

Where Culture Meets Economy: Co-Producing Conceptual Understandings of Curation

Proposed Program for the upcoming RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2014: Geographies of co-production

Session Organizers

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Sponsorship

Economic Geography Research Group

Session Abstract

The concept of curation is attracting increasing levels of interest and engagement from scholars across geography. As the motivations, practices, materialities, spatial dynamics and outcomes of curation encompass the cultural and economic, research is being conducted from a range of perspectives. Cultural and historical geographers have studied exhibitionary geographies, explored the curation of art movements, and have recently taken up curatorial practice as part of their research practice. Economic geographers have started to examine the processes and spatial dynamics of curation in highly competitive cultural industries such as music and fashion where a range of actors, operating in a range of physical and virtual spaces, evaluate and ascribe value to specific products and experiences. As few attempts have been made to share and integrate these complementary approaches, this session brings together scholars from across geography to co-produce a more nuanced understanding of curation. In particular, the papers will explore the range of actors (individuals, algorithms, institutions, neighbourhoods), spatialities (museums, shops, streets, neighbourhoods, blogs) and values (economic, symbolic, cultural, social) associated with curation.

Schedule Summary

Session 1: 'Meet the Curators'

Chair: Brian J. Hraacs

1) Collecting: Knowledge in Motion

*Claire Dwyer - UCL Geography
(Margot Finn, Kate Smith - UCL History; Ulrich Tiedau, Stephanie van Gemert - UCL Dutch)*

2) Reproducing Gender and Class Divisions: The Role of Headhunters in the Creative Economy

Karenjit Clare - University of Oxford

3) Curating the consumers

Alte Hauge - Eastern Norway Research Institute

4) Curating co-productions of style

Elyse Stanes - AUSCCER, University of Wollongong

5) Vinyl junkies unite! Casual curators and the preservation of vinyl culture

Pacey Foster - College of Management, University of Massachusetts Boston

Session 2: 'Space as Curator'

Chair: Harriet Hawkins

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Melanie Fasche - University of Toronto

2) Institutions and Installations: Designing and Staging Iranian Identities

Priya Vadi - Royal Holloway University of London

3) Curatorship in the fashion industry: the role and strategies of concept stores in The Netherlands

Mariangela Lavanga, Willeke van Die, Gresa Rexhepi - Erasmus University Rotterdam

4) The Neighbourhood as Curator: A Case Study of Lifestyle Retailers in Toronto, Canada

Taylor Brydges - Uppsala University

5) Group Discussion

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Chair: Priya Vadi

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Nicola Thomas - University of Exeter

2) geography of co-curation: learnings from the case of Antiatlas

Camille Boichot - PACTE-CNRS, Grenoble

3) Critical Junctures in the Curation of Dutch Furniture Design, 1880-2000

Claartje Rasterhoff - Erasmus University Rotterdam

4) Community engagement, non-expert knowledges and the disruption of curatorial authority in museums.

Ealasaid Munro - University of Glasgow

5) The Antinomies in the Anti-racist Politics of the The Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration

Esther Rootham - National University of Singapore

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Chair: Harriet Hawkins

1) Monetizing the family? The 'Mummy Blogger' as Curator and Entrepreneur

Carol Ekinsmyth - University of Portsmouth

2) Self-curation and the memetic academic

Gwilym Eades - Royal Holloway University of London

3) Dining 2.0: Why curation by cultural gatekeepers matters even more for restaurants in the digital age

Vivian Wang - University of Southern California

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

Brian J. Hracs. Johan Jansson - Uppsala University

5) Group Discussion

Session Abstracts

Session 1: 'Meet the Curators'

Chair: Brian J. Hrcs

Collecting: Knowledge in Motion

Claire Dwyer - UCL Geography

(Margot Finn, Kate Smith - UCL History; Ulrich Tiedau, Stephanie van Gemert - UCL Dutch)

Invited to join an inter-disciplinary group of academics to curate an exhibition to showcase the collections held by the university, this paper reflects on the process of becoming curators. Encountering the diversity, eclecticism and even serendipity of UCL's museums and art collections, our exhibition *Collecting: Knowledge in Motion*, explores the role of collections in the construction of academic knowledge. This paper discusses how the exhibition evolved as a means to explore the mobilities of university collections and question how knowledges are produced, shared, lost and recuperated. Choosing to exhibit objects as diverse as 'Agatha Christie's picnic basket' and an inexpertly stuffed taxidermy Bosc's Monitor lizard, the paper describes the emergence of a narrative for the exhibition and emphasises the possibilities of universities as sites of curatorial practice.

