern’ style. Their recent re-emergence as a retro commodity coincided with the latest retro revival of the 1950s. Beginning in the late 2000s, this has seen the period reimagined through fashion, period television and film, advertising and the consumption of post-war and reproduction ‘mid-century modern’ designed objects by both committed collectors and those with a casual affection for retro home accessories. Although there is no published academic research dedicated specifically to ball-and-rod furnishings, surveys of post-war British design, across different genres of history-writing, almost always picture at least one.<sup>8</sup> With their spindly rods and often colourful balls, these objects embrace the visual hallmarks often associated with post-war British ‘contemporary’ design. They have also become emblematic of the period’s scientific discoveries; ball-and-rod furnishings are frequently described as ‘molecular’ or ‘atomic’, suggesting that their motif is a kind of science-inflected ornament.

In the post-war period, however, a single name to describe the style did not consolidate around it. In the design press, magazines and in manufacturers’ and retailers’ advertisements, they were frequently described simply as furnishings with ‘rods’ and ‘balls’ or ‘knobs’. And very often, these outlets included no text at all accompanying ball-and-rod objects. Their relative marginality as commodities at the time is demonstrated further by the fact that they were frequently marketed as something consumers were not expected to buy for themselves but rather would purchase as gifts. In the 1950s, for instance, Heal’s advertised ball-and-rod furnishings in their ‘Presents for Particular People’ catalogue, in which shoppers were entreated to ‘find gifts to please your most exacting friends’ (Figure 7.2).<sup>9</sup> Post-war sources,

## Presents for Particular People

The buying of presents is a highly individual art which requires the careful study of the recipient's taste and interest. At Heal's, with five floors of presents to choose from, you can do your shopping for all the family and find gifts to please your most exacting friends.

This catalogue has been arranged so that many presents of unusual character can be found, floor by floor, and department by department, starting with the Craftsman's Market on the Fourth Floor, and finishing with the Electrical Department, in the Basement.

For those who are unable to visit Heal's, it is hoped that this catalogue and the enclosed order form will help the choosing of presents at home.

### The Fourth Floor THE CRAFTSMAN'S MARKET

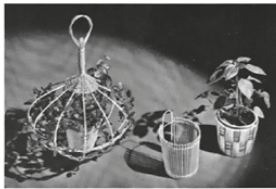


**COTTON CUSHION COVER, CM/S 480**  
Hand-woven in red, emerald or yellow, trimmed white ric-rac. 14" x 18". (Postage 1s.) £1. 17. 6

**CUSHION (for above), CM/S 483**  
Filled with down and feather. 14" x 18". (Postage 1s.) 10s. 6d.

**WASTE PAPER BASKET, CM/MW 140**  
Wicker with black or red metal frame (15½" high overall). (Packing & Postage 2s.) £1. 8. 3

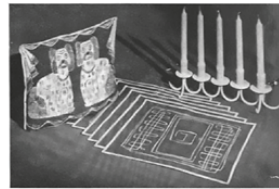
**MAGAZINE RACK, CM/MW 96**  
White metal and natural walnut. 19½" high x 15" long. (Packing & Carriage 5s.) £2. 17. 9



**HANGING PLANT BASKET, CM/MW 150**  
Wicker, with small glazed terra cotta bowl. 15" high overall. (Packing & Postage 2s. 6d.) 11s. 0d.

**FLOWER POT HOLDER, CM/MW 64**  
Natural cane with hook for hanging, 5" diam., 5¼" high. (Postage 1s.) 9s. 6d.  
(Without hook for standing 9s. 0d. Other sizes 10s. 0d., 10s. 6d., 11s. 0d., 11s. 6d.)

**FLOWER POT HOLDER, CM/MW 149**  
Bamboo and string; 4½" x 4½". (Postage 1s.) 8s. 0d.  
(Also with hook for hanging 8s. 6d. Other sizes 9s. 0d., 9s. 6d., 10s. 0d., 10s. 6d.)



