Holly Tessler

Introduction:

Why is everything curated these days? Examining the work of popular music curation

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Abstract

Beginning with consideration of why the term 'curation' has come to be so ubiquitous in popular culture, this special issue looks at the ways in which curation work today happens across an array of popular music activity. More than simply selecting a range of interesting objects, the imperative to be community-oriented is embedded within contemporary curatorial practice. Hence, much modern curation work is narrative in nature: telling a compelling story not just through a static collection and presentation of artefacts to a single, monolithic audience but through dynamic and multiply iterated discourse with a range of audiences, communities and stakeholders. The articles in this collection all examine how the work of music curation illustrates a form of community and belonging, either through participation and engagement with some type of music activity or in acknowledgement of how others are either liminally or overtly excluded from it. Whilst cultural commentators and writers tend to treat the application of the word 'curation' in extra-museum environments with an element of disdain, the articles in this special issue demonstrate that the ultimate value of curation in both popular culture and popular music is its power to communicate stories that foster new forms of community, identity and collectivity in an increasingly disaggregated and isolating world.

Keywords: curation; curation work; narrative; identity; community; belonging; collectivity

The idea for this double issue has its origins in an unsolicited email I received in 2018 announcing that Chris Martin of Coldplay was curating an EP in support of the charity Global Citizen. I was struck by the word 'curating'. He wasn't *producing* the album, or even *performing* it, so what, exactly, did *curating* this album involve? The track listing itself didn't offer much elucidation: it was an impressive array of songs and artists but had no apparent musical, lyrical or thematic cohesion apart from each act wanting to lend its support to Global Citizen. If we take Martin's work

on the EP as an exemplar, does music curation then only mean a kind of bringing together of like-minded musicians? But Martin was certainly neither the first nor the only artist to 'curate' an album. In 2014 Rhino Records released *Morrissey Curates The Ramones.* What makes this album more notable than it otherwise might have been is that Morrissey (in his pre-fame youth) famously wrote a scathing letter to *Melody Maker* in 1976 titled 'The Ramones are Rubbish' only to recant his comments decades later, remarking to *Billboard* in 2012, 'Three days after writing that Ramones piece, I realized that my love for the Ramones would out-live time itself' (cited in Comer 2012). With this public *mea culpa* the Ramones' management company invited Moz to assemble a compilation of his favourite Ramones tracks (if you're curious, his side 1, track 1 choice was 'Sheena Is A Punk Rocker'). So if we understand the work of Chris Martin and Morrissey on these respective albums as music curation, we can formulate a definition which includes the bringing together of like-minded musicians as well as the informed selecting and sequencing of recorded music. And if that is the definition of music curation, it is an idea that is perhaps even more popular in the online world, where streaming apps like Spotify regularly promote playlists curated by noted musicians including Father John Misty, Lorde, Frank Ocean and Four Tet, all of whom have uploaded sets of their favourite music to share with app users. But the concept of musical curation extends far beyond recorded music. In the pre-pandemic world Wicks (2018) noted the recent uptick in curated live music festivals: the National's Homecoming Festival, Shovel & Rope's High Water Festival and Drake's OVO Festival amongst them, where acts on the bill were representative of the curators' aesthetics, their taste, or indeed their 'brand'; in the mid-pandemic world, artists like Lady Gaga have been continuing to curate live events (of a kind) in order to raise awareness and funds for worthy causes. But when artists partner with outside organizations, a further aspect of musical curation emerges: that of the fusion of the creative and the industrial. A number of musicians have teamed with commercial companies and retailers not only to promote their music, or a worthy cause, but rather their *lifestyle*, where a carefully cultivated soundscape is not just the end product in and of itself, but rather the soundtrack to a range of coordinated consumer choices all fashioned around a single aesthetic or vibe: for instance, the H&M menswear collection curated by The Weeknd, where the music, the clothes and the impossibly cool images are all presented as meticulously stage-managed representations of The Weeknd's ultra-hip world, which fans can experience vicariously simply through discerning yet enthusiastic consumerism. So urgent is this need to curate impactful music-lifestyle brands, a new profession has arisen, namely, that of the professional music curator: people who are tasked with crafting the (shopping) soundtracks of our lives. In the words of Raymond Medhurst, one such professional music curator:

> My job is to choose or design the right music to curate playlists that enhance customer experiences which can help customers to linger longer and affect their spending. We create soundscapes for retailers, events and installations. We also create on-hold music, in-store branded radio, music playlists that mask confidential conversations, or customized playlists that set the mood for cafes, restaurants, bars and hotels. Music is far more than just entertainment for customers—it can elicit emotions which affect decisions. I work with clients to create a soundtrack that reflects the brand values, personality and unique traits versus competitors (Medhurst 2018).