Reproducing Gender and Class Divisions: The Role of Headhunters in the Creative Economy

Karenjit Clare - University of Oxford

Recently, the growing importance of a number of labour market intermediaries has grabbed the attention of a range of scholars, resulting in the opening up of a range of new debates. This talk, which draws on a case study of employment practices in the advertising sector in London, contributes to an understanding of recruitment and promotion practices of workers. It argues that the rise of headhunters, should be seen as integral factors in understanding career trajectories of workers in the creative industries. These intermediaries are viewed as important for assisting in the processes of job recruitment, advancement and various other aspects of career development. Drawing on data from interviews, I reveal how headhunters, as 'curators' of the labour market, affect the professional lives of many employees, and I document how their work has a profound, though hidden, effect on the employment picture. It is argued that scholars need to pay attention to the role of headhunters if they are to understand the informal mechanisms in the maintenance of gender inequality in the creative economy.

Curating the consumers

Alte Hauge - Eastern Norway Research Institute, Norway

The concept and practice of curation appears to be used in wider variations, and the main reason is the astonishing proliferation of information, ideas, images and knowledge propelled by rapid technological innovations. Parallel to this, the role of the curator has changed, from the person "who fills the space with objects" to someone who "brings different cultural spheres into contact, invents new display features and makes junctions that allow unexpected encounters and results" (Obrist 2012). As digital technologies accelerate consumerism and choice (Featherstone 1998; Currah 2003), we have also seen a change in the curation practices between consumers and products.

For the consumers, new forms of curation are developed hand in hand with the growing magnitude of information consumers need to process to establish which products or services fit their needs. Through for example smart-phones or other portable devices, consumers have immediate access to information on the product on display, and through various social media individual experiences with and opinions of products are spread rapidly. This means we have seen a shift in power favoring the consumers, or a speeding up of the "democratization of consumption" (Hracs et al 2013). As a result, retailers can not influence the customers in the same way as they used to.

However, despite the acceleration of digital technology, bricks-and-mortar shops and the people who work there still play a crucial role in most consumer products' commercial success (or lack thereof). In this paper I discuss the vital role of one group of curators - shop assistants - in a world of rapidly changing technology and consumption practices.

Curating co-productions of style

Elyse Stanes - AUSCCER, University of Wollongong

To 'curate' is in vogue within the realms of fashion, clothing and design. Curation in this context is defined as an aesthetic practice of production, using creative and skilled labour to collect, organise and display objects, bodies, spaces and experiences. Its uptake has been accelerated by emergent digital technologies that have caused a shift in the nature of fashion production and consumption. Moving between material and digital worlds, this paper explores the various ways curators practising within the field of fashion create value through a co-production of aesthetics, dress and consumption. Using examples from recent ethnographic work, I draw on three relatively new curatorial professions: the blogger, the stylist and the retail assistant. In developing an expanded definition of curation to incorporate these roles, a number of tensions arise; the immaterial versus material, spectacle versus practical and appearance versus reality. While each

curatorial role oversees the collection and display of clothing across virtual and physical domains, specific flows of knowledge produce new spaces, networks and dialogues of production, identity, event and consumer interaction, while the product - clothing - is caught between static exhibition and constant change.