**LINEN TEA COSY, CM/L 7005**  
Staffordshire poodles design in white on pink, gold or grey ground. (Postage 1s.) £1. 11. 6

**TABLE MATS, CM/L 9005A**  
Hand-printed linen in white on elephant grey or yellow ground, set of six, each 14" x 11½". (Post Free) £2. 14. 0

**CANDELABRA, CM/MW 99A**  
Black or white painted wrought iron to take five candles. (Post Free) £2. 7. 6  
(There is a large selection of candles to be found in the Metalware Department)

Figure 7.2 Heal & Son Ltd, 'Presents for Particular People' catalogue, 1953, detail of page 2. © Archive of Heal & Son Limited, Victoria and Albert Museum.

such as this, present a rather different picture of these objects and their status. Once the peripheral furnishing with 'knob' feet, a possible gift for a picky friend; now an archetype of post-war 'atomic' design.<sup>10</sup>

While researching the post-war British history of ball-and-rod furnishings, I discovered that aside from the more well-known high-end examples of the style, like Race's Antelope chair, ball-and-rod objects are rarely found in conventional archives and museum collections. Consequently, as many historians who research artefacts absent from the traditional archive do, I turned to the 'unofficial' archive, that is, eBay. I typed 'atomic' into the bar at the top of the webpage and clicked the blue 'Search' button. An abundance of coloured balls and thin metal rods shaped into magazine racks, coat hooks, rubbish bins, plant stands and other furnishings appeared – the very objects that were so resistant to the word 'atomic' in period sources, and were largely absent from conventional archives.

It was in this 'unofficial' archive where the appellation for ball-and-rod objects most closely resembled their characterization in many secondary sources. On eBay, ball-and-rod objects have been almost universally identified with the keyword 'atomic'.

The results of systematic searches carried out in 2015 for the term 'atomic' across the whole site and in eBay's 'vintage/retro' category indicated this: nearly half of the items in the first one hundred results for any search using the keyword 'atomic' were ball-and-rod objects, which constituted a larger proportion of the listings summoned by the search term than any other single type of object in these sets of results.<sup>11</sup>

As in the museum, on eBay the lives of historical artefacts involve their submission to particular modes of categorization. These affect the kinds of narratives about the past in which they are embedded. In this case, the keyword 'atomic' was central to the narrativization of the ball-and-rod objects I observed on eBay, due to the way in which keywords on eBay function as indexes for informal categories. One sense in which the term 'atomic' is used on eBay is as shorthand for a period, the 'Atomic Age' (in line with the liberal use of the word in 1950s' retro culture generally). The shifting results list generated by any search using the keyword 'atomic' doubles as an informal historical category, the 'Atomic Age', defined by the artefacts appearing on the page. The strong link between ball-and-rod objects on eBay and the tag 'atomic' afforded them a prominent position within this informal category, where their abundance generated a retrospective sense of their popularity and archetypal status in the post-war era.

The profusion of ball-and-rod furnishings on eBay speaks less to their actual post-war lives, however, than to the mechanisms of their arrival on eBay. The generation that originally consumed ball-and-rod objects in the post-war period is ageing; a 25-year-old in 1958 would have been 82 in 2015, one year older than the UK's average life expectancy.<sup>12</sup> A marginal furnishing, such as a Woolworths magazine rack, is rarely treasured as an heirloom or keepsake when its original owner passes away or moves home. Instead it is likely to be cast off, often landing eventually on eBay. There it joins a collection of other objects like it, their numbers generating the illusion of post-war popularity. As Zoe Trodd writes on eBay, 'junk becomes a counterhistory'.<sup>13</sup> This is the past as what consumers from the period have discarded.

Although ball-and-rod objects accounted for most of the results of searches carried out using the keyword 'atomic', they shared this category with other now-archetypal 1950s and 1960s domestic furnishings (Figure 7.3). These included kidney-shaped coffee tables, glassware with starburst patterns and furnishings with thin splayed legs. The combined visual representation of these archetypes within eBay's seemingly endless results lists contributed to the ball-and-rod's narrativization on the site. Scrolling through the 'atomic' category represents a mode of consuming history that differs greatly from encountering a ball-footed object in the home of a post-war consumer or in a charity shop, likely surrounded by furniture from multiple periods. On eBay, as they drift upwards on the screen, ball-and-rod objects are cut off from the contexts that might have defined them in the past, and inserted into a vision of post-war material culture in which its own past is invisible. The artefacts of the 'atomic' category suggest the most unlikely of post-war British homes: one in which everything is new.