The idea that a carefully curated music soundscape can drive everything from retail sales to mood has elevated music curation from a mere art form to a science. But rather than risk leaving the high-stakes work of music curation solely in the fallible hands, hearts and ears of humans, many music-based social media apps and platforms have begun to develop technologically robust machine-based curation algorithms, which sit at the crossroads of 'data mining, taste curation and audience manufacturing' (Bonini and Gandini 2019: 3). If by now you're thinking the concept of curation has mushroomed into some kind of Adornian nightmare-world, you wouldn't be alone. Art critic David Balzer has likened the pop-appropriation of curation to a kind of vampirism, citing Madonna as a particularly telling example of how problematic the hyper-elevation of the term curation and the attendant rise of the celebrity-curator have become:

> Amassing and fusing an assortment of pop-cultural and countercultural texts, from Old Hollywood and German expressionist film to the ballroom voguing scene of late-1980s Harlem has become the way in which celebrities and entrepreneurs supercharge their brands and attract audiences. It is hardly a stretch to assert that it is precisely the ethically shady side of this—its vampiric/parasitic qualities, feeding on previously authored works and styles—that makes it alluring. It's also what makes it dangerous, wobbly. Witness the scathing reviews for Lady Gaga's 2013 album *Artpop* or Jay-Z's 'performance art film' *Picasso Baby* of the same year, which, with their pandering art-world obsessions, risibly dive into the middle of the curationist fray (Balzer 2014: 72).

Balzer's scepticism is shared by many gallery and museum professionals who similarly bristle at the thought of curation as the latest trendy neologism. Lucy Worsley, UK television presenter and Chief Curator at Historic Royal Palaces, has said of her work, 'One thing that's bound to annoy any museum curator is other people abusing the word for what we do. In a world where department stores talk about "curating" their shoe selections or whatever, people think that curating just means choosing nice things' (*The Guardian* 2016). To arts professionals like Worsley, popular culture's lionizing of curation work is more than a little bemusing because historically curation was seen as the rather mundane and unskilled part of museum work: the physical and often tedious task of preparing objects for exhibition—a

fusty job unlikely to be coveted or emulated by the glitterati. It was not until the 1960s and the Institutional Critique movement that the full potential of modern curation work was first challenged, shifting its focus from unreflective caretaking to a more 'performative curation', where not only objects themselves but the environments in which they were displayed formed part of the exhibition and aesthetic experience (Farquharson 2003). Accordingly, it is likely to be in this era of the 'new museology', where the popular appropriation of curation work originated.

The first hint of a more meaningful kind of curation work emerges in this period's proliferation of community-based museum initiatives (Kreps 2003). For example, Stevens *et al.* (2010: 67) note the cooperation between London's Lambeth Archives and the Black Cultural Archives to produce a 1998 exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*[1] to the UK. Although the bulk of the physical materials for the event came from the Lambeth Archives, much of the curation work was undertaken by BCA staff and volunteers, thus taking the exhibition, 'to places and audiences it would not otherwise have reached' (Stevens *et al.* 2010: 67). In this kind of collaboration, we can see that the concept of curation is in one sense becoming de-mystified but at the same time valorized—becoming more worthy and worthwhile work—something far more than the drudgery done by white men in white coveralls in dusty archives. This kind of community engagement evidences what O'Neill (2007: 14) has called the wider 'curatorial turn' in 1990s museum work, noting the pivot from 'practice' to 'discourse' where exhibitions were no longer seen as 'mere presentation of artworks; they [were] understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate' (Filipovic 2006: 66).

