

The Logic of Re-Intermediation: An Introduction¹

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Abstract

This special issue of *Cinéma & Cie* analyses the logic and processes of re-intermediation emerging in the contemporary European media industry landscape, providing an opportunity to bring questions of availability, text circulation and gatekeeping to the centre of scholarly debates and investigations. Through contributions showcasing a wide array of methodological and theoretical approaches, the volume illustrates and analyses the presence of new gatekeepers, their impact in shaping texts and their consumption in different European contexts. Its case studies include file sharing, Curzon Home Cinema, VOD services and the problematic implementation of the Digital Single Market policy.

The introduction is structured in three parts. In the first, we define the logic of re-intermediation as the change in traditional intermediaries and the development of new, different gatekeepers; we then emphasize its importance for a full understanding of the cultural and economic struggles in the contemporary European audiovisual market. The second part provides an example of the ongoing re-intermediation processes by focusing on the lesser known case of 'aggregators' for VOD platforms, in reference to the activities of the international company Under the Milky Way. Finally, the third part provides a detailed overview of the articles included in the special issue.

Re-Intermediation and Distribution: Introductory Remarks

The past decade has witnessed the weakening role of traditional intermediaries, such as distributors, exhibitors and broadcasters, in the European screen industries. This is due to a series of phenomena that have affected traditional patterns of film distribution and consumption: the crisis of home video physical formats and the loss of related revenues; the shrinking of the theatrical window

¹ This work is the fruit of genuine and intensive collaboration on all parts and aspects of the introduction. Valentina Re is principally responsible for writing the first section, Francesco Di Chiara for writing the second section and Stefano Baschiera for the third section.

and, more radically, the crisis of the key principles on which the window system is based, namely exclusive territorial licensing and inter-temporal pricing; the growth of online streaming, especially after the arrival in Europe of global video-on-demand (VOD) services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video;² and, finally, the dissemination of informal,³ unauthorized services such as P2P portals and linking sites/cyberlockers.

Many of the early contributions to this field of research have underlined the disruptive role of these factors, in what has been defined as a welcome process of disintermediation.⁴ This process has been seen as ushering the audiovisual market into a new era, characterized by the weakening of traditional gatekeeping systems and a new array of possibilities for filmmakers to reach their audiences. Nevertheless, excessive emphasis on the supposed obsolescence of intermediaries risks a rhetoric of unconditioned, limitless and ubiquitous content access, as well as the democratization of audiovisual culture in the digital age.

On the contrary, recent scholarship has drawn on the assumption that, rather than disappearing, intermediaries are instead changing shape, through processes of re-intermediation that involve negotiations between several subjects, all interested in maintaining control over content access.⁵ This special issue engages with this perspective. We suggest that looking at the logic of re-intermediation — defined as the changing of traditional intermediaries and the development of new, different gatekeepers — it is possible to offer a new understanding of the contemporary European audiovisual market.

Indeed, renewed forms of intermediation have led to fresh strategies of control taking over the old gatekeeping model, engaging with new forms of competition, and creating relationships and synergies with other actors in the market.

With this approach, this special issue aligns itself with the recent renewal of academic attention toward aspects of media distribution as ‘a fruitful site for investigating the major struggles over cultural and economic power that have long invigorated the field’.⁶ With digitalization, the emergence of new business

² See Stuart Cunningham and Jon Silver, *Screen Distribution and the New King Kongs of the Online World* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

³ On the idea of informal media economy see especially Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (London: BFI–Palgrave 2012); Ramon Lobato and Julian Thomas, *The Informal Media Economy* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2015).

⁴ On the idea of disintermediation see in particular *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*, ed. by Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012). See also Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013). The authors oppose the traditional idea of distribution to that of circulation, aimed at stressing ‘the roles that networked communities play in shaping how media circulates’ (p. 2).

⁵ See, among others: Michael Gubbins, SampoMedia, *Audience in the Mind* (Château-Renault: Cine-Regio, 2014); Chuck Tryon, *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Virginia Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Patrick Vonderau, ‘The Politics of Content Aggregation’, *Television & New Media*, 16.8 (December 2015), 717–33.