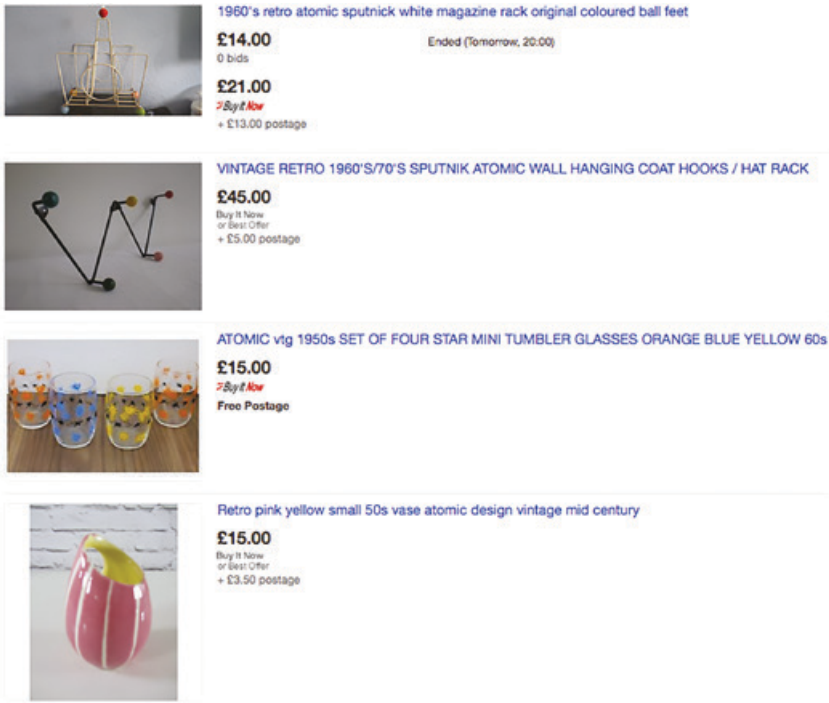


Figure 7.3 Screenshot from the results list of a search using keyword ‘atomic’ in ebay.co.uk’s ‘Vintage and Retro Collectables’ category, accessed 20 July 2015. Image courtesy of eBay.

Ball-and-rod objects have re-emerged as commodities before, during 1950s retro revivals in the mid-1970s, mid-1980s and late 1990s. Their identification as ‘atomic’ was stronger on eBay in the mid-2010s, however, than in the literature associated with these previous revivals. In the 1970s, for example, British critic Bevis Hillier identified ball-and-rod objects by the term ‘cocktail cherry’.<sup>14</sup> He surmised that the style referenced the ‘breaking-down of matter into atoms and molecules’, which, he wrote, were ‘often imaged by “cocktail cherry” type models’.<sup>15</sup> In the 1980s, ‘atomic’ appeared as an adjective for ball-and-rod objects in some collectors’ guides, such as US author Cara Greenberg’s influential *Mid-Century Modern*.<sup>16</sup> But collectors’ guides published in the 1990s and early 2000s still do not show the strong solidification of a definitive term for ball-and-rod furnishings.<sup>17</sup> Alongside ‘swizzle stick’, ‘cocktail cherry’ still appears, perhaps due to its use in Hillier’s 1975 book, which is well-known within British retro collecting circles.<sup>18</sup> The 2003 Miller’s buyer’s guide, in some ways a precursor to eBay as a source for the current value of collectibles, uses no specific terminology for the style.<sup>19</sup>

That eBay’s recent link between ball-and-rod objects and the term ‘atomic’ (or a single name generally) is stronger than in collectors’ guides of previous retro revivals may be due in part to the way in which eBay has altered the mediation of retro

commodities. Baker writes that brand names, such as 'Eames', are used in a fluid fashion on eBay, and with a frequency not witnessed previously in collecting cultures.<sup>20</sup> This use of brand names is one way, Baker observes, that the identification of objects on eBay is mirrored in retro culture more generally.<sup>21</sup> 'Atomic', in the case of eBay's ball-and-rod objects, is similarly deployed as though it is a 'brand' – as a shorthand classifier advertising and making easily identifiable a large group of commodities. And this strong attachment is evident in recent British retro culture outside eBay as well, as evidenced by its use in publications such as *Vintage Explorer* magazine, and more recent collectors' guides; a 2009 Miller's guide references 'the rod and ball atomic-style', for example.<sup>22</sup>

It is impossible to state with certainty that eBay is solely responsible for the strong contemporary attachment between ball-and-rod furnishings and the term 'atomic', but it is clear that eBay's design facilitates and solidifies such linkages. This is due to the way metadata functions on the site. Metadata is the information (like the tag 'atomic') attached to data online – including eBay auctions and 'Buy It Now' listings – that makes such data searchable. The algorithms governing how metadata is searched determine what a user sees online.