At the same time, however, the full power of this more narrative and collaborative kind of curation work was tempered by the period's simultaneous shift towards globalization and the professionalization of the culture industries. Alongside the artistic instinct to use curation work as a means of dialogue and exchange of ideas, there was also the more mundane imperative for museum and gallery workers to meet sector 'targets' in terms of visitor numbers, income generation and attainment of professional qualifications, for example. And with this requirement for curators to be not only responsible for ensuring the aesthetic merit and discursive quality of their exhibitions and shows, but also for discerning what types of events will be both popular and profitable, we can see another early quality of curation work which might have contributed to the popular appropriation of the concept: that of quantifiable

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1.   The *Empire Windrush* was the British ship that brought Jamaican migrants to the UK in 1948, as part of Britain's post-war plan to recruit Commonwealth citizens to relocate to the UK to fill employment shortages.

benchmarks. Today curators of all varieties measure their success and are measured by social media 'likes', 'shares' and 'Insta-worthy' moments. In this regard, in addition to the traditional kinds of labour associated with their jobs, museum curators now must do much the same kinds of intermediary work of pop-culture curators as well. Indeed, they are now compelled to augment their sector-facing and specialist work with the online skills and vernacular necessary to compete for and engage various publics in the same ways and in the same media as curators outside the arts. But how can a curated gallery show compete with, for example, a curated album?

The answer lies, perhaps, in attributing the popularization of curation to its power as a narrative form. Snyder (2015: 224) has observed that 'curating is the medium through which the communication between the art and its audience takes place'. But what her definition fails to consider is the way curation is also critically the medium of communication between *audiences* and *art*. More than just rhetorical nit-picking, this distinction is important to make because it no longer positions curation as just a one-way discursive channel between one exhibition and a single, monolithic audience, but instead as the means through which a series of open-ended dialogues take place between a number of different audiences, objects, environments and events and the stories they tell. This kind of multiply iterated curation work is the outcome of an ontological shift in museums and galleries moving from being 'object-oriented' to becoming 'people- and socially-oriented' (Kreps 2003: 312). Kreps's argument stems from the realization that rather than remaining part of the capital-C culture world, museums and galleries have adapted their operations not just to be centred around the accumulation and presentation of objects, but rather to be about the *stories* those objects can tell, as well as the individuals and communities who tell them. For instance, Crenn's comparative analysis of two ABBA exhibitions—one in Sweden, one in Australia—makes the case for how the same physical objects can tell significantly different stories depending upon the ways in which they have been curated:

> In Sydney, [the curator's] use of narrative introduced a local perspective along with an intercultural dimension. The curator played the role of translator between Swedish and Australian cultural traditions and backgrounds. The original exhibition was designed for a Swedish public ... At the Powerhouse Museum [in Sydney], the curator first added specific information for the Australian public, less familiar with the European context ... These additions helped Australian visitors to determine to what extent ABBA can be considered 'Swedish' ... Thus the process of establishing the network of relationships, experiences and spaces that have 'built' ABBA (Hennion 1993) gave a definition of the band, on one side, as authentically 'Swedish', and as such, part of a national heritage, while on the other side their links with Australian audiences (via items, memories and perceptions of Australian people) showed how they have been transformed into an aspect of Australian heritage (Crenn 2015: 148–49).

In this example, curation serves as the medium of relational discourse: connecting the foreign to the local and vice versa. Understanding that exhibitions are more dynamic and affective when they can establish personal connections with museum visitors is to acknowledge the ultimate force of curation: its ability to create a sense of identity, relevance and belonging. By now, many readers, particularly those of a certain age, likely will have recognized that much of the activity that is today earnestly labelled as 'curation' in contemporary culture and understood as work undertaken by those who are now called 'influencers', sounds very familiar. If music curation is defined as the selection and presentation of music intended to create a sense of identity, relevance and belonging, it is fair to say that companies like Muzak have been 'curating' music since the 1950s. Anyone who has ever fretted about trying to fit that last four-minute song onto what looked to be only three minutes of blank cassette tape, would have been 'curating' mixtapes in the 1970s and 1980s. Radio DJs, pop music critics and MTV all 'curated' music for 'specialist' audiences decades before Spotify hired people to do much the same kind of work. Williams (2009) makes the case that:

> The word 'curate', lofty and once rarely spoken outside exhibition corridors or British parishes, has become a fashionable code word among the aesthetically minded, who seem to paste it onto any activity that involves culling and select- ing. In more print-centric times, the term of art was 'edit'—as in a boutique edits its dress collections carefully. But now, among designers, disc jockeys, club pro- moters, bloggers and thrift-store owners, curate is code for 'I have a discern- ing eye and great taste'. Or more to the point, 'I belong' (Williams 2009: 2).