Vinyl junkies unite! Casual curators and the preservation of vinyl culture

Pacey Foster - College of Management, University of Massachusetts Boston

The increasing digitization of creative has industries helped to fuel scholarly and practical interest in the activities of cultural brokers like curators, tastemakers, and gatekeepers. While digitization has certainly democratized (or at least diffused) these functions, historical cases from the pre-digital age provide useful theoretical and empirical examples that can help us understand the underlying social processes associated with cultural brokers. Avid record collectors and their collections represent a particularly interesting and important case of crowd sourced, casual curation in the pre-digital age. Because many avid record collectors have themselves been tastemakers and gatekeepers in local (and sometimes national) music scenes, their collections represent important cultural artifacts in themselves. At the same time, these collections raise important questions about whether and how to preserve and share them in the digital age. Using examples from my own lifetime work as a record collector and founder of the Library of Vinyl Experience, I discuss how vinyl junkies can be seen as casual curators, and explore how their resulting collections can be seen as examples of pre-digital, crowdsourced, cultural preservation efforts. I will also draw on contemporary examples of more formal record preservation efforts, such as Cornell's work with Afrika Bambaataa's collection and the recently opened vinyl lending library in London, to consider important contemporary issues and theories of cultural curation.

Session 2: 'Space as Curator'

Chair: Harriet Hawkins

Conceptualizing curation in the creative and knowledge economy - making value by making sense

Melanie Fasche - University of Toronto

This paper explores the role of curation in the process of determining value in the creative and knowledge economy. Research of the past two decades has established that immaterial qualities such as novelty, design and information are central in the determination of economic value in the post-industrial economy (Florida 2002; Glaeser 2011; Scott 1997, 2008). Yet, markets in the creative and knowledge economy are characterized by wide access to information and

unlimited consumer choices making orientation and selection necessary – a role that is increasingly performed through the practice of curation.

This paper builds on conceptual findings derived from previous research on contemporary visual art and tests its implications for the conceptualization of curation in the wider creative and knowledge economy. Based on different empirical examples this paper will unpack the practice of curation and conceptualize the different steps of making sense as part of a competitive process of making value within a larger selection system. Here, the notion of making puts forward a comprehensive view of production and consumption as being interrelated processes while the notion of value emphasizes the shift in perspective from the production of fixed and frozen entities to a processual emphasis on value as a continuous variable. It will be argued that curation is a socially and spatially entangled process that may or may not generate economic value over time.

Institutions and Installations: Designing and Staging Iranian Identities

Priya Vadi - Royal Holloway University of London

Commercial food spaces are inherently geographic in nature because they, and the cultural identities associated with them are place based. Food studies have questioned the importance of the diasporic interaction of food spaces, as signifiers of ethnicity and spaces of social interaction. Reaching beyond diasporic communities, food spaces and their public cultures are material forms that allow, and indeed have come to somewhat stereotypically represent, multicultural interaction to occur within urban cultures of consumption.

Drawing upon interview and photographic documentation, this paper will explore the public performances of diasporic Iranian identities in London and Vancouver through commercial food spaces in terms of spaces of production, consumption, and representation. In particular, I will examine how Iranian restaurants and shops are a representation of diasporic Iranian culture in terms of the ways in which they are designed and organised. I think about these spaces not in terms of food production, but as sites of production and symbolism as argued by Sharon Zukin (1996), where identities are staged and curated, questioning authenticity through visual representations.

In setting out the agendas for this work I will argue, as does Lily Cho (2010) that spaces of culinary consumption are institutions and installations. From this, I question if restaurants are fetishized spaces of nostalgia and fantasy, drawing away from post- Revolution geopolitics. I also question if shops are ad hoc, everyday mundane spaces where commodities are circulated, but still evoke nostalgia, not just for products but as a market place in terms of experience economies.

