Subcultural dilettantism and online visibility

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Abstract
It is standard practice in music-oriented subcultures for commitment to the scene to be expressed through knowledge of the musical history of that scene, as that is articulated, notably, through ownership of the recordings which form ‘the canon’. Typically, this collecting extends also to ‘paratextual’ material produced by musicians, labels, journalists, and other devotees: zines, books, T-shirts and other ephemera. In relation to ‘niche’ scenes, this practice of collecting is complemented by the relative rarity of the goods so collected. We can understand this interest in terms derived from Pierre Bourdieu, and developed latterly by Sarah Th ornton and others. It is not uncommon, for instance, for contemporary recordings released on cassette in some scenes to be limited to 250 or even 50 copies. To own such artefacts, and to participate in the networks of exchange through which they are distributed, is a sign of scene immersion. What happens, then, when ‘the canon’, previously restricted in access because of the rarity and obscurity of its physical manifestations, becomes publicly available in the course of its digitisation?

This question is framed here specifically in terms of subcultures with highly developed idioms for the expression of transgressive themes, where these themes and idioms may appear morally reprehensible to those outside the scene who have not been acculturated into the ‘correct’ ways to ‘read’ the material. Th is generates a conundrum, for scene participants on the one hand, as to how to ‘compete’ internally, and on the other, for those tasked with regulating this material.

Keywords
subcultural, dilettantism, online, visibility

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