An app for inquiring minds

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Project Team

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Client Expertise

We are a group of sociocultural anthropologists who have decades of experience engaging in **long-term immersive field research** in diverse sites around the world, including in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Our current research collaboration seeks to understand "**logistics**" – that is, the everyday practices and professional industry for managing the movement of people, things, and information– and its relationship to our increasingly on-demand global economy. Logistics is a complex sociotechnical process involving many different actors, knowledges and technologies distributed across places that are both (1) clustered together into local industries and (2) spread out across international borders to facilitate the circulation of materials, labor, money and data in global supply chains.

Understanding such a large-scale problem requires new research experiments in doing fieldwork. One aim of our project is to **innovate new methodological approaches** for investigating complex global phenomena like logistics.

To do this, we have launched "**The Experimental Field School**" to gather scholars with diverse expertise to pursue collaborative team experiments in studying logistics, including with **the use of mobile devices for conducting fieldwork and sharing findings.**

Project Idea – Curiosity Cabinet

The proposed app was initially developed in a UT Austin coding boot camp with the UChicago "Logistics" research team in mind. Currently it exists only as proof of concept rather than as a working application. Below is the original pitch imagined with a broader audience beyond academia:

Elevator pitch

Are you an avid collector or scholar eager to share your artifacts and notes with a community of like-minded enthusiasts?

Or perhaps you are a 5th grade teacher with a remote classroom or someone gathering scrapbook materials looking for an interactive platform to stage your "show-and-tell."

Welcome to **Curiosity Cabinet** - a new user-friendly application for inquiring minds. Think of us as Pinterest Plus - the next generation of your digital vision board or personal online collection with new interactive features for uploading your favorite materials and for annotating each item in your collection with convenient pop-up comments.

Calling all curious collectors: Upload. Annotate. Share!

Problem Statement and Definition

A sketch of the proposed app is below. You can access the rest of the original pitch and its related materials [here](#).

Concept

Overview: An Interactive show-and-tell application that allows contributors to upload an image and then annotate that image with notes pinned to specific parts in the image being described. Viewers can then explore the collection of uploaded images and read all the annotations attached to each image.

Motivation: Empower sharing communities of scholars, collectors and enthusiasts of all sorts of things to upload and gather their materials - and the notes related to each item - in one place to exchange with like-minded people.

User Story:
- As a user I want to share my object of curiosity or collection of data with others through a user-friendly platform.
- After logging in as a contributor, I want to easily upload and display an image of my artifact / data collection.
- I want to easily add notes to specific parts of the image by appending nodes with pop-up comment boxes so I can convey my knowledge or curiosities about specific features of my artifact.
- I want to be able to edit and update the notes I attached to each item.
- I want all my artifacts and related annotations to be displayed as an interactive collection that viewers can access by clicking on each artifact and on each related node to display pop-up boxes of my comments.

Problem Statement and Definition

Some starting inspiration for the App:

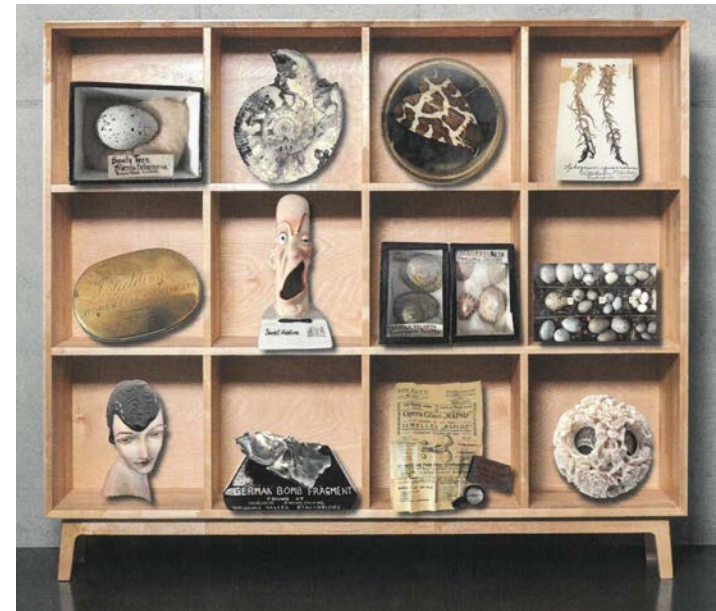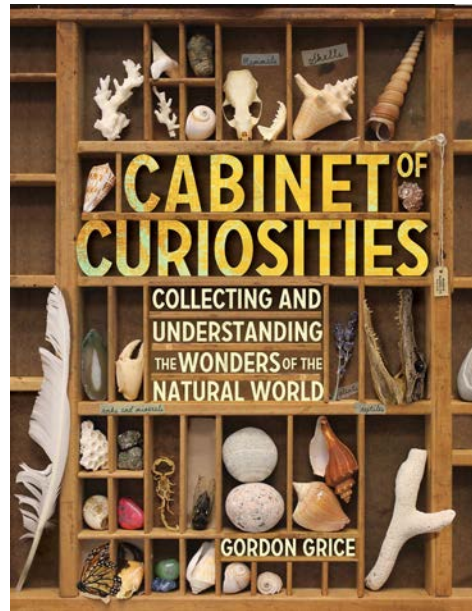Inspiration: The Original Wunderkammer

Marchese Ferdinando Cospi, about 1657

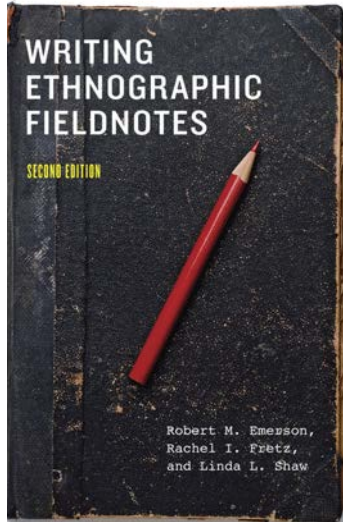Inspiration: Field Guides

Problem Statement and Definition

Some starting inspiration for the App:

Background / environment where the App will be used

Field research – the main practice of anthropologists – requires collecting materials and documenting all kinds of interactions with places, events, people, and things.

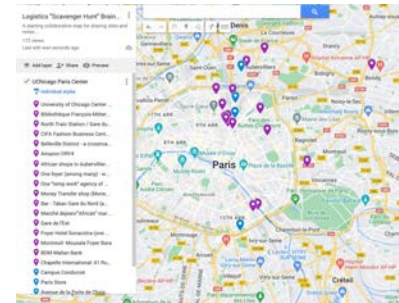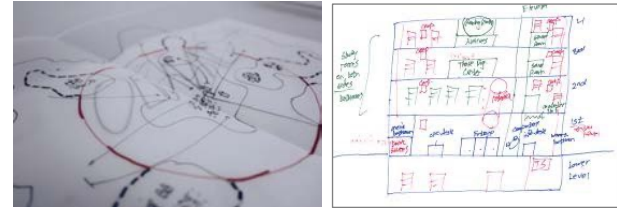**Field Notes – Handwritten, Typed, Voice Memo**

Photography & Video

Mapping & Diagramming

Audio Recording

Securing data collection and research exchanges for the App

Anthropologists and other researchers who do fieldwork with human subjects typically ensure that all their data are stored in a secured place and protect the confidentiality of people who participate in the study. Any collaborative exchange of data between scholars also needs to abide by these standards.

Julie Chu
University of Chicago

Audience/s

The initial target user

•	Research collaborators in the UChicago Experimental Field School who are gathering in various hotspots of logistics – Paris, Chicago, Seoul – to develop new fieldwork strategies.
•	Other scholars and investigators who conduct fieldwork and want to share their findings.
•	Students training to become ethnographers and others interested in field-based research.

Background knowledge

•	User will likely be situated in different parts of the world and conducting research in different languages.
•	Fieldwork often takes places in fast-changing and sensitive environments which require the researcher to be discrete in taking notes, pictures and other data.
•	Sometimes fieldworkers have to shift gears or improvise on the fly when gathering materials on sensitive topics or unstable events, especially when questions of confidentiality, security or conflicts of interest arise.

International dimension

•	The app should be interoperable across various foreign languages and in regions with different digital ecosystems (e.g., across and within the infamous "Great Firewall" of China and in sites with spotty internet access or rolling blackouts).

Broader ambition

•	The app should be accessible to anyone interested in collecting and sharing notes, maps, images, and other AV materials into one user-friendly show-and-tell platform.

Other relevant Apps (if known and obvious)

Currently used in the work environment

- Evernote, Notes (iOS) and other notetaking apps
- Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook (for the old school) and other image-sharing social media apps
- Atlas.ti – a common qualitative data analysis and research software (with app version)
- Google Maps and other geolocation apps
- Ramblr – a geolocated blogging app typically for hikers but "hacked" by ethnographers for research
- Native smart phone camera apps – for photography & video recording
- Voice memo and other audio recording apps – for interviews and soundscape recordings
- Scrivener – word-processing program for organizing documents, notes, drafts, and metadata (with iOS version)
- Dropbox, Google Drive and other cloud storage apps for securing and exchanging data

The challenge of existing Apps for fieldwork

- Lack of Integration – too clunky to move between multiple apps in the middle of busy fieldwork
- Not User-Friendly – high learning curve, controls not intuitive for researchers on the go
- Interoperability overseas (beyond U.S.) – difficulty with some foreign languages, access and data flow across firewalls
- Storage challenges – security, speed of data upload / exchange

Content for the App

- Check out [the original pitch](#) for Curiosity Cabinet and [the Github repository](#) for the app.

- Here's a demo of the initial mock-up of the app (as proof of concept via the UT Austin coding boot camp):

The home page shows a single collection.

Ideally, it would open with a display of multiple collections with an additional option/link to create a new collection.

Users should be able to search for collections and artifacts by keyword, username, and other metadata.

Content for the App

- A key feature to include is a **pop-up image annotation function** like the one below:

It would be nice if you could pin a node or draw a polygon in addition to dragging a rectangle around a part of the image.
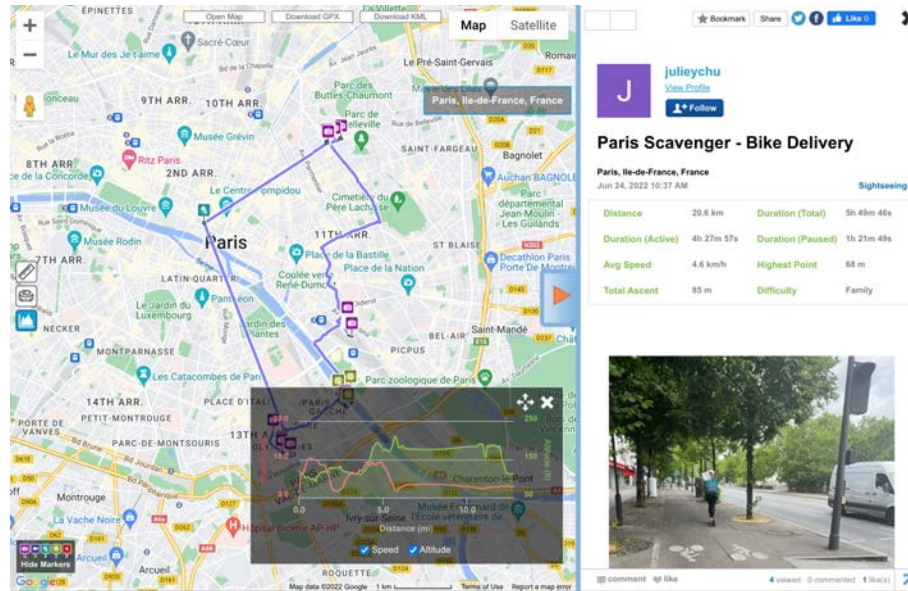
Ideally, the pop-up box could also contain an audio note instead of typed text.

- Here's the [demo and documentation](#) for this feature – built in React. Another option is [Annotorious](#).
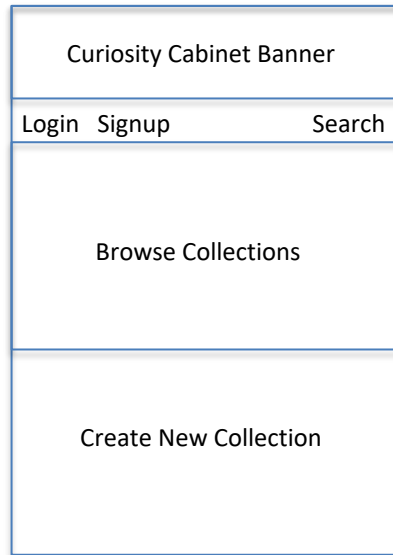
Content for the App

• Here's a screenshot (below) and link to some initial collaborative fieldwork by the UChicago Experimental Field School using Ramblr, which integrates notetaking in text, audio, photo and video with geolocation tracking.
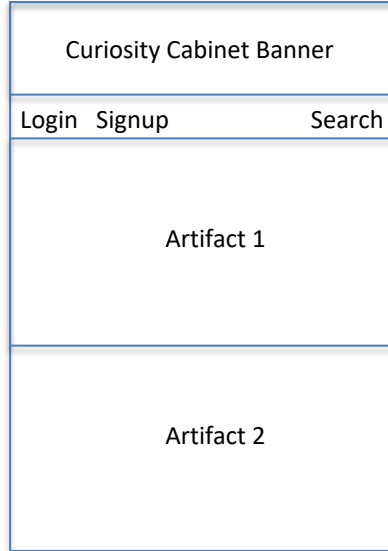
Content for the App

- The initial proof-of-concept version was not built as a mobile-first design.
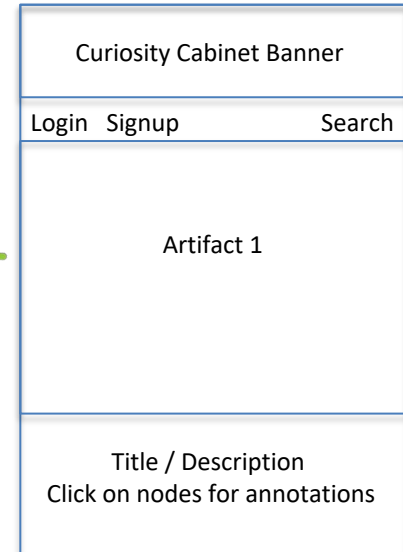- Below is a proposed sketch of some wireframes for the new app:

Home Page – Browse/Create

Curiosity Cabinet Banner
Login Signup   Search
Browse Collections
Create New Collection

2ⁿᵈ Level – Single Collection

Curiosity Cabinet Banner
Login Signup   Search
Artifact 1
Artifact 2

3ʳᵈ Level – Single Artifact

Curiosity Cabinet Banner
Login Signup   Search
Artifact 1
Title / Description Click on nodes for annotations

Content for the App

- Below are wireframes for creating a new collection
- Start with options for upload or recording (photo, audio, video, or map)

Home Page – Browse/Create

Curiosity Cabinet Banner

Login   Signup   Search

Browse Collections

Create New Collection
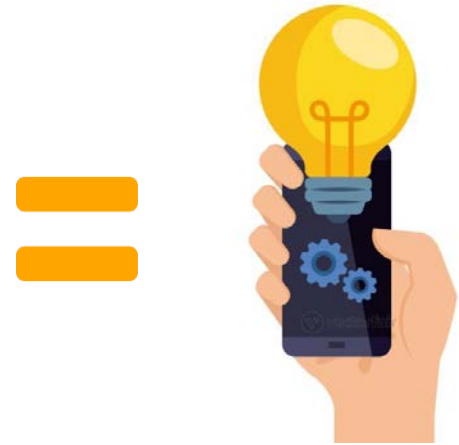
2nd Level – Upload or Record

Curiosity Cabinet Banner

Login   Signup   Search

Upload or Recording Options

Enter Basic Info:
Title, Author, Date, etc.

3rd Level – Annotate Artifact

Curiosity Cabinet Banner

Login   Signup   Search

Artifact 1

Click on node or draw shape
around area to annotate

Help us build the Curiosity Cabinet App for inquiring minds!

The UChicago Experimental Field School in action – Paris, June 2002.