Today, the idea that curation not only signifies that the person, organization or algo- rithm doing the curating has the right kind of cultural capital, more importantly, it also signifies that they can provide each of us with our own access to places, events, clothing, people, lifestyles and music that would improve both our lives and our social (media) status by enabling us to feel as if we belong. Curation is therefore not only gatekeeping or intermediation or even the calculating and clinical work of branding and marketing experts. It is a form of *narrative* gatekeeping; and in that sense it is unsurprising that so much of the work of music has elected to align itself with the work of curation. Music is both a narrative medium in its own right but also a powerful channel to communicate meaning and emotion when attached to other media, objects, activities, events, ideas and moments of time. That music is part of everyday life and elicits from us a range of emotions is self-evident (cf. DeNora 2000; North *et al.* 2004; Sloboda 2010). But how we choose to engage with music in all its forms is the challenge of curation. Whether we are actively selecting the music we hear and respond to, or whether we passively allow other people or even machines to do this work for us, it *is* curation: the filtering out of

that which has no meaning, to focus on that which is meaningful and resonant to us at a given moment in time:

> Curation answers the question of how we live in a world where problems are often about having too much. Acts of selecting, refining and arranging to add value—my working definition of curation—help us overcome overload … Abundance was the goal, now it's the problem to be solved (Bhaskar 2016: 13).

In another recent special issue of *Popular Music History* (12.1) on lost popular music histories, it was argued that the role of curation helped to form 'a collective identity' which in turned facilitated a sense of community amongst the people who shared their voices and memories of past musical events, times and places (Carr 2019: 5). In his introduction to that issue, guest editor Paul Carr observed that 'the notion of being part of a community, either as a musician, curator, music industry stakeholder or audience member (or indeed a combination of all of these things) is something each of the authors in this edited collection share' (Carr 2019: 9). Precisely the same can be said of the ten authors who have contributed to this double special issue. For each of them, curation illustrates a form of community and belonging, either through participation and engagement with some type of music activity or in acknowledgement of how others are either liminally or overtly excluded from it. The first four contributors have drawn on their own experiences of music curation as active practitioners. Amanda Mills, music curator of the Hocken Collection in Dunedin, queries what it is to 'collect' a scene. Reflecting on her experience of curating the Hocken's extensive collection of recorded music, published texts, photographs, posters and other ephemera of musicians and acts who were part of the Dunedin Sound movement, she considers the complex interplay between collecting and curating, considering the inherent challenges and opportunities curation can present in confirming or disproving historical narratives and discourses about scenes and the people who were involved within them. Mills observes that the true work of curation is not just in the one-time and static presentation of objects, but rather in the ongoing and dynamic effort to uncover new ways of understanding a scene, its people and its sense of community through the stories and narratives of its material objects.

Like Mills, Sara Cohen considers the role curation played in generating different perspectives, understandings and approaches to popular music history. In documenting her work on three popular music exhibitions in Liverpool over a 25-year period: *Harmonious Relations: Popular Music in Family Life on Merseyside, 1990–1991*; *The Beat Goes On: From the Beatles to the Zutons, 2008–2009*; and *Music, Photographs and Stories from the Archive, 2016*, she argues that the boundaries between various groups and work involved in popular music curation are both fluid and contested. Here, curation is not the isolated and discrete work of a single individual,

but often the outcome of negotiation and communication with and between a number of stakeholders. Thus, Cohen finds the issue of authorization—who is telling the story—is central to both community building and popular music as *praxis*.

Beate Peter provides further insight into the implications of authorization in her research on co-curation. Through her work on a Heritage Lottery-funded project, *The Lapsed Clubber Audio Map of Greater Manchester 1985–1995*, Peter extends Cohen's thinking on authorization in curation work through discussion of how the people who were part of the city's rave scene could be represented not merely as interview subjects but rather as active stakeholders in the LCAM project, preserving and shaping their own histories. Peter makes a case for the inherent complexities of curation as a means of creating a sense of belonging, noting that Manchester's rave scene occupied a unique space that was neither fully mainstream nor fully underground, involving behaviours and activities that were often neither fully legal nor fully illicit. Hence, efforts to collect and curate contributions from participants across such a 'melting pot' of race, cultures and sexual orientation in a way that did not privilege one group of people over another raised a number of pragmatic, legal and ethical concerns. Peter concludes by asserting that through co-curation work, the LCAM project enabled stakeholders and participants to craft a self-authorized history of rave culture in Manchester, one that did not aim to be a definitive or totalizing narrative, but rather one in which a range of individual voices and experiences contributed to a shared history and collective identity.

