

Spaces and Scales of Music Production, Curation and Consumption in the Digital Age

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

Session Organizers

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Session Abstract

Geographers have demonstrated a sustained empirical interest in music-related topics but the marketplace for music continues to change in the wake of the 'MP3-crisis' and it has proven difficult to document activities that fluctuate temporally and spatially. Indeed, new technologies, organizational forms, market dynamics and consumer behaviour continue to restructure the industry at multiple scales (from global firms to local entrepreneurs) and in multiple spatial settings (from established clusters and burgeoning scenes to online environments). Record labels and intermediaries are reinventing themselves while independent musicians are negotiating a range of new opportunities and challenges. Against this backdrop, a new interconnected sonic ecosystem of cities, scenes, venues, festivals, record shops, and online communities is emerging. This session, aptly held in London roughly 15 years after the introduction of 'Napster', will address the evolving landscape of music and raise new questions for further music-related research in geography. In particular, the papers will explore how and where music-related products are financed, made, curated, consumed and monetized in the digital age.

Session 1

Monetizing music

Andrew Leyshon - University of Nottingham

Michael Lewis famously described the dot.com phenomenon of the late 1990s as 'an experiment in capitalism with too much money' (Lewis, M, 2001, *The New, New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story*, Penguin, London). Partly as a result of technologies produced by the dot.com boom the contemporary musical economy is undergoing an experiment with insufficient money, or at least with much lower amounts of money than hitherto. Record labels are still the predominant sources of investment within networks of musical creativity, although these budgets are much reduced from their peak in the late 1990s as record companies have responded to the problems of defending copyright in the face of file sharing on

peer-to-peer networks by making smaller and more cautious investments. As traditional methods of funding have waned so alternative methods of funding have emerged. This paper considers the funding ecology of the musical economy. A new set of musical business models have emerged that range from private equity and venture capital, through transactional models and performance-based self-provision, to fundraising, including both public funds and private sponsorship. I speculate on the equity implications of this emerging funding ecology which may favour groups and individuals who are able to draw on pre-existing reserves of particular kinds of economic and social capital.

'Created Industries': The Discursive World of the Major Label

Toby Bennett - King's College, London

The political economy of the music industry has been profoundly transformed thanks to new digital technologies. This paper draws out some early reflections from on-going qualitative research on work inside UK major record labels, suggesting that these companies give crucial insights into this transformation. I argue that the ways in which the still-dominant majors make sense of themselves should sensitise and situate further research in this field.

The industry has a notoriously secretive history, such that perception (from both the inside and the outside) is mediated through a complex but alluring mythology, allied to workers' and consumers' emotional investment in music. In recent years, digital technologies have challenged this 'inside'/'outside' relationship – rendering record companies more visible and shifting their discursive role. So, while the 'old' industry was famously opportunistic: exploitative, hedonistic, closed, short-sighted; it seems the 'new' industry is ethical: transparent, outward-looking, and committed to building economic structures that nurture interaction between artists and audiences.

As the old emphasis on product retail has been partially displaced by 'background' sectors like sync licensing and brand partnerships, so the major label now gives corresponding weight to 'Communications' and 'Insight' departments, moderating engagement and understanding in line with this new ethical imperative. Digital technologies may have democratised access to production, circulation, and consumption but majors remain culturally, economically, and politically dominant. This is equally true for representation which, I claim, is now the key site of tension – intimately incorporating the individual (artist, fan, worker) into this broader industry

Pop careers: changing locational dynamics of charting musicians, from the vinyl age to the digital age

Amanda Brandellero - University of Amsterdam

Marc Verboord - Erasmus University Rotterdam

The nexus between music production and place has generated significant interest among researchers, who have noted the clustering of musicians around locations displaying higher agglomeration levels of recording industry, as well as the micro-geographies of music scenes and their shared communities of taste. Our paper extends these researches by tracking the locational dynamics of musicians obtaining chart success in the period 1965-2010, adopting an internationally comparative approach. Taking weekly charts' data from nine countries (including Western European countries and the US, but also North and South European countries and Australia), we analyse the artists' place of birth, timing and location of career start, and record label to gain insights into the changing geography of music production. We explore cluster premiums, to see whether music associated with certain locations has higher chances of national and international success, and question the impact of digitalisation in making artists more footloose. In so doing, we ask to what extent the sounds from specific places have become more or less dominant over time. We explain our findings against the backdrop of increasing globalisation of music charts, with the intensification of flows of music across countries, and industry restructuring, with digitalisation and the emergence of new organizational forms.

The re-invention of the record shop: a case study of an independent record store in London

Tarek E Virani - Queen Mary, University of London

The digital age has caused a few casualties in the music industries. One of these is the independent record store. Already competing with illegal downloading and discounted music in large retail outlets they now have to contend with iTunes and Google Play both of which have had a profound impact on the ways we consume music. Interestingly, this has not been the final nail in the coffin for the independent music store that many had predicted a few years ago. As the case study will show, independent music stores are developing entirely new business models that are helping to ameliorate the after-effects of the musical digital revolution on the consumption of music. These include: the role of curation in the production of mixed-artist recordings that are immediately and exclusively made for sale in-store only; the discovery of other genres of music from mainly the developing world; the advent of in-store live performances on a daily basis; and the launching of an online music discovery service, just to name a few. Importantly, the findings also show that there are different types of independent record stores regarding the scale of economic activity that they can realistically undertake as well as sustain. This particular one has a reputation that goes back

a long time; thus it can be viewed as one of the 'larger' independent music stores in the area. Smaller stores may not be able to adopt the business models that this particular store does simply because they lack the financial (as well as the reputational) capital to do so.

Journalists in the music industry: De-professionalisation by algorithms?

Bastian Lange - Humboldt University

For a long time evaluation of musical artefacts were restricted mainly to music communicators (Doehring 2011, pp. 163) or music recommenders such as music journalists, radio presenters and other professional organizers, programmers, festival directors, etc. playing the role as boundary spanner (Noble / Jones 2006) or cultural brokers (Welz 1996). They acted as hinges, selector, but also contextualizer of musical artefacts, who presented the results of their work to a public. In contrast, however, a growing number of sophisticated digital evaluation systems provide extreme competition to the professional elites of music journalists, radio presenters, club organizers and programmers. These digital evaluation systems - in the early years of the Internet as Online guest books, now nameless but omnipresent online assessment tools – are initially based on algorithms. They are preparing, sorting and evaluating and selecting the spread and acceptance of automatically generated taste recommendations. The presentation discusses how new recommendation configurations can be identified at the intersection of technology and newly emerging expert constellations ("New "Communities"). This presentation explores the way how (social) media rates and asks how the function of the established connector – the "musical taster", the journalists – has changed. Do they act as curators, as a gatekeeper, as tastemakers, as experts or as friends of good music taste? How do this type of a former professional elite behaves over the growing influence of digital selection mechanisms?

Session 2

Working Harder and Working Smarter: The survival strategies of contemporary independent musicians

Brian J. Hracs - Uppsala University

The working lives of contemporary independent musicians are fraught with risk and uncertainty. These individuals are responsible for a complex range of tasks, earn low incomes, experience forms of spatial and temporal fragmentation and face fierce competition from local and global firms. Yet, the psychic rewards associated with creative employment compel musicians to remain in the labor market, practice self-exploitation and develop innovative strategies to compete and survive. To date, however, little is known about how musicians overcome the inefficiencies of the 'Do It Yourself' (D.I.Y.) model and negotiate the hyper-

competitive marketplace. Drawing on 65 interviews with independent musicians and key informants, this presentation will highlight the interrelated spatial, organizational and commercial strategies being used by musicians in Toronto, Canada. It will demonstrate that independent musicians are exchanging their bohemian identities and spatial preferences for professional personas and banal live/work spaces in Toronto's suburbs. It will also consider how musicians are altering their networking practices and 'get help' from collaborators and intermediaries in order to move beyond the constraints of the D.I.Y. model and traditional social networks. Some of the innovative commercial strategies that independent musicians use to market and monetize their products in the increasingly competitive and global marketplace will also be discussed. This presentation will contribute to and nuance understandings of creative entrepreneurship and risk mediation strategies in the digital age.

Hiphop Tunity? Opportunities and challenges in the Dutch hiphop music industry

Joni Haijen -University of Amsterdam

As the digital revolution has drastically transformed the landscape of the music industry, Nederhop has become one of the most fruitful genres in the Dutch music industry. A new niche market is born, generating alternative business models with different opportunity structures. This new landscape requires indie musicians to negotiate a range of challenges and opportunities which are as of yet relatively under examined. This paper aims to uncover the ways in which macro-economic changes in the creative industries impact on the individual at the local scale, by zooming in on the case of indie artists active in the Dutch hiphop scene operating in the city of Amsterdam. Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, including 26 in-depth interviews, the study shows how indie artists are embedded within the city of Amsterdam and the music industry and how the changing landscape is affecting their opportunities. Through their unique life stories, the chapter shows how indie artists in the Dutch hiphop scene form an 'art world' on their own, one that facilitates opportunities when you know the tricks of the trade and the manual of the city of Amsterdam.

Digital hope? Internet-based commercialization and career promises in Berlin's no-budget music production

Joachim Thiel - HafenCity University Hamburg

The paper is to present the starting point and conceptual framework of ongoing research work on amateur and semi-professional pop music production in Berlin's cultural economy. It approaches this specific urban cultural economy from two perspectives. On the one hand it describes the emergence of digital distribution channels such as YouTube as powerful vehicles that lower the barriers of entry into commercialized music business, therefore increasingly

encouraging young musicians to consider music as a real and possible career perspective. On the other hand it looks at the entanglement of this digital space with the urban environment(s) in which the actual production takes place. The key argument is that individual careers are shaped through the interaction of individual resources and decisions, the work and (life) options provided by the urban space and the digital technology that generates new audiences.

Musicians and temporary spaces: the case of music festivals in Sweden

Johan Jansson - Uppsala University

Jimi Nilsson - Uppsala University

Recent technological innovations have altered the geographies of creativity, distribution and production in the music industry. Consequently, artistic work in the contemporary music economy requires musicians to perform a wide range of creative and non-creative responsibilities in a multitude of spaces. To cope with these dynamics and the associated conditions of risk, uncertainty and mobility, artists spend less time in traditional locally-rooted microspaces such as studio settings, cafés and bars. In fact, temporary spaces such as tour buses and music festivals are suggested to display characteristics similar to those social spaces found in more permanent knowledge communities; they have become key spaces of network exchanges and creativity. Geographers have begun to examine temporary spaces in the context of international trade fairs and conventions and their importance for the creation of e.g. knowledge, networks and different types of capital. However, little is known about the role of temporary spaces for musicians in their creative and non-creative performances. This presentation draws from ongoing research in Sweden, including 'netnographies', interviews with established musicians and participant observation at well-known Swedish music festivals, to highlight how and why Swedish musicians use music festivals to cope with the multiple geographies of work and creativity. In so doing, it will demonstrate that music festivals serve as vital spaces where musicians can access information about work opportunities, risk mediation strategies and new creative collaborations.

The work of recording engineers in the digital age: changing work places and the intimacy of technology

Allan Watson - Staffordshire University

Recording studios have traditionally enjoyed a privileged position within the musical economy, with record engineers acting as key cultural intermediaries in the process of music production. However the role played by digital technologies in reducing recording budgets and facilitating home recording is now undermining the position of recording studios and is accordingly, for recording engineers, changing the places and practices of their work. Drawing on twenty qualitative interviews with recording engineers working in the UK, this paper considers the

ways in which digital technology is impacting on how recording is undertaken, the places in which it is undertaken, and the nature of recording work. In particular, the chapter considers the way in which spaces of 'work' and 'life' are increasingly blurring into one another. The availability of music recording and editing software on personal PCs, combined with pressures not to turn down work when it is available and to be seen as doing a 'good job', is resulting in an increased intimacy with technology and work in the home environment, and an increased client expectation of being 'on call' 24/7. Furthermore, with the ability to send music files digitally, engineers are increasingly interacting with clients at-distance through digital means rather than through face-to-face contact, itself presenting particular challenges in terms of communication and creative decision making. The paper argues that the emotional labour that is so crucial to creative work in the space of the studio (Watson and Ward, 2014) is now being replaced by emotional labour 'at distance'.