Like most marketplaces, eBay has its own systems and conventions for displaying goods. Central to its display of objects is the way metadata operates in its database. eBay's software indexes, searches and displays items based on tags, keywords, price and geographical data entered by users so that potential buyers can more easily locate desired objects. Not all metadata is immediately visible to Internet users, but on eBay some metadata is in plain sight, such as the titles accompanying items for sale. These are especially significant because eBay's search engine's default mode trawls keywords in titles, rather than words, in item descriptions. Many guides to selling on eBay therefore emphasize the title's importance, advising sellers to anticipate buyers' search terms in their titles.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, consumers are enlisted in using the language of the object's mediation, because an effective search involves anticipating sellers' tags. This cycle in which sellers and potential buyers anticipate each other's terminology ultimately leads to the universalization and solidification of terminology for ball-and-rod furnishings on eBay, principally the tag 'atomic'.

In her study of eBay item descriptions for nineteenth-century *cartes-de-visite*, Trodd points out that the historical narrativization of collectibles on the site is part of the seller's strategy.<sup>24</sup> Most ball-and-rod objects on eBay lack extensive item descriptions but, by carefully titling their auctions, sellers capitalize on the potential of the visible metadata in titles to double as a tool for communication. Title tags are used to limn histories of ball-and-rod objects. Within the laconic, awkward compositional style common to the eBay title's bargain-aesthetic, a vocabulary of keywords has congealed around ball-and-rod furnishings. Title terms orbiting the most prevalent tag 'atomic' have included 'sputnik', 'mid-century modern', 'kitsch', and sometimes 'molecular' or 'Eames' (possibly a reference to the Eames's 1953 'Hang-It-All' ball-and-rod hooks, or simply shorthand for a picture of 'Atomic Age' design dominated by US archetypes). For example: 'ATOMIC LAMP FINIAL MID CENTURY MODERN



STYLE SPACE NEEDLE'; 'Original 1950s Festival of Britain style shop mirror 24"x14" molecular'; 'Vintage Retro Magazine Rack, Atomic Feet, Original Condition'. Ball-feet were sometimes singled out as 'atomic' specifically (as in 'atomic feet'), thus introducing a second, more specific meaning of the term 'atomic' on eBay; in addition to further solidifying the archetypal position of the ball-and-rod motif in the larger 'Atomic Age' category, this usage of 'atomic' suggested a resemblance to ball-and-spoke models of atoms in molecules.

The solidification of terminology on eBay, designed to lubricate commerce on the site, has in this case also solidified ball-and-rod objects' associations with a post-war history of science. Many titles for ball-and-rod objects reference notions of 1950s and 1960s period style with a strong emphasis on post-war science and technology as optimistic, future focused, anodyne and – unironically – integrated into the home. Titles such as 'Gumball Atomic Space Age Magazine Rack' suggest an age of technological and scientific discovery stripped of any inkling of danger or destruction that the 'atomic' might otherwise connote. In this sense, eBay's image of the past replicates aspects of post-war narratives about science that were deployed, for instance, in many public science exhibitions in Britain. Historian Sophie Forgan has shown that exhibitions at the Science Museum and the 1951 Festival of Britain focused on science as safe, largely omitting references to destructive applications. In this period, she writes, 'official institutions such as the Science Museum eschewed all mention of the bomb' in discussions of atomic physics.<sup>25</sup>

Period style in the case of eBay's ball-and-rod objects becomes tethered to an analogous notion of 'period science'. Just as design histories based on notions of period style understand objects through a progression of visual styles indelibly linked with period designation over other historical contexts, ball-and-rod objects on eBay are categorized and understood through a notion of the period's most well-known and mythologized areas of scientific novelty: nuclear, molecular and space sciences. The historical narrative of these 'atomic' designed objects on eBay thus contributes to what historian of science David Edgerton has described as an 'innovation-centred timeline' of the history of science and technology that can obscure a picture of what was actually used, experienced and consumed in a period in favour of a teleological, positivistic presentation of progress.<sup>26</sup>

In these processes of narrativization, eBay is, of course, part of a larger ecology of retro consumption, past and present. There are, no doubt, elements of a feedback loop operating between eBay, collector's guides and other spaces of retro consumption. But, as noted above, eBay is the go-to site for many collectors in a landscape in which much retro exchange now takes place online. Furthermore, eBay articulates narratives in a way that simply was not possible in markets for second-hand objects that were not word-searchable, such as vintage shops and car boot fairs. The ball-and-rod object's link with the keyword 'atomic' on the site makes this clear; it is funnelled into narrow historical categories, solidifying its archetypal status within the site's novelty-focused 'Atomic Age' narrative. eBay replicates aspects of existing popular memory, but strengthens and streamlines them for wide



dissemination through the action of its software, shaping stories of second-hand objects on- and offline.