Like Peter, Michael Jones also challenges the traditional boundaries of curation work, making the case that much of the work he and collaborator John Ball undertook in producing a live music event, *George Harrison: The Story of the Beatles and Indian Music*, fits comfortably within the dimensions of museum-based curation work outlined by Baker *et al.* (2019). But in slowly uncovering the 'hidden history' of the Indian musicians who had performed on several Beatles' recordings, Jones and Ball were conscious of the fact the artefacts and narratives they discovered would not only tell the story of the musicians themselves, but in turn become part of one of the most celebrated popular music histories of all time, that of the Beatles. Curation in this kind of extra-museum context raises a number of practical, creative and ethical challenges which Jones describes as 'pragmatic curation', where he and Ball had just one opportunity on one night to present their work to a live theatre audience.

The theme of curation and environment is a common thread amongst the articles that comprise the second half of this double special issue. Where the first four authors have written about aspects of curation as *practice*, the following six contributors reflect on curation as *place*. Lee Ann Fullington, Mark Percival and Iain Taylor look at the ways in which popular music curation happens in the physical

milieux of the record shop, library and gallery, respectively. By contrast, Christopher Charles, Jada Watson and José Vicente Neglia examine the role curation plays in virtual and mediated spaces of specialist music websites, the *Billboard* charts and compilation albums. Fullington likens the environment of independent record shops to that of galleries and museums, and the skillset of shop owners and workers to that of arts curators. Through detailed ethnographic research, she observes that record shop employees go through an implicit kind of 'apprenticeship' where they acquire specialist skills such as the ability to spot valuable used records and to learn how to 'read' a customer. Fullington argues that these skills, along with the successful development of aesthetic talents required for tasks like decorating a shop and playing appropriate in-store music, can generate feelings of community and belonging in both staff and shoppers, all of which indicate a democratization, rather than cultural appropriation, of traditional museum-based curation work.

Following along the same conceptual lines as Fullington, Mark Percival explores curation as a democratizing force in the British Library's creation and presentation of its 2016 exhibition *Punk: 1976–1978*. He makes the case that although hosting an exhibition of DIY music and culture within a venerated national institution may initially seem an unlikely and inappropriate choice, the library's commitment to egalitarian access and its focus on popular culture as much as classical scholarship make it a good fit for an exhibition about a music genre which draws on the influences of Rimbaud and Situationism as much as it does on the Ramones and CBGBs. Thus, like Cohen and Peter, Percival takes the position that curation of the Punk exhibition centred around the creation of dual authorizing narratives: one that told the story of punk through the stories and artefacts of those who were active in the scene, and another that positions both punk and the British Library itself at the crossroads of high and low culture.

Iain Taylor's investigation of the *We Buy White Albums* exhibition takes a slightly different approach to the role curation plays in fostering a sense of belonging and identity. The subject of his research is a touring art installation and interactive exhibition where the artist-curator, Rutherford Chang, presents his carefully curated collection of over 2,000 vinyl copies of the Beatles' 'White Album'.[2] Visitors to the exhibition flip through record-shop styled racks, thumbing through copy after copy of the same record. If they choose to, visitors can play the marred, scratched and cracked vinyl on turntables integrated into the exhibition. Taylor argues here that the value of curation is not in the work involved in the conservation of artefacts, but rather in their recontextualization: how elements like the wear-and-tear of

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2.   Released in 1968, the official name of the Beatles' ninth album was simply *The Beatles*. But owing to its plain white cover, the album is often popularly referred to as 'the White Album'.

the albums and the markings on the covers and sleeves tell the stories of former owners, people we will never know. In turn, these stories influence our own understanding and engagement with the materiality of popular music. Thus, Taylor concludes that the *We Buy White Albums* exhibition tells us very little about the Beatles' album we don't already know, but instead proffers new ways of considering how the work of curation in interactive and extra-museum environments influences the production and circulation of narratives of hidden histories of popular music.

