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Analyzing Genre in Post-Millennial Popular Music

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ANALYZING GENRE IN POST-MILLENNIAL POPULAR MUSIC

by

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Abstract

Analyzing Genre in Post-Millennial Popular Music

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This dissertation approaches the broad concept of musical classification by asking a simple if ill-defined question: "what is genre in post-millennial popular music?" Alternatively covert or conspicuous, the issue of genre infects music, writings, and discussions of many stripes, and has become especially relevant with the rise of ubiquitous access to a huge range of musics since the *fin du millénaire*. The dissertation explores not just popular music made after 2000, but popular music as experienced and structured in the new millennium, including aspects from a wide chronological span of styles within popular music. Specifically, with the increase of digital media and the concomitant shifts in popular music creation, distribution, and access, popular music categorization has entered a novel space, with technologies like internet radio, streaming services, digital audio workstations, and algorithmic recommendations providing a new conception of how musical types might be understood and experienced. I attempt to conceptualize this novel space of genre with what I call a *genre-thinking* or a *genreme*, a term which is meant to capture the ways that musical categorization infiltrates writings about, experiences of, and the structures connecting genres.

This dissertation comprises four main chapters, each of which takes a slightly different perspective and approach towards questions concerning genre in popular music of the post-millennial era. Chapter 1 provides a general survey and summary of music theory's and musicology's discourses on musical categorization and genre. After describing the "problem of genre," I outline the main issues at stake and chief strategies previous authors have employed. This involves describing the closely intertwined facets of the "who" of genre (is a musical category defined by music, a musician, an

audience, the industry?) and the "how" of genre (is it a contract, a definition, a pattern, a system, an experience?) By asking these questions, I open new approaches to understanding and analyzing genre's role in both the structure and potential experiences of post-millennial popular music.

Chapter 2 takes on the digital compositional practice of mashups—most prevalent in the first decade of the 2000s—in an attempt to understand genre as a crucial element of meaning-formation and creation. Previous mashup scholars have tended to focus on the ironic, subversive, or humorous juxtapositions of the particular samples or artists which get layered together. However, this leaves out the broad, exceptionally potent acts of signification that are possible even when a listener lacks the knowledge of the specific autosonic source materials. By incorporating methodologies from musical semiotics and topic theory, I create a field of "interaction methods" to explain the dynamic relations between samples, exploding the analytical potential for signification and collaboration in mashups. These interaction methods are placed in dialogue with formal analysis to show ways that artists, samples, and genres intermingle in this form of digital musicking.

Chapters 3 and 4 then progress chronologically into the second decade of the new millennium, taking a twinned approach to our contemporary world of streaming services and online musical cultures. First, I pursue a brief musicological and sociological exploration of current discourses engaged with genre in the 2010s, outlining the ways that critics, fans, and musicians deploy stylistic terms and musical categories. A somewhat paradoxical position emerges in which genre is both in a state of decline and a state of proliferation, simultaneously atrophying yet employed in increasingly abundant and sophisticated manners. I then describe how this contradictory state fits into sociological research on "omnivorousness" and musical taste. The following chapter investigates how these perceptions and linguistic usages of genre compare to two main ways that Spotify classifies its artists. This quantitative analysis reveals some potential systemic patterns of bias that shed light onto genre's paradoxical position; whether genre is dead or not depends on who is classifying the music and who

is being classified. These two chapters map out my concept "#genre" which I employ to describe the multivalent genre-thinking we currently inhabit.