Curatorship in the fashion industry: the role and strategies of concept stores in The Netherlands

Mariangela Lavanga, Willeke van Die, Gresa Rexhepi - Erasmus University Rotterdam

“Fashion buyers are important when they are able to give a strong and clear message to their store which becomes a vanguard place always in transformation. When your products are in one of those well known store, your brand value certainly increase; your presence in those stores gives a strong message to other buyers and consumers” (personal interview). Concept stores, multi-brand stores and showrooms have become of strategic importance for both re-known and emerging independent fashion designers worldwide. 10 Corso Como in Milan, Colette in Paris, SPMKT in Amsterdam and Margreeth Olsthoorn have become fashion icons and brands in their own right. The shop is transformed into a “gallery” and the owner/buyer becomes the “curator” of the fashion items, goods and the overall experience. In some of these concept stores, it is not only fashion that matters, but also the cross-over between fashion, music, performance and art. They organise periodical art exhibitions, pop-up shops and other events with the opening resembling temporary micro-clusters. This paper aims at investigating the role of concept stores in the Netherlands, highlighting their buying strategies and consumer relationships. The paper offers a qualitative analysis of selected concept stores in major cities in The Netherlands via interviews to the owners/managers/buyers of Dutch concept stores. The main expectation of this paper is that cutting-edge concept stores and boutiques are re-enforcing their role as one of the key intermediaries in the negotiation of values in the fashion industry.

The Neighbourhood as Curator: A Case Study of Lifestyle Retailers in Toronto, Canada

Taylor Brydges - Uppsala University

Given the levels of consumer choice for cultural products such as food, fashion and furniture, curators, who filter supply by offering advice and inspiration, play an increasingly important role in the contemporary cultural economy. Although curation is often associated with individuals or institutions, micro-spaces and even entire neighbourhoods can also perform this vital function. Drawing on an empirical case study of one community of lifestyle retailers in Toronto, this presentation will demonstrate that ‘Dundas West’ has evolved from merely housing curators to being a curator in its own right. Indeed, by viewing space as an economic, cultural and symbolic actor, the blurring of people and place that occurs in a neighbourhood creates a unique identity that reflects and curates the goods and services available within its boundaries. This presentation will chronicle the development of this neighbourhood through three stages. Through the opening – and eventual clustering – of complimentary lifestyle retailers,

individuals emerged as the first curators in the neighbourhood. Over time, customers began to identify this district as the place to go for independent art, fashion and design. Finally, Dundas West received recognition from Toronto's curators more broadly and the neighbourhood evolved into a distinct retail district. By demonstrating that some neighbourhoods are signifiers of identity and distinction, instead of mere spatial containers of curation, this presentation nuances current conceptualizations of curation and urban landscapes.

Session 3: 'Processes and Practices of Curation'

Chair: Priya Vadi

Curating 'standard': the politics and practice of selling craft in collective exhibition/retail spaces

Nicola Thomas - University of Exeter

This paper draws from research undertaken with the Guild of Gloucestershire Craftsmen and the Devon Gloucestershire Craftsmen to consider the politics of curation within the retail practices of the Guild. These Guilds are selective membership organisations that enable professional designer-makers to achieve professional recognition for the quality of their work within a community of practice, and access a regulated retail and exhibition spaces to display and sell to the public. The Guilds currently serve c.350 professional makers within the South-West and are very resilient organisations that have been established since the 1930's and 1950's. This paper will explore the practices of regulation and the politics of display within the curation of Guild selling events (permanent retail, temporary selling exhibitions, pop-up shops, exhibitions) drawing on archival records, interviews and retail ethnographies. The paper will consider the curation of 'standard' within the Guilds. Maintaining Guild 'standards' are consistently identified as of critical importance by membership and staff, however, the politics of maintaining standards leads to questions around who controls the standard, and what happens when perceptions of what is 'standard' are out of step with the expectations of a commercial retail sector, buying public, craft 'experts', grant providers, peer group designer-makers, and stakeholder interests. Within the debate are tensions around the role of Craft Guilds in the contemporary craft landscape and the function that these collective organisations should play in supporting the future craft economy.

The geography of co-curation: learnings from the case of Antiatlas

Camille Boichot - PACTE-CNRS, Grenoble

Researchers are more and more using curatorial practices as part of their research, especially in art-science projects (Hawkins, 2011; Witzgall et al., 2013). These practices question both the methods and results of the conducted research and enables innovative ways of presenting and sensing them.

The Antiatlas project we consider in this paper takes a transdisciplinary approach to State frontiers and the way in which people interact with them in the 21st century. Artists and researchers of hard and social sciences have been working together to consider the transformations of borders. Two related exhibitions offer a variety of ways of considering and experiencing borders, one in Aix-en-Provence and the other in Marseilles. But what happens when researchers become curators? What specificity keeps the work of the professional curator involved in the project? How are transdisciplinary practices changing the geography of the exhibitions and the geography of the “travelling objects” that are the different pieces presented (Hill, 2006)?

Our research is based on a qualitative study of the case of Antiatlas, combining observations and semi-directed interviews by the different members of the project.

First, I show how curatorial practices and research practices are hybridising to produce new knowledges in a sensitive and conceptual approach of borders. I will also demonstrate how art-science curatorial practices are mobilising art-sciences works and changing art places. Finally, the value of these curatorial practices will be considered from the double point of view of researchers and professional curators in terms of learnings and the economic value of the cooperation.

Critical Junctures in the Curation of Dutch Furniture Design, 1880-2000

Claartje Rasterhoff - Erasmus University Rotterdam

Piet Hein Eek’s scrap wood furniture in the Financial Times. Hella Jongerius’ vases at the MOMA in New York. Moooi showrooms in London and Milan. Dutch designers operating at the forefront of international design illustrate the premise of this paper: to be commercially competitive is to be valued artistically.

Using the case study of twentieth-century Dutch furniture design, we seek to understand under which conditions creative industries prosper. Until now, the historical development of creative industries has been mainly explained from either economic or artistic perspectives. These studies have typically failed to recognize that competition and aesthetics tend to go hand-in-hand. Creative industries can only prosper if both producers and consumers are able assign

value to products. By integrating economic-sociological theory on valuation with new insights in industrial competitiveness, this paper shifts focus from production and consumption, to intermediation.

We map how practices of intermediation solidify and dissolve by means of a longitudinal analysis of the main actors, standards, and means of curation over the period 1880-2000. In order to identify critical junctions in the development of Dutch design, a historiometric analysis will be conducted, which will be crosschecked with occupational census data and the development of the institutional infrastructure of intermediation. Specifically, we propose that types of intermediation and their impact on the development of creative industries are contingent on the broader structures of modes of production (pre-industrial, Fordist, PostFordist). Each, we claim, come with their own characteristic valuation practices.

Community engagement, non-expert knowledges and the disruption of curatorial authority in museums.

Ealasaid Munro - University of Glasgow

This paper draws on my experience of working with community engagement practitioners from Glasgow Museums and community groups from around Glasgow, as they curated an exhibition as part of the 'legacy' programme associated with the 2012 Olympics. The exhibition – entitled Curious – was held at St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow's East End in 2012/13.

This paper juxtaposes the experience of viewing the finished exhibition with ethnographic vignettes drawn from my time spent working on the Curious project. I argue that community exhibitions can challenge traditional museum practice by disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about curatorial authority. The paper emphasizes both the range of meanings that can be attached to museum objects, and the radical potential of including 'non-expert' knowledges in the creation of exhibitions and displays. However, I also argue that community exhibitions may be understood as poor relations to traditionally curated exhibits, and that visitors may be confused or wrong-footed by community exhibitions. I argue that as a result of the ill-fit between social and commercial imperatives within Glasgow Museums, curatorial authority is still key to the production of museum displays.

The Antinomies in the Anti-racist Politics of the The Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration

Esther Rootham - National University of Singapore

The role of the museum has expanded to engage with contemporary problems, to facilitate social debate and, often, to empower by enabling marginalised voices to surface. Many curators now struggle with the question of how to narrate plural points of view, since representation of 'the Other' through authoritative narratives and display has been widely discredited (L'Estoile 2007, Andermann and Simine 2012). The demand for museums to engage with urgent contemporary concerns and in a spirit of democratic participation which avoids the pitfalls of the politics of representation has opened up the question as to what critical museum practice might consist of. The capacity of national museums to operate as radical purveyors of democracy remains open to question. Bennett argues that it is limited by their retention of a function in 'nationing' or as spaces devoted to civic training (2006). In this paper, I examine the multiplicity of State-circumscribed anti-racist discourses and practices in the permanent exhibits and displays of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (CNHI) in Paris, France. This museum's anti-racist narrative attempts to present migrants in a positive light and to highlight their contributions to the French nation. I consider how the occupation of the museum by sans-papiers in 2010-11 brings to the fore the limits and contradictions inherent to these French State anti-racist discourses enacted at the museum in the sans-papiers' attempt to advance a struggle for rights and secure status. The occupation also provides an interesting case through which to explore key debates about the democratisation of curation.

Session 4: 'Curation in the Digital Age'

Chair: Harriet Hawkins

Monetizing the family? The 'Mummy Blogger' as Curator and Entrepreneur

Carol Ekinsmyth - University of Portsmouth

This paper will focus on the curation activities of a blogger (and tweeting) sub-group increasingly labelled as "Mummy Bloggers". These curators are not defined by the artefact or product about which they blog, but by the market segment they blog to (middle class parents and often more specifically, mothers) and their personal identities as members of that segment. They legitimate their role as curator through their shared identity with their readership, and crucially, use their family experiences and circumstances to consolidate trust between themselves and their audience (monetizing the family?). In this particular form, I venture, practice is underpinned by a hegemonic version of middle-class motherhood whose underlying social processes need to be interrogated.

Though specific, this type of curation represents an interesting, increasingly diverse and widespread process (Hracs et al 2013), made newly possible by social media and wireless technologies. In the paper, I shall outline the key processes and network infrastructure that is developing around this practice. Of importance is the intermediary agency (a curator of curators) that acts to match advertisers with bloggers. Equally important is the infrastructure of events aimed at would-be and start-up bloggers who set the agenda and act as agents in the development of 'communities of practice'. Lastly, the distinction between business owners who blog and blogging businesses will be examined and questions will be asked about the viability of such business practices as rewarding (in different ways) ways to earn an income.

Self-curation and the memetic academic

Gwilym Eades - Royal Holloway University of London

This paper examines intersecting areas of concern between academia as increasingly invested in social media for the propagation of ideas, for peer review, and for promotion; and the artist as self-curating agent of change. I argue that academia and the arts increasingly overlap at a memetic level, in which self-selection and horizontal (i.e. spatial) transmission of information dominate. Empirically, this study uses a blog created and maintained by the author as a source of data for examining the question of the sustainability of the self-curating model of academia. Specifically, I examine the self-created blog Place Memes for evidence of peer-review, rigor and potential addition to the academic portfolio of the academic in question (myself). At the same time I look at how both visual essays and imagistic writing come to inform the 'artistic' side of the blog; and how this might be perceived in more 'traditional' academic circles. I conclude by speculating upon the shape of things to come, in terms of how horizontally transmitted self-curations might, through archiving practices and other forms of selection, transform themselves into vertically transmitted (temporally grounded) sustainable academic practices.

Dining 2.0: Why curation by cultural gatekeepers matters even more for restaurants in the digital age

Vivian Wang - University of Southern California

Gatekeepers play a significant role in the cultural industries. They impact both the reputation and the reach of products. With a plethora of new digital tools, any and everyone can be a curator. The restaurant world is part of the cultural industries and many "curators" have arisen to help sort through the overwhelming dining options available. With over 25,000 restaurants in major cities such as Los Angeles and New York, how does one select where to dine? From traditional food critics to new digital age food bloggers to crowd-sourcing websites, which of these curators actually matter? How does each of them

contribute to the evaluation and understanding of selecting dining experiences?

From interviews with key people in the restaurant world and an exploration of current digital tools, this paper seeks to understand how these actors and spaces interact in the evaluation of food and restaurants. While it's true that anyone can be a curator, curation is becoming an increasingly winner-take-all activity with just a few curators who matter the most.

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

Brian J. Hrac. Johan Jansson - Uppsala University

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.