The final three authors in this special issue consider the role of curation in identity and belonging not in terms of practice or of physical place, but in mediated forms and spaces concerning genre. Christopher Charles looks at how a curated website, Ektoplazm.com, fosters connections between curator, commodity and community in the Psychedelic Trance genre. DJ Basilisk, the site's sole owner and webmaster, calls Ektoplazm a 'curated collection' of over 2,000 albums which have been downloaded over 21,000,000 times between 2007 and 2017. Using the concepts of 'thin' and 'thick' curation, Charles's research considers the interplay and tensions between machine-based and human curation work in the creation of a music and lifestyle psytrance website. He concludes that curation work involved in the production of Ektoplazm is a kind of 'reintermediation' activity, whereby DJ Basilisk's work in selecting and promoting some unsigned and independent acts can be seen as curational in nature, having both positive and negative outcomes where the value of this kind of curated website aids in the promotion of psytrance culture and community but offers little financial benefit to artists and creators.

Jada Watson also considers the tensions between genre and curation through her analysis of *Billboard*'s 'Hot Country Songs' chart. Here, curation work is evidenced through the magazine's often nebulously constructed methodology, a complex and fluid hybrid formula which includes data derived from a song's airplay, sales and streams amongst other criteria which determine not only which songs make the chart at all, but also their chart position and duration. Watson makes the case that *Billboard*'s curation of the chart methodology drives a 'feedback loop' for the country music industry: record labels actively promote artists and music more likely to fit within *Billboard*'s charting criteria; and in turn, artists and music that chart higher and for longer are likely to be more successful in terms of album sales and audience numbers. Watson's extensive analyses of 20 years of chart data reveal a pattern of data curation that has consistently advantaged white, male artists over female and non-white country music acts. Through the concept of 'rewilding' she makes the case that a new and more balanced approach to chart data curation could make the country music 'ecosystem' a more diverse and open industry and community than it is at present.

José Vicente Neglia's work examines the role of the reissue compilation album in the documenting and recovering of lost popular music histories. Looking specifically at reissue compilations in the garage rock genre, like Taylor, Neglia argues that curation work provides a useful lens through which to understand the ways these albums function in capturing and recontextualizing various strands of popular music histories. In doing so, he asserts that far from just being niche, specialist or even sales and promotional activity, the curation work involved in releasing reissue compilations can have far-reaching socio-cultural implications with the potential for catalysing new communities of fandom through the geographical and 'genealogical' narratives created through the stories, artefacts and images uncovered in the production of these albums. In this way, reissue compilation albums are not 'standalone' objects but rather vehicles for reframing garage rock not as a 'lost' genre of the past, but one that has relevance and influence for contemporary musicians and fans.

In 2015, the satirical website *The Daily Mash* published a tongue-in-cheek article parodying the over-use of 'curation' through its description of making a cup of tea as the 'ongoing dialogue between water, milk and tea that requires careful curation' (*The Daily Mash* 2015). Similarly, Balzer (2015) has commented that 'contemporary curating has become an absurdity. Outfits are curated. Salads are curated. Twitter feeds are curated. Bennington College in Vermont invites prospective students to curate their applications. Lorde was appointed "sole curator" of the most recent Hunger Games film's soundtrack. Everyone is a curator these days'. The expression of this kind of cynicism towards the (over)usage of curation in popular culture may be understandable; but embedded within Balzer's eye-rolling ennui is a salient and telling observation: we are all curators these days. And it is not because we are nurturing secret pretensions of becoming social media influencers or celebrated artists. Instead, we are all curators out of necessity. To return to Bhaskar's argument, curation is the pragmatic solution to overabundance in what he terms the age of 'post-scarcity economics' (2016: 55). We curate not out of affectation but a need for sense-making, affiliation and identification. Curation is both a way of filtering out what is not relevant or important to us and also a means of presenting to the outside world only those aspects of our lives we wish others to see. For people for whom curation is additionally a profession, it is one that is reliant as much on hitting targets and getting social media 'likes' as it is about specialist expertise and aesthetic fluency. In considering the value and import of music curation, as the authors within this special issue have shown, the vast amount of creative and practical work involved in the curation of music in all its varied forms is rarely the result of artistic self-indulgence but instead the desire to shape the use of music as a narrative medium: to tell a

compelling story. We may not value the work of people who curate their tea, but we do value the work of those people, apps and algorithms that introduce us to new songs that fit our present mood or bring together a festival line-up of artists whose music we enjoy. It is my hope that the articles presented in this special issue demonstrate individually and collectively that beyond the popular and the superficial contempt that so often accompanies its use, the ultimate value of curation in both popular culture and popular music is its power to communicate stories that foster new forms of community, identity and collectivity in an increasingly disaggregated and isolating world.[3]

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3.   This special issue is dedicated to Dave Laing.

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