Acknowledgements

An acknowledgements section is a strange thing to write. It's essentially the only sanctioned point in academic scholarship when the personal gushes forth through the gates of objective disciplinary discourses into the open. Like any work that bears only one author's name, this dissertation would not have been possible without the work and support, both direct and indirect, of countless people (many of whom I'm sure I'll unfortunately forget to mention.) My committee has had the most explicit influence on the following text, starting with my advisor, Mark Spicer. His peerless guidance and editorial work were matched by his patience, and though I know I wasn't always the quickest or easiest advisee to work with, Mark bravely encouraged me to explore topics well outside his typical research interests. My first reader, Chadwick Jenkins, provided the most careful, critical reading and commentary I have ever received on my work, and through his prodding and suggestions, I hope my writing has become less rebarbative and my thoughts have become more clear. Eric Drott was an outside reader in name only; in fact, he was as integral to the revisions and direction of the dissertation as anyone, and I look forward to collaborating with him in the future. Finally, Eliot Bates, who agreed at the eleventh hour to serve as chair on this project, helped me see my own project from an ethnomusicological perspective while holding me accountable on important issues that often fall outside music theory's orbit. I can't thank my committee enough for their spirited engagement with my dissertation. It was a real treat to have my work considered so carefully by such an esteemed group of scholars.

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introducing me to topic theory, Jonathan Bernhard for getting me into the field of music theory, John Rahn for unwittingly sending me down a rabbit hole of critical theory, and all my undergrad music and physics professors who helped instill a (hopefully) lifelong commitment to learning, especially Shane Burns, Richard Agee, Stephanie DiCenzo, Michael Grace, Dick Hilt, and Frank Shelton.

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scare quotes because she does so much more than it could possibly capture, and her unwavering support and no-nonsense commitment to her students has given confidence to many of us through our comprehensive exams and defenses. She had no doubt in my work and abilities even when I did, and I thank her for all she does for our community.

As seems to be tradition, I save the most important for last. My immediate family has always encouraged me, believed in me, supported me, and loved me, and no words I write could possibly reflect the impact they've had on me over the past three decades. Ben, Emily, Mom, and Dad, thank you. And this family continues to grow; my new siblings-in-law, Justin and Lindsey, have been a gift and have brought a special vitality to our clan. (And I can't wait to meet the newest addition.) To Ann and Tom, your generosity, warmth, and love have given me another home to visit, and I'm so glad to share time with you. To Eric and Karissa, I hope our paths continue to intertwine, and that we may finally visit on your home turf. I thank Chet and Julie for appreciating my out-of-practice piano playing, for reminiscing on recitals gone by, and for digging up old CDs of their favorite Chopin and Brahms to share with me. Their love will always hold a special place in my heart. And of course, I thank Henry, Louie, Robbie, Ollie, Maizie and the rest for their unique contributions to my world.

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Introduction

On October 13, 2016 the Nobel Foundation bestowed their Prize in Literature upon Bob Dylan "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition."[1] This single, cryptic explication for the award—similar in brevity though less specific than prior years' announcements—blurred boundaries between three major types of artistic creation: literature, poetry, and song. In so doing, the Prize committee revived discussions of artistic categorization and type, embodied by the central question that structured much of the public discourse surrounding the award: Do Dylan's lyrics count as literature? Or conversely, does Dylan count as a writer?

Those who a took positive view of the award (e.g., Brake 2016; Hajdu 2016) often relied on a common trope of Dylan-as-poet that has generated academic discourse since the 1970s (Marshall 2009). Echoes of the high-low art divide so prevalent during much of the twentieth century reverberated through websites, social media, and popular articles as scholars and lay people alike supported the Nobel's decision by arguing that Dylan's lyrics elevate popular music to the status of literature or poetry. Conversely, those writers who took a less favorable position (e.g., North 2016; Metcalf 2016) suggested the committee mistook lyrics for literature; these are separate kinds of artistic creation, distinct disciplines that deserve their own unique awards, determined by field-specific criteria of merit. These critics' meritocratic justification underscored their belief that the award had committed a fundamental classificatory violation.