⁶ ‘Introduction’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 75 (2015), 1–4 (p. 1).

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models that challenge consolidated practices has presented scholars with new opportunities to question how distribution operates.⁷ New developments in ‘distribution studies’ are characterized by a variety of theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and levels of engagement, all of which have begun to reveal how the long arm of distribution practices profoundly shapes the global media landscape.⁸

Recent research has indeed argued that a focus on the circulation of media products in cultural markets can impact several approaches to media studies, offering new insights on film genre,⁹ as well as revealing the manifestation of corporate power through global rights management.¹⁰

From this perspective, the study of the logic of re-intermediation and its ongoing processes provides a theoretical framework and the analytical tools to delve into these cultural and economic struggles and their effects.

A seminal example of newcomers changing the shape of the audiovisual distribution patterns is, of course, that of VOD services. While both transaction-based and subscription-based video-on-demand services still remain a relatively small sector of the European audiovisual services market, they are also the fastest-growing,¹¹ and represent a force that traditional gatekeepers could not ignore. In the European market such growth has been driven by the development of VOD services operating at a global level, and in particular SVOD (subscription video-on-demand) services like Netflix (2012) and Amazon (2014).

⁷ Alisa Perren, ‘Business as Unusual: Conglomerate-Sized Challenges for Film and Television in the Digital Arena’, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 38.2 (Summer 2010), 72–78.

⁸ See for instance, Ramon Lobato, ‘The Politics of Digital Distribution: Exclusionary Structures in Online Cinema’, *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 3.2 (2009), 167–78; Alisa Perren, ‘Rethinking Distribution for the Future of Media Industry Studies’, *Cinema Journal*, 52.3 (2013), 165–71; Kevin P. McDonald, ‘Digital Dreams in a Material World: The Rise of Netflix and its Impact on Changing Distribution and Exhibition Patterns’, *Jumpcut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 55 (Fall 2013); Jeff C. Ulin, *The Business of Media Distribution* (New York and London: Focal Press, 2013) (2nd edition); *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*, ed. by Michael Curtin, Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson, *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming & Sharing Media in the Digital Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); *Besides the Screen: Moving Images through Distribution, Promotion and Curation*, ed. by Virginia Crisp and Gabriel Menotti Gonring (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁹ Ramon Lobato and Mark David Ryan, ‘Rethinking Genre Studies through Distribution Analysis: Issues in International Horror Movie Circuits’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 9.2 (2011), 188–203.

¹⁰ Philip Drake, ‘Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood’, in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, ed. by Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 63–82.

¹¹ Christian Grece and others, *The Development of the European Market for On-Demand Audiovisual Services* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015); Laura Croce and Christian Grece, *Trends in Video-on-Demand Revenues* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015); Christian Grece, *The SVOD Market in the EU: Developments 2014/2015* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015); Francisco Javier Cabrera Blázquez and others, *VOD, Platforms and OTT: Which Promotion Obligations for European works?* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016).

Firstly, these services quickly exerted a huge impact on the consumer base, by offering audiences seemingly endless catalogues, and promoting a pervasive ‘on-demand culture’¹² characterized by a widespread promise of new forms of immediate, personalized, and ubiquitous access to films and television shows. However, it must be stressed that such infinite, immediate, and personalized access is actually being filtered through interfaces ruled by recommendation algorithms prone on redefining, or re-intermediating, users’ viewing habits.¹³ In other words, while being oriented by personal preferences, the user experience of SVOD catalogues is guided at the same time by software and business decisions, which do not necessarily benefit the long tail of niche productions, as was enthusiastic suggested in early accounts of these systems,¹⁴ and as Netflix continues to claim today.¹⁵

Secondly, the debut of these global players in the European market has affected both new and old stakeholders, stimulating competition from local VOD companies as well as Internet service providers or Telcos and broadcasting companies branching out in the VOD sector. In light of the re-intermediation logic, it is particularly interesting to take into account how public service broadcasters, commercial free-to-air broadcasters and pay televisions have developed online services based on a logic of integration between linear and non-linear offerings, that also combines their back catalogue/legacy programs with new original programming and new content acquisitions.¹⁶

Therefore, seen through the perspective of re-intermediation, the emergence of different kinds of VOD services in the European market — be they global players, local providers, non-linear services belonging to scheduled-programming broadcasters or ISPs, etc. — is affecting the offer of on-demand content while, at the same time, shaping the experience of end-users.