## Making history

Through its display design and indexing functions, eBay acts not only as an e-commerce platform, but also as a digital archive with a powerful narrativizing influence. As this study demonstrates, however, many of eBay's modes of narrativization differ from those operating in traditional historical writing. The narratives explored here, for instance, depart from the conventions of the linear prose text (and from the methodologies of professional history practice). Instead, the stories generated through the display, categorization and indexing of objects more closely resemble the narrative style of the archive. In this 'unofficial' archive, Jacques Derrida's observation that 'archivization produces as much as it records the event' holds just as much as it does for traditional archives.<sup>27</sup>

Narratives emerge from the interaction between eBay's software, which traffics in keywords and categories, and the buyers, browsers and sellers who use it. This prompts a rethinking of social historian Raphael Samuel's statement, published in 1994, that if history was viewed 'as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of its practitioners would be legion'.<sup>28</sup> The rise of online media adds new complexities to the politics of knowledge at the heart of questions about public history, as it has increased access to the tools for making and consuming history beyond academic forums for some publics, and has introduced new technologies to the process of 'making' history.<sup>29</sup>

There is a contemporary strain of dynamic, digital archive that emerges on commercial sites with user-generated content.<sup>30</sup> These include, for instance, the collections of photographs on Flickr and Facebook's stores of personal information. eBay is also one of these. And although it provides space outside the often-insular sphere of academia for participation in history, this private space in many respects does not constitute a 'democratic' platform for the production of histories. In addition to the fact that access to and participation on the site is delimited in numerous ways, the narratives generated and disseminated there are shaped by ideas inscribed in what communication scholar Michele White calls eBay's underlying 'organizational logic' (represented, for instance, by features such as its in-built item categories).<sup>31</sup> eBay users are, in many ways, subject to the platform rather than the converse. This dynamic does not remove people from the equation, however: human actors, such as eBay's product managers and user interaction and experience designers, play a role in making public design histories in the 'unofficial' digital archive.

As the mediation of ball-and-rod objects on eBay indicates, historical narratives on the site are, in many ways, problematic. But there is nevertheless reason for historians working in academia to engage with such public histories. First, public history can provide perspectives on the past that 'official' histories might miss.<sup>32</sup> In this case, for instance, eBay's 'atomic' narrative is one populated by the mass-produced

ball-and-rod objects that constitute much of the post-war biography of this class of furnishings, but which are missing from most archives and museum collections, and from histories that spotlight the role of high-end designers such as Race and the Eameses.

Second, an understanding of public history narratives is clearly key for historians engaging in dialogues outside of academia. And as Ludmilla Jordanova has argued, even those who do not can benefit from understanding the operation of what she calls popular ‘myths’, because of their sheer power in the present. ‘When we talk about historical myths,’ she writes, ‘we are not so much contesting what happened as drawing attention to the intense affect that surrounds certain views of the past.’<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in this case, the twenty-first-century retro consumption of ball-and-rod objects is a channel through which historical narratives of both design and science enter popular culture, and their circulation operates as a part of larger dynamics of public history-making. They are embedded, for instance, within narratives of innovation-focused histories of science that have been critiqued for their dominance in public elsewhere, such as in museums of science and technology.<sup>34</sup>

The case of post-war ball-and-rod objects on eBay reveals yet another reason for historians to engage further with the operation of historical narratives outside the academy. Such understanding is not only key to the practice of historians concerned with the wider ramifications of their work, but also necessary for the academic work itself. Historians are part of many ‘publics’ comprising the audience for public histories. Academic design historians have worked for decades to move past the influence of connoisseurial approaches, and have, in many respects, succeeded at this endeavour. There is an enduring relevance, however, to critically examining the field’s traditional links – and sometimes-blurred boundary – with new cultures of collecting and connoisseurship, and the technologies underpinning them.