The controversy was a familiar one, and not just for those acquainted with Dylan's history. Similar issues of categorization and definition arise across diverse cultures of art and music all the time, usually less publicly or controversially, but no less perniciously. Decisions about what "counts" as music can of course vary strikingly between diverse communities of people, with potentially serious

[1] https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/press.html (accessed July 24, 2018).

repercussions. In al-Qa'ida, ISIS, and other radical groups, music is strictly forbidden, but as Jonathan Pieslak notes, non-Muslim listeners approaching "the media and sonic culture of al-Qa'ida might be confused by what they hear as 'music'" (2015, 19). Recitation of poetry and calls to prayer are not music *per se* for some of those steeped in Islam, but the melodies, phrasing, rhythms, and occasional instrumental and harmonic accompaniments of the *anashid* genre satisfy enough musical requirements of secular ears to be heard as music. On the other hand, it's not hard to find those who hear rap music as lacking "harmony or tonality" (Kostka 2006, 99), and many consider the phrase "rap music" oxymoronic (e.g., Remington 2000). Whether on the scale of music vs. non-music, or of micro-generic specificity, definitions of musical-type necessitate a recognition of cultural and experiential difference; an approach founded on only musical "poetics"—which Krims roughly defines as "systems of 'purely musical' determination" (2000, 36)—would remain necessarily incomplete. Defining music or art by objective lists of criteria is simply untenable.

Categorization requires at least a few more steps. Asking "what counts?" also involves the slightly more opaque qualifiers, "to whom?" and "how so?", questions that inflect any actions involving categorization. Kofi Agawu, contemplating the uniqueness of African music, pithily summarizes the problems involved in bracketing musics by objectively determined traits. "Ultimately," he writes, "any claim that qualities exist that set African music apart from other world music is more than an empirical claim; it is also an expression of desire, an article of faith, and a mark of pride (ethnic, nationalistic, or otherwise)" (2016, 18). As a consequence of these expressions of desire, classifying music also often entails classifying identities of the people involved in making or listening to it.[2] When responding to Dylan winning a literary award, critics cast judgments both about his art *and* about his

[2] As an explicit example, Tamara Roberts suggests that "music becomes 'black' or 'Asian' through a process I call *sono-racialization*: the organization of sound into taxonomies based on racialized conceptions of bodies" (2016, 4). The interrelated aspects of classifying music and people run throughout the dissertation, but come to a head in Chapter 4 in my discussion of Spotify's classifications of hip hop.

identity, whether explicitly or not, all from within their own cultural milieus. "Do Dylan's lyrics count as literature?" is inseparable in practical discourse from "does Dylan count as a writer?" This dissertation will not answer these questions, but it will provide some strategies for understanding the controversy. Dylan's Nobel, an unexpected cultural event, embodies the loaded, challenging, multifaceted task of defining, defending, and experiencing borders and boundaries of artistic creation, a task this dissertation tackles directly.

This dissertation approaches the broad concept of artistic classification by asking a simple if ill-defined question: "what is genre in post-millennial popular music?" Alternatively covert or conspicuous, the issue of genre infects music, writings, and discussions of many stripes, and has become especially relevant with the rise of ubiquitous access to a huge range of musics since the *fin du millénaire*.[3] So the dissertation explores not just popular music made after 2000, but popular music as experienced and structured in the new millennium, including aspects from a wide chronological span of styles within popular music.[4] Specifically, with the increase of digital media and the concomitant shifts in popular music creation, distribution, and access, popular music categorization has entered a novel space, with technologies like internet radio, streaming services, digital audio workstations, and algorithmic recommendations providing a new conception of how musical types might be understood and experienced.

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[3] Ben Ratliff's (2016) popular guide to listening to music in the post-millennial milieu represents the issues associated with increased access; an age of "musical plenty" apparently requires a knowledgeable expert to shepherd listeners through the essentially or practically infinite, never fully experience-able amount of music at our fingertips.

[4] Since my habitus is constituted largely from a general assemblage of U.S. popular culture of the past 30 years, the music and concepts of genre I investigate will necessarily focus on musicians and industries successful within the U.S. This is mostly a pragmatic concern. I acknowledge that an understanding of generic relations from a Latin American, African, Asian, European, etc. perspective would likely differ substantially from my investigation here. In his foundational article on genre in the journal *Popular Music*, Fabbri highlights the provinciality of genre experiences, noting "the very title of this journal would be untranslatable in Italian" (1982, 132). But since I mainly investigate how categories of music manifest within popular discourses and through the popular music machine, I follow Covach in suggesting that "the American market" continues to be "the key to greatest success for many acts … even if the field of play [is] arranged in some significantly different ways" (2011, 66). It thus remains at the center of my study.