Nevertheless, the behavior of on-demand audiovisual media services and of other, more traditional players in the European audiovisual market is, in turn, also affected by supranational policymaking. We refer, for instance, to the heated debate surrounding the European Digital Single Market strategy.¹⁷ The removal

¹² See Tryon, *On-Demand Culture*.

¹³ On the controversial relevance of algorithms in contemporary, data-driven culture see for instance: William Uricchio, ‘Television’s Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow’, in *Television after TV*, ed. by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 163–82; Ted Striphas, ‘Algorithmic Culture’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4-5.18 (2015), 396–412; Blake Hallinan, Ted Striphas, ‘Recommended for You: The Netflix Prize and the Production of Algorithmic Culture’, *New Media Society*, 18.1 (2016), 1–21.

¹⁴ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand* (London: Random House Business Books, 2007).

¹⁵ See in particular Carlos A. Gomez-Uribe, Neil Hunt, ‘The Netflix Recommender System: Algorithms, Business Value, and Innovation’, *ACM Trans. Manage. Inf. Syst.*, 6.4 (2015), 1–9.

¹⁶ See Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni, ‘Convergenze parallele. I broadcaster tra lineare e non lineare’, in *Streaming Media. Distribuzione, circolazione, accesso*, ed. by Valentina Re (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2017), pp. 31–47.

¹⁷ For the main policies involved see: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/>

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of unjustified geoblocking mechanisms,¹⁸ cross-border portability of digital services¹⁹ and cross-border access to online content, the possible abolition of exclusive territorial licensing²⁰ as well as the obligation to finance and promote European content²¹ are eliciting different responses in a variety of stakeholders.²² This includes European producers and distributors, European public-services and commercial broadcasters, global giants or smaller European VOD services and consumer organizations.

In addition to the formal side of the audiovisual sector, we also need to take into account the informal side. Although it does not exactly overlap with illegal activities, informal practices are mostly associated with a wide array of unmeasured, unregulated, semi-legal or extra-legal practices, thus undermining what is conventionally taken as *the* economy of a specific sector. In this respect, the logic of re-intermediation also concerns informal distribution platforms (for instance P2P portals, newsgroups, linking sites connected to cyberlockers), which feature new forms of gatekeeping through their own policies and strategies and objectives, as well as interaction with formal distribution and its main players.²³

Informal distribution services, understood as unauthorized forms of ‘social distribution’²⁴ which rely on consumers acting as new intermediaries, play a fundamental role in spectators’ viewing habits and choices. The ‘curatorial’ impulse of consumers or fans, irrespectively of any expectation of profit, emerges in the field of informal distribution, and a ‘collective archival activity’²⁵ produces

shaping-digital-single-market [accessed 15 December 2017].

¹⁸ *Geoblocking and Global Video Culture*, ed. by Ramon Lobato and James Meese (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2016).

¹⁹ <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/cross-border-portability-online-content-services>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

²⁰ Francisco Javier Cabrera Blázquez and others, *Territoriality and its Impact on the Financing of Audiovisual Works* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015). See also: <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/modernisation-eu-copyright-rules>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

²¹ <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/revision-audiovisual-media-services-directive-avmsd>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

²² See in particular Oxera and O&O, *The Impact of Cross-Border Access to Audiovisual Content on EU Consumers* (2016), defined as a report ‘prepared for a group of members of the international audiovisual industry’.

²³ Lobato and Thomas, *The Informal Media Economy*. YouTube, for instance, insofar as a classical mix of both formal and informal elements, has created an advertising market and a TVOD (transactional video-on-demand) service based on precedent video-hosting and video-sharing services; Netflix monitors the most downloaded TV shows to improve its production strategies; many VOD services enhanced their offerings to compete with unauthorized services; finally, circulation in informal communities may lead to the success of independent filmmakers and productions (the network or ‘revaluation’ effect).

