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CURATION AND INDEPENDENT RECORD SHOPS

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LACUNY GRACE ELLEN MCCRANN LECTURES
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
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SETTING THE SCENE

• METHODS
• WHAT IS AN INDEPENDENT RECORD SHOP?
• DEFINING CURATION
• RECORD SHOPS AS CURATED?
METHODS

• INTERVIEWS WITH OWNERS AND STAFF
  – 35 interviews, 21 different shops in UK and US
  – Data collected between Feb 2002 and Nov 2003

• SHOP VISITS AND OBSERVATIONS

• PHOTOGRAPHS

• THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

WHAT IS AN INDEPENDENT RECORD SHOP?

• Sole proprietor or a few co-owners
  • “mom and pop”
  • not corporate owned

• Actual storefront
  • “bricks and mortar”

• Specialized stock
  • genre, format, collectibles, new/used or some combination
WHAT IS “CURATION”? 

What to collect? How to distinguish or identify ‘important’ objects? How to tell a story? What is worthy of display? (Leonard 2007:52) 

Caring for objects and interpreting, translating, and shaping the marketplace through the strategic practice of sorting, organizing, and ascribing value(s) to certain products (Hracs & Jansson 2017:5)

RECORD SHOPS AS CURATED? 

• Owners/staff are selecting stock for the shop 
• Requires expertise to understand market for LPs/CDs/collectibles 
• Requires acumen to understand clientele and their wants/purposes 
• Display key stock
CURATING FOR A CLIENTELE

A few examples of actual customers:

“the obsessed record buyer who will crawl through a little mouse hole”

“the Every Day Metal Guy, he goes through all the metal CDs every day”

SELECTING STOCK

“When it comes to buying second hand, you have to divorce yourself from your own personal feelings about what’s good and what’s not and go for the general consumer and collector interests. The high end of this store tends to be a reflection of the personality of the collectors and regulars. They buy the same things we buy. They find what we buy to their liking.”
“There is no problem getting used records. The hard part is getting sellable used records.”

“If you pile 20 things in front of me and I say I will give you $15 or $20 for it, I'm not giving you a dollar for each thing. I'm giving you $2 for that, $4 for that, and $1 on these three, and sometimes on the rest of them, I'm giving you nothing. Or I can put all those things aside into little piles and add them up. These are the ones I'm giving you nothing for. Take them away or you can leave them here. Either way it's gonna be the same number.”
“If you buy a collection of 10,000 records, 10,000 CDs, then you’re getting past the point of platinum. You’re getting into a lot of unusual stuff that, like, real music collectors are seeking out, that they don’t see very often… You’ve got to buy 10,000-record collections rather than a thousand 100-record collections.”

CURATED CLUTTER?

“In a used record store, on any given day, you may get a quantity of a genre-type music. That is why people come to your store. Now, you have to accommodate them, so the place is always gonna be in a little bit of disarray.”
YES, CURATED CLUTTER!

“There are a lot of people who will be into something or someone who’s original. That’s why we keep the more choice and intriguing things on the walls.”

QUESTIONS?

THANKS!

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REFERENCES