It seems natural that music might be categorized differently by people and cultures at different times and in different places, a result not just of changing musical styles themselves, but of changing attitudes towards classification more generally. As such, a secondary goal of this dissertation is to posit a shift in large-scale musical categorical conceptions in a manner akin to Negus's genre cultures, Kuhn's paradigms, or DiMaggio's Artistic Classification Systems, which will be further explored and defined in the next chapter. Two terms I will use for these large-scale discursive and musical formations are *genre-thinking* and *genreme*. These will be largely interchangeable, meant to capture the general world of post-millennial popular music categorization, mostly as it appears through writings about, experiences of, and the structures connecting genres.

Analyzing genre provides a unique vantage on musical endeavors of all kinds, be they speculative or practical. For Tia DeNora, music serves as "a device for clarifying social order, for structuring subjectivity (desire and the temporal parameters of emotion and the emotive dimension of interaction) and for establishing a basis for collaborative action" (2000, 5). Genre is perhaps the most important component of this device, linking each item in DeNora's list: social order, subjectivity, and collaboration, not to mention creativity and expression. And, as the following chapter will explain, I believe genre deserves additional direct confrontation from the fields of music theory and musicology.

This dissertation comprises four main chapters, each of which takes a slightly different perspective and approach towards questions concerning genre in popular music of the post-millennial era. Chapter 1 provides a general survey and summary of music theory's and musicology's discourses on musical categorization and genre.[5] After describing the "problem of genre," I outline the main

[5] Other music-focused literature reviews can be found in Moore (1998) and Brackett (2016, 1–40), though both necessarily branch into other related fields, as will my own summary. Rick Altman's (1999, 1–29) introductory chapter—"What's at stake in the history of literary genre theory?"—remains the preeminent source for a long history of genre as it pertains to literary studies, film, and the humanities more broadly. George Lakoff's expansive summary of both category theory and cognitive sciences (1987, 1–154) provides a detailed, complementary perspective.

issues at stake and chief strategies previous authors have employed. This involves describing the closely intertwined facets of the "who" of genre (is a musical category defined by music, a musician, an audience, the industry?) and the "how" of genre (is it a contract, a definition, a pattern, a system, an experience?) By asking these questions, I open new approaches to understanding and analyzing genre's role in both the structure and potential experiences of post-millennial popular music.

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Chapters 3 and 4 then progress chronologically into the second decade of the new millennium, taking a twinned approach to our contemporary world of streaming services and online musical cultures. First, I pursue a brief musicological and sociological exploration of current discourses engaged with genre in the 2010s, outlining the ways that critics, fans, and musicians deploy stylistic terms and musical categories. A somewhat paradoxical position emerges in which genre is both in a state of decline and a state of proliferation, simultaneously atrophying yet employed in increasingly abundant and sophisticated manners. I then describe how this contradictory state fits into sociological research on "omnivorousness" and musical taste. The following chapter investigates how these perceptions and linguistic usages of genre compare to two main ways that Spotify classifies its artists.

This quantitative analysis reveals some potential systemic patterns of bias that shed light onto genre's paradoxical position; whether genre is dead or not depends on who is classifying the music and who is being classified. These two chapters map out my concept "#genre" which I employ to describe the multivalent genre-thinking we currently inhabit. John Frow suggests that genre is "central to human meaning-making" (2015, 11), and it is genre's centrality to musical experience and discourse that drives this dissertation's multivalent, interdisciplinary attempt to understand the modes and kinds of meaning it creates.

Chapter 1: Approaching (and Leaving) Some Theories of Genre

I. The Problem of Genre

Of the underexamined realms of music theory, perhaps none rests in a more peripheral space than genre. Compared to Leonard B. Meyer's (1989) "primary parameters" of pitch and duration, the secondary (or even tertiary) issue of genre usually holds a tacit or implicit place in music theory literature. And yet, issues of categorization permeate music theoretical and musicological scholarship; decisions about what kinds of music to study, analyze, or listen to are necessarily driven by choices of genre.[6]

In one very obvious sense, the relative lack of scholarship is easy to explain: genre is simply difficult to talk about, and any attempt to grasp it is made more difficult by its slippery, malleable nature. Fabian Holt notes that among other problems, vernacular and academic discourses vary widely in their use of the word "genre" itself (2007, 12), with "genre" in the academy often referring to specific forms or instrumental forces—for example, the concerto, the sarabande, or the *Lied*—while its vernacular use typically refers to a stylistic category of sorts.[7] Franco Fabbri (1999) similarly notices that, "while categories like 'genre' or 'style' seem to be used mainly to 'put some order' [on] and reduce

[6] As Meyer puts it, "the very fact that we choose to study one particular set of phenomena, rather than some other, indicates that we have hypothesized that its components are related" (1989, 11). My point here is that these initial hypotheses about the relations of phenomena or their components is often undertheorized. Megan Lavengood has presented a similar argument for the analysis of timbre, which remains mostly "unanalyzable through segmentation or hierarchical organization—and both of these steps are central to many methodologies of music theory, especially methodologies addressing 'primary parameters' such as pitch and rhythm" (2017, 4). I agree with Phillip Tagg, who suggests that while parameters like harmony are still obviously important in today's music, they can "no longer be treated as intrinsically more important than other parameters of expression" (2012, 354).

[7] This dissertation suggests that the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language within the music theoretical community and broader public might be synthesized to more profoundly interrogate genre-thinking. (For further discussion of the "centripetal" and "centrifugal," see Bakhtin [1981, 271–73].) Any number of anecdotal interactions with students and those new to the academy would indicate the centrifugation of the term "genre." Undergraduate students in a section I assisted at the University of Washington struggled mightily when the professor asked them to identify the "genre" of various pieces of Western art music on "drop-the-needle" tests. For a piece like Schoenberg's Op. 10, I felt bad for spilling red over an answer of "Second Viennese music," but I had no choice since it *is* a "string quartet" in conventional classical music genre-thinking. I return to usages of "genre" and "style" in Section VI below.

the overall entropy in the musical universe (or, at least, in our talks and writings about music), sometimes they seem to create even more disorder and confusion." These are not comforting assertions.

Almost every study of style or exploration of categorization contains a necessary explanatory hedging of sorts that acknowledges genre's rascality: generic boundaries are "fluid and inherently messy" (Gilman 2016, 9); definitions of genre are wracked by "excessive broadness" (Fabbri 1981a, 52); musical categories "do not fit into a system" and any list of genres "can only be tentative" (Holt 2007, 15–16); genres are recognizable, "albeit fuzzy," sociocultural gestalts (Tagg 2012, 268); genres suffer from temporal instability, porous boundaries, and a lack of definitional consistency (Brackett 2016, 2–3).[8]

Despite genre's incredible ability to squirm out of analysts' clutches, it remains an inevitable aspect of musical creation and experience. In a study mimicking the experience of flipping through radio stations, Gjerdingen and Perrot (2008) found that people can reliably recognize large-scale genre categories (like rock or jazz) in less than a half a second—often in as little as a quarter of a second. Experiencing a genre as gestalt takes less time than it takes to say the word, "genre." And while Gjerdingen's and Perrot's study suggests some musical categories may not be as instantly "hearable" as others, genre saturates experiences of music with a high level of immediacy, setting expectations, creating firewalls, and generally guiding how we define what we hear. For popular music, this rapid act of categorization tends to carry particular weight, directly impacting musicians at aesthetic and financial levels. Simon Frith suggests that the act of generic "labeling lies, in practice, at the heart of pop value judgments" (1996, 75), and as I discuss in Chapter 4, these value judgments drive the popular music machine, creating or limiting opportunities for musicians based on their perceived

[8] It is from Gilman's study that I derive the subtitle of this section, and I share her hope "that readers will recognize the inherent problem of genre in popular music studies and will focus on the arguments made about musical experience rather than on disagreements about genre" (2016, 10).

generic categories.[9] I discuss some implications of the relationship between genre labels, value, and classifications of people in Chapters 3 and 4, but it should be immediately obvious that style-describing adjectival descriptors impinge directly upon musicians' lives and their musics.

The ease with which we can recognize or name genres, though, cannot comprehensively reflect either their experiential effects, or their overwhelming scope and breadth. In Gjerdingen's and Perrot's study, they relied on very broad stylistic signifiers and forced their participants to choose a single genre.[10] Yet they acknowledge that "listeners can ascribe a song to multiple genres through a type of triangulation from known positions," with descriptions like: "Country, leaning toward Blues-Rock with a touch of rockabilly" (2008, 95). Despite the ability to nearly instantaneously match a sonic excerpt to a given genre-label, genre remains a relatively ineffable parameter of music, its actions and meanings irreducible to a collection of labels. As useful or common as they may be, these labels instead embody the relative futility or incompleteness of describing a style. In its ubiquity, genre might be understood as an example of a "fringe" aspect of experience or a "psychic overtone"—two phrases that William James uses to conceptualize the vague but intense experience of contexts just outside focal attention. Fringes refer to an indistinct "halo of relations" around more "definite images," images which "form but the very smallest part of our minds as they actually live" (quoted in Block, Flanagan, and Güzeldere 1997, 78). My argument here is that traditional primary parameters of musical analysis concretize into these images, but their "halo of relations" usually remains underexplored. The psychic overtones of genre are immediately present but remain ever at the fringes of experience.

[9] To anticipate my findings in Chapter 4, I would point to a variety of popular articles in which (usually black) musicians describe how being "boxed in" by genre labels limits their potential audiences, sources of revenue, or artistic aspirations (e.g., Younger 2017; Fisher 2018; Bernstein 2018.

[10] As I will discuss more thoroughly in Section VI of this chapter, I will use "style" and "genre" as interchangeable synonyms, except when I discuss other authors' distinctions between them

In the following sections, I parse and categorize some of the ways previous scholars have approached the problem of genre as it pertains to music.[11] The most intense and sustained research on genre comes from the worlds of film studies and literary theory, with representative studies by Steven Neale (1990) and John Frow (2015) respectively. Film scholar Rick Altman opens his influential book, *Film/Genre*, by claiming that "of all the concepts fundamental to literary theory, none has a longer and more distinguished lineage than the question of literary types, or genres" (1999, 1).[12] Most music scholarship kowtows to these interdisciplinary sources, citing their long and distinguished lineage. There is much to gain from a sustained engagement with ideas of other fields, of course, and this dissertation will continually reach out towards them (as well as semiotics and critical theory) to gain a handle on issues of categorization. But music provides a particularly interesting topic of study which might result in modes of genre analysis to be borrowed by these other fields. Compared to literature or film, music's genres are typically more immediate. Further, the non-representative, pseudo-linguistic nature of music lends itself to unique relational mediations. As Georgina Born suggests, "more than the representational arts, we should conceive of music as inherently multitextual—or liable to many kinds of mediation—and intertextual … referring in the first place to nothing other than the specific musical system(s) or genre(s)" (1998, 215–16).[13]

With all these difficulties and peculiarities of musical genre, it is no surprise that music theorists have tended to keep it at arm's length. As I will show throughout the dissertation, I think genre should be taken more seriously and considered more directly in music studies since ignoring issues of

[11] My list of genre concepts will be necessarily incomplete, since the nuances and shades involved in theorizing genre embody the topic's inherent challenges.

[12] Altman's history of literary genre theory is a lucid and relatively comprehensive account, tracing important changes from Aristotle through the twentieth century.

[13] In a later article, Born reiterates music's uniqueness as a "diffuse cultural object": "Compared with the visual and literary arts, which we associate with a specific object, text or representation, music may therefore appear to be an extraordinarily diffuse kind of cultural object: an aggregation of sonic, social, corporeal, discursive, visual, technological and temporal mediations—a musical assemblage, where this is understood as a characteristic constellation of such heterogeneous mediations" (2011, 377). Other arts of course carry plenty of social and cultural baggage, but I agree with Born's assessment that music exhibits an unmatched cultural dispersion.

categorization necessarily brackets out important aspects of both musical experience and musical community-building. By taking genre seriously music scholars would necessarily confront the inherently political implications of their analytical and methodological choices, forcing the field to recognize the discipline-defining work done by its repertoires of choice. Further, the definitions of genre and its analysis that the field usually works with tend to be somewhat confining, relying on an understanding of genre-as-distinction and genre-as-arborescence. Though these positions are valuable and fruitful, my own position is that music studies could gain from perspectives of genre-as-connection and genre-as-rhizomatic. With these criticisms in mind, I now turn to the array of techniques that recent music scholars have employed as they "joust with the chimera of genre" (Brackett 2016, xiii).

II. Classical Category Theory

I suggested above that genre is typically *implicit* in many musical studies, yet it does occasionally surface explicitly in popular music scholarship geared towards traditional music-theoretical enterprises.[14] David Heetderks's article on seventh chords in post-millennial art rock is exemplary, as he describes his repertoire of study by listing some of its essential characteristics: "unusual timbres often incorporating high vocals, combination of sounds from a broad array of styles, and projection of a progressive ethos through means other than overt displays of virtuosity," in addition to "chromatic experimentation" (2015, [0.1-0.2]). David Easley (2015) uses a similar strategy for defining the genre of hardcore punk, highlighting fast tempos, concise forms, dense textures, riff-driven song-writing, aggressiveness, loudness, and minimalism.[15]

[14] The classical category conception of genre is not limited to music theorists. Borthwick and Moy's (2004) primer on various genres, though it includes plenty of social context, attempts a similar act of elemental description.

[15] Easley mentions most of these characteristics through nods to their inheritance from earlier rock bands, and he briefly explains the importance of location in defining various punk scenes. Punk seems an especially challenging genre to pin down, since context, reception, instrumentation, and personalities all act as agents in the punk network, distributing the genre somehow among the interlocutions and connections between them. Scholarship on punk has tended to focus on its

The strategy reflects what is typically called "classical category" theory, driven by an attempt to define a style by unearthing its essential elements. George Lakoff concisely summarizes classical category theory:

> From the time of Aristotle to the later work of Wittgenstein, categories were thought to be well understood and unproblematic. They were assumed to be abstract containers, with things either inside or outside the category. Things were assumed to be in the same category if and only if they had certain properties in common. And the properties they had in common were taken as defining the category (Lakoff 1987, 6).[16]

The issues become immediately clear: without one of Heetderks's listed "certain properties," would a song no longer be considered "art rock"? Could a song released before the year 2000 fit into the post-millennial art rock paradigm?[17] Or could a hardcore punk song ever be slow? Can there be necessary or sufficient conditions for various genre categories?[18] This is not to single out either Heetderks or Easley, but merely to suggest that the issue of stylistic definition frequently gets treated this way.

Many scholars have, of course, mentioned the difficulty in defining the properties of a style or genre. Allan Moore, for example, acknowledges the challenges of coming up with a "set of characteristics that define [a genre] such that any example can be clearly labeled as" this or that style

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attitude and political motivations to the expense of musical analysis, a situation that David Pearson seeks to rectify in his recent work on U.S. punk of the 1990s. Pearson suggests that analysts and scholars should "view punk as a three-dimensional object that we can look at from many different angles, be it fashion, personal relations, musical sounds, media, record production and distribution, venues, or any other angle we choose" (2017, 17). Pearson's advice on how to study punk should be taken to heart for scholarship of any topic: "it is best to acknowledge the three-dimensional nature of punk rather than insist that it be viewed from any one author's framework, and write the best scholarship we can from whatever angles we have expertise in." For Pearson, a combination of interviews and musical analysis provide his most productive methodological angles.

[16] Aristotle opens his *Poetics* by describing a version of classical category theory: "Concerning poetics, both itself and its kinds, what particular power each has, and how stories should be put together if the *poiesis* is to be beautiful, and further from how many and from what sort of proper parts it is… ." (2002, 1–2) This would remain the dominant mode of understanding genre until the mid-twentieth century, as Lakoff describes.

[17] The question reflects a general tendency to define a genre based on its chronological milieu, usually by decade. These decade-based descriptors tend to be relatively underdefined—how could any decade of popular musics be reduced down to a single metagenre label? Yet, as Megan Lavengood shows with the DX7 in the 1980s, there are occasionally single timbres which "function as a symbolic representative of the 'sound' of popular music" during a particular era (2017, 104).

[18] The issue can be understood as a variation of the Sorites paradox: how many grains of sand constitute a *heap*? If one is forced to choose a specific number n (or if one posits a specific set of principles or properties for genre), then n-1 or n+1 seem equally possible as answers, meaning there is no hard and fast limit on the conception of "heap," just like there is no way to define exact parametric properties of "rock" or "disco."

(2012, 13).[19] Joel Rudinow describes similar issues in his discussion of soul music as a category, which "can be somewhat elusive under definitional or essentialist analysis. The difficulty stems in part from the fact that, as a cultural phenomenon, *soul music is continuous and deeply entangled with a myriad of* (sic) *other cultural variables*, all of which are inextricably bound up in dynamic struggle and evolution. And so soul music might reasonably be identified or defined in terms of any number of combinations of regional, historical, generational, ethnic, and racial factors, each of which has some bearing on our eventual interpretive understanding and assessment of the music" (2010, 11).[20] And though he doesn't include aspects of musical construction or experience in this assessment, Rudinow at least gives an idea of genre's complexity.

These warnings about the ways that genre violates classical category theory bear repeating since this conception frequently turns up in scholarship without reflection.[21] The "classical category" model also closely comports with other, more generalized notions of generic or stylistic rules or norms, whose specificity or detailed resolution depends on the competency and literacy of those involved. The whole notion of style analysis—as practiced throughout the twentieth century and with recent incarnations in popular music—is predicated upon the notion that musical categories can be adequately postulated or described through recurrent sonic patterns. I discuss the issue of style analysis in conjunction with the style/genre binary in Section VI, but first I turn to the ways that scholars have understood how genre manifests across different scales.

[19] In addition, Moore borrows from Lakoff to argue that "our categories are dependent on the work we want them to do" (Moore 2012, 13).
[20] Emphasis is mine.
[21] One useful modification might be seen in Franco Fabbri's (1982) adaptation of a general Saussurean system of *difference* (gleaned from Eco [1976]). This will be taken up in the subsection on genre-as-repetition below, but a brief example is instructive. Early rock 'n' roll might be defined as *not* country and *not* R&B much more readily than it might be defined as a collection of traits (many of which, of course, were gleaned from these earlier genres). In fact, the more detailed the list of traits for a classical category, the less likely individual texts might fit in.

III. Levels and the Mediation of Genre

The question of "to whom?" posited earlier reflects the inherent imbrication of multiple actors and agents within the networked web of genre relations. Some studies posit a triangle of genre's relations, linking musicians/composers, audiences/listeners, and the music itself—taking a cue from Nattiez's tri-level model of musical discourse (1990, 12). This can be a useful initial position, one that inflects the genre-as-contract formulation I articulate below. Such a perspective relates rather closely to a simplistic Saussurean semiotics—made up of signifiers and their signifieds—negating broader socio-cultural forces. The relation between genre and meaning, and my critique of this tri-partite mode of signification, will structure much of Chapter 2's discussion of meaning creation in mashups, relying on genre as a large-scale plane of signification that undergirds traditional pop music semiologies.

Rather than focus on these levels, I find it more useful and illuminating to consider genre's broader, reticulated communal agencies. Born (2011) and Brackett (2016) both survey genre's capacity to affect categorization at a variety of levels or planes, collecting overlapping communities and social forces into a dynamic and productive assemblage. For Brackett, (popular