²⁴ Candace Moore, ‘Distribution Is Queen: LGBTQ Media on Demand’, *Cinema Journal*, 53.1 (2013), 137–44.

²⁵ Rayna Denison, ‘Redistributing Japanese Television Drama: The Shadow Economies and Communities around Online Fan Distribution of Japanese Media’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 75

catalogues shared by communities. Even today, ‘fan-made’ or file sharers’ catalogues are often more effective in their structure than the libraries of formal services; movies presentations may look more detailed and precise; and the user experience may prove to be even more enjoyable and satisfying. In this respect, human recommendations (lists of top rated movies or most recent comments, for instance) are far more central than in formal streaming services, thus enforcing the sense of community and the loyalty of users.

Finally, it is important to recall that the process of re-intermediation cannot be circumscribed to the domain of digital distribution, but it also affects the role played by other, pre-existing, institutions. An interesting example is that of film festivals. Because of the disruption of traditional release windows caused by the digital distribution technologies in the audiovisual sector, the gatekeeper function of the film festival circuit, and the value-adding process it generates through its economy of prestige,²⁶ has become all the more important. In fact, circulating and accumulating prizes in the film festivals circuit before entering the film-value chain is a fundamental step, especially for low-to medium budget films competing in the art-cinema sector, to avoid the risk of disappearing into the seemingly endless catalogues of global-operating VOD services.²⁷

New, Invisible Players: The Agent Aggregators

So far, we have addressed re-intermediation as a logic that involves the re-definition of market strategies, policymaking and consumption, driven by reciprocal interaction between pre-existing stakeholders (e.g. broadcasters), new players (e.g. over the top [OTT] services), supranational institutions (e.g. the EU) and end-users. However, we want also to draw attention to what is, perhaps, one of the less visible but more symptomatic players to have emerged in this new process of re-intermediation: the ‘aggregators’, intended as business-to-business services, acting between local rights holders and on-demand platforms. In this respect, it is worth noting that in academic as much as in professional and policy-making discourses, the term ‘aggregator’ has a rather unstable definition, which varies not only diachronically but also according to the players involved. For

(2015), 58–72.

²⁶ On the film festival circuit see Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005) and Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007). For the value adding process of film festivals, see James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) and Marijke De Valck, ‘Fostering Art, Adding Value, Cultivating Taste: Film Festivals as Sites of Cultural Legitimization’, in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, ed. by Marijke De Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 100–16.

²⁷ On the fluctuation of value of cultural artifacts, especially in relation to their presence in the catalogues of SVOD platforms, see Vonderau, ‘The Politics of Content Aggregation’.

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instance, on some occasions the term is used to encompass both VOD retailers and the middlemen providing technical services and/or content to said platforms. A report by Cabrera Blázquez, Cappello, Grece and Valais suggests that the term ‘can include the provision of a technical platform to store and retrieve content [...]; the management of advertising, transactional or subscription sales related to the content; the recommendation of content proposed to the user, often supported by algorithms.’²⁸

On other instances, however, the definition of aggregators is more restrictive, as in the work of Ramon Lobato²⁹ and Patrick Vonderau who understand them as gatekeepers who connect rights-holders to retailers, performing an ‘agent-’ rather than a ‘retail function’ and they are thus labelled ‘agent aggregators’.³⁰

A similar approach is taken in a recent publication by Fontaine and Simone for the European Audiovisual Observatory, which distinguishes aggregators from retailers. However, the report describes them as ‘companies that serve as middlemen between right holders and VOD platforms, often providing technical, localization and marketing services’.³¹ In other words, aggregators are understood here as a new form of gatekeeper/intermediator in the digital distribution landscape, which overlaps with, and in many cases outright replaces, the role of traditional distributors.

We believe that this ever-shifting definition of the role of aggregators is indicative of two phenomena related to the scenario of digital distribution.

First, the confusion surrounding the term ‘aggregator’ emerges from the presence of several players coming from highly different backgrounds, who perform uneven tasks in the value chain. As pointed out again by Fontaine and Simone, ‘aggregator’ is a blanket term that covers players as diverse as the digital rights departments of big media companies; physical home video companies, which negotiate the rights of their catalogue with VOD retailers; and even companies specialized in digital postproduction, which encode digital files according to the standards required by VOD platforms.

Second, from a diachronic point of view, the role of the aggregator has changed in the past few years, beyond the definition of a middleman between rights-holders and VOD platforms. This particular player has started offering services that are normally provided by distributors, such as localization, marketing, and even content curation, through the assembly of content packages.

These two phenomena stress how the supposed digital disintermediation has instead evolved into a form of re-intermediation through the emergence of new, more flexible and unstable players, that are replacing existing gatekeepers by constantly adapting to changes in technology and policy. In this respect,

²⁸ Cabrera Blázquez and others, *On-Demand Services and the Material Scope of the AVMSD*, p. 11.

²⁹ Lobato, *The Politics of Digital Distribution*.

³⁰ Vonderau, *The Politics of Content Aggregation*, p. 723

³¹ Gilles Fontaine and Patrizia Simone, *VOD Distribution and The Role of Aggregators* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2017), p. 8.

we believe that Under the Milky Way, a European agent aggregator created in 2010, exemplifies fruitfully the activities and the outcomes of this new kind of player.³²

Under the Milky Way performs multiple activities that overlap with, and inherently redefine, the roles of pre-existing intermediaries. The company acts as a sales agent of small-scale European films as it directly negotiates with producers to acquire cross-borders licenses; however, at the same time it functions as an international distributor, in that it creates subtitles or dubbing while developing targeted and localized marketing strategies. Finally, it performs relevant curatorial functions with regard to the content, by compiling pre-packaged selections of movies and selling them to (mostly) transactional-based VOD platforms, thus enhancing the appeal of each European film in international markets, boosting demand, and driving consumption. It should be noted that Under the Milky Way performs this activity in synergy with, and with the support of, the EU Creative Europe/MEDIA programme, which in turn has among its current objectives ‘the development of licensing hubs to facilitate the licensing of works in countries where they have not been released in cinemas’ and the creation of European aggregators.³³

Therefore, when it comes to re-intermediation, the new digital environment is not abolishing traditional intermediaries such as film distributors, but rather reshaping their activities and complicating the film value-chain with the emergence of new, ductile players that manage to occupy uncovered positions and interact with multiple stakeholders.

An Overview of This Special Issue

This special issue aims to explore the on-going transformations in the gatekeeping systems that regulate the digital distribution of audiovisual content in the European context. The first three contributions deal with the impact exerted by the development of VOD platforms, first taking into account a global phenomenon like Netflix, then analysing local services operating in medium and small-scale European markets, and finally focusing on their inner gatekeeping mechanisms.

When entering European national markets, global distribution platforms face the problem of debuting in countries with already established media systems, power balances and competitive environments, where they face the

³² See: <<http://galaxy.underthemilkyway.com/about>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

³³ European Commission, ‘25 Years of the EU’s MEDIA Programme: Questions and Answers’ (2016), <https://www.google.it/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwii8qeSoqLXAhXSYIAKHAMhAkWQFggpMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Feuropa.eu%2Frapid%2Fpress-release_MEMO-16-3881_en.pdf&usg=AOvVaw369gjh6ZcA-kjjooUnxQd> [accessed 15 December 2017].

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task of mediating between the expectations and the habits of those countries' mainstream audiences. The first essay, written by Luca Barra, thus follows the carefully planned arrival of Netflix in Italy in late October 2015. A medium-sized market, Italy arguably served as a sort of mid-point between Netflix's debut in European markets a few years earlier, and its planned global launch in January 2016. Drawing on a media-production studies approach, the article focuses on the promotional discourses circulating in the months preceding and following the actual launch, stressing the disruption rhetoric employed by the company's press-office as well as its uncritical adoption by the Italian press and social media. In doing so, the author highlights how a logic of re-intermediation is implied not only by the very gatekeeping function of digital VOD platforms, but also by the role played by different kinds of intermediaries (press-offices, national media, institutions and other stakeholders) in establishing the brand identity of a global service within the media system of a national market.

In the second contribution, Petr Szczepanik moves out of the scope of global OTT platforms in order to investigate the reactions of a whole small-nation market to the challenge posed by the current development of VOD platforms. Taking the Czech Republic as a case study, the author examines how different players in that specific market are reacting to the ongoing changes regarding digital distribution and its intermediaries, highlighting in particular different stakeholders' reactions to the intended process of revision of territorial licensing and copyright regulations, which are part of the EU Digital Single Market strategy. As a result of Szczepanik's analysis, it emerges that both the advent of global players and the possible implementation of the DSM seem to have had a limited impact in a small-nation context characterized by an online audience which is mostly interested in local content and is seemingly loyal to local distribution brands. Thus, rather than in the new possibilities of cross-border circulation implied by the EU strategy, local stakeholders seem to be interested in finding new ways of serving the local market, and thus the process of re-intermediation mostly results in new intermediary roles for the traditional players. This is demonstrable in the case of cinema distributors who have assumed the function of aggregators of digital rights.

Rather than the impact of digital distribution services on European markets, the third contribution focuses on recommendation system algorithms as gatekeepers in a VOD environment. Drawing from his experience in collecting metadata for the VOD platforms owned by the Italian media company Mediaset, Giorgio Avezzi analyses the data supply chain, emphasizing the role played by executive decisions in setting the hierarchy of categories on which recommendation algorithms rely. In fact, despite a rhetoric insisting on the neutrality of automation stemmed mostly by the VOD platforms themselves, recommender systems rely extensively on human processes, ranging from the tagging of videos to algorithm configuration. Furthermore, recommender systems are ultimately shaped by business decisions, and act like intermediaries filtering content and shaping a user's experience of VOD services.

The process of re-intermediation is not limited to the field of VOD distribution, but it also concerns the role played by informal distribution, as well as new gatekeeping practices performed by traditional players: for instance, film festivals and theatrical exhibition. As is the case of less visible albeit nonetheless present new intermediaries of digital distribution, even the structures and policies of unauthorized content circulation can appear invisible if mapped using methods rooted in the logic of the traditional content supply chain. Instead, as Virginia Crisp stresses in her contribution, even in an informal distribution ecology there are gatekeepers that regulate the circulation of cultural goods according to their own set of values and objectives. The author focuses on the release group known as the 'Scene', and on the role it plays in controlling media supplies through a network of distribution outlets including (but not limited to) newsgroups, linking sites, file sharing communities, etc. Operating as a globally spread, hierarchically organized cluster of micro-organizations, the 'Scene' acts as a gatekeeper by disciplining, through its own set of rules, the nature and the scope of the content it provides to said outlets, filtering them through a logic of internal competition based on the speed and technical prowess of single release groups. Far from being devoid of a logic, as it might appear from an outside perspective, informal distribution instead operates through an inner set of values, which are at odds with the practice of aggregating huge catalogues typical of VOD platforms, or with the curatorial attitude of smaller, niche operations.

A curatorial logic is instead prevalent in the two case studies analysed in the final contribution, written by Ian Robinson and focussing on two VOD platforms that were partly financed through the Creative Europe's MEDIA programme. Festival Scope and Curzon Home Cinema have diverse origins: the first is the consumer-targeted evolution of a business-to-business platform, tied to the festival circuit; the second is the division of a distribution and exhibition company specialized in art house cinema. However, these platforms share a similar attitude, as they act as gatekeepers of film culture by proposing carefully selected films from the festival circuit and organizing day-and-date releases of films aimed at a cinephile audience. In fact, as stressed by Robinson, Festival Scope and Curzon Home Cinema re-intermediate the festival and theatrical experience by inducing scarcity through time-limited releases, and thus transforming their online programs into events. But above all, by stressing the expertise implied by their selections, these platforms oppose a rhetoric of curation to the prevalent aggregation logic characteristic of VOD systems. As we have previously seen in the case of the content aggregator Under the Milky Way, emphasizing curatorial activity seems to be an essential strategy for small and medium new operators, which are attempting to emerge in the restructured value-chain introduced by the logic of re-intermediation.