

From Record Shops to Online Playlists: The Processes and Spaces of Music Curation in the Digital Age

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The music industry traditionally featured a range of intermediaries, including, talent scouts (A&R), booking agents, radio, record store clerks, DJ's and journalists, who curated the oversupply of musical talent and music-related products. In recent years digital technologies and broader global shifts have radically restructured this integrated ecosystem. Lower barriers to producing, promoting, distributing and consuming music have encouraged disintermediation and allowed empowered consumers to circumvent traditional curators. Yet, in this increasingly saturated marketplace - the iTunes music store offers over 30 million songs - many consumers are feeling overwhelmed and turning (or returning) to curators for help. Drawing on interview and observation-based research in Stockholm, this presentation will explore the evolving landscape of curation in the music industry. It will highlight the new mix of traditional (record labels, booking agents) and emerging (streaming services, bloggers) actors who perform curation and the range of physical (record shops), virtual (online forums) and temporary (music festivals) spaces they operate in. The presentation will also discuss the related stages of curation, from finding, sorting, evaluating and ascribing value, and importantly what value actually means in this context. Indeed, as the theme of the session suggests, music-related curators rely on their social and cultural capital to create both economic and symbolic value for specific products and themselves. Taken together, the findings will nuance our understanding of the processes and spatial dynamics of curation and the intersections between cultural and economic approaches to this phenomenon in geography.