## Notes

1. Colin Pill, ‘Let’s Get Spherical’, *Vintage Explorer* (February/March 2014): 40.
2. ‘Retro’ here refers to the revival of post-war styles of a ‘long’ 1950s, encompassing the late 1940s and early 1960s.
3. ‘Mediation’ in this context corresponds to what Grace Lees-Maffei calls the ‘mediating channels’ between producers and consumers, which include retailing and advertising. Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘The Production – Consumption – Mediation Paradigm’, *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 4 (2009): 354.
4. Sarah Elsie Baker, *Retro Style: Class, Gender and Design in the Home* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 107.
5. Baker, *Retro Style*.
6. Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds), *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013).
7. Zoe Trodd, ‘Reading eBay: Hidden Stores, Subjective Stories, and a People’s History of the Archive’, in Ken Hillis and Michael Petit (eds), *Everyday eBay: Culture, Collecting, and*

- Desire* (London: Routledge, 2006), 77–90; Ken Hillis, 'Auctioning the Authentic: eBay, Narrative Effect, and the Superfluity of Memory', in Hillis and Petit, *Everyday eBay*, 167–84; Baker, *Retro Style*; Michele White, *Buy It Now: Lessons from eBay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).
8. See e.g. Christopher Breward and Ghislaine Wood (eds), *British Design From 1948: Innovation in the Modern Age* (London: V&A, 2012); Jonathan M. Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Ornament* (London: Studio Vista, 1990); Lesley Jackson, *Contemporary: Architecture and Interiors of the 1950s* (London: Phaidon, 1994).
  9. Heal & Son, 'Presents for Particular People', 1953–1956, 2. V&A National Art Library Trade Catalogues Collection.
  10. There is insufficient space for a detailed post-war history of ball-and-rod furnishings here. Research informing this section is covered in my doctoral thesis, 'Mid-Century Molecular: The Material Culture of X-ray Crystallographic Visualisation across Post-war British Science and Industrial Design', PhD dissertation, Royal College of Art and the Science Museum, 2016.
  11. As a result of eBay search experiments carried out between 2013 and 2015 testing the relationship between ball-and-rod objects and several keywords, I hypothesized that they were most strongly linked to the keyword 'atomic'. Between May and July 2015, I analyzed the frequency with which ball-and-rod objects appear in results lists generated by searches using the keyword 'atomic' through data gathered weekly throughout this three-month period.
  12. Office for National Statistics, National Life Tables, United Kingdom, 2012–2014, 23 September 2015, [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_416983.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_416983.pdf) (accessed 26 September 2015).
  13. Trodd, 'Reading eBay', 88.
  14. Bevis Hillier, *Austerity/Binge: The Decorative Arts of the Forties and Fifties* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), 159.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. Cara Greenberg, *Mid-Century Modern* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 45.
  17. Paul Rennie, *Miller's 20th-Century Design Buyers Guide* (Kent: Miller's, 2003); Madeleine Marsh, *Miller's Collecting the 1950s* (London: Miller's, 1997); Christopher Pearce, *Fifties Source Book: A Visual Guide to the Style of a Decade* (London: Quarto, 1990).
  18. Marsh, *Miller's Collecting the 1950s*, 35, 78; Pearce, *Fifties Source Book*, 135.
  19. Rennie, *Miller's 20th-Century Design*.
  20. Baker, *Retro Style*, 101.
  21. Baker, *Retro Style*.
  22. Judith Miller, *Miller's 20th Century Design: The Definitive Illustrated Sourcebook* (London: Miller's, 2009), 146.
  23. Cathy Hayes, *The Easy eBay Business Guide: The Story of One Person's Success and a Step-by-Step Guide to Doing It Yourself* (London: Right Way, 2014).
  24. Trodd, 'Reading eBay'.
  25. Sophie Forgan, 'Atoms in Wonderland', *History and Technology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 182.

26. David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2006), xi.
27. Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 17.
28. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), 17.
29. Meg Foster, 'Online and Plugged In?: Public History and Historians in the Digital Age', *Public History Review* 21 (2014): 1–19.
30. See Marquard Smith, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History: The Work of Research in the Age of Digital Searchability and Distributability', *Journal of Visual Culture* 12, no. 3 (2013): 375–403.
31. White, *Buy It Now*, 8.
32. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*.
33. Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), 103.
34. Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*.