

Category: Social Affairs

Project: A Semantic Landscape of the Last.fm Music Folksonomy

What was the challenge?

The challenge for this design was to visualize what the world of music looks like according to tags on Last.fm. How can we use the musical annotations of casual listeners and diehard fans alike from the social radio website last to represent this world? How can the resulting model--over a domain as broad and deep as music--be realized clearly and completely as a map that is easy to read and explore?

Last.fm is an Internet radio site where users discover new music based on their listening history. They can annotate musical items such as artists and songs with arbitrary tags, ranging from "rock" or "jazz" to "seen live" or "songs I absolutely love".t

What was the solution?

Our analysis used the self-organized map method, an unsupervised neural network training algorithm that generates a model where similarity is realized as proximity. Proximity inspired a geographic metaphor, and we painted the model as a "landscape" of music using cartographic tools.

What was the effect?

The result is an unfamiliar landscape of a familiar place. Listeners from every corner of this shared musical geography can explore the borders of their own stomping grounds or see how history, culture, and technology have shaped the ever-expanding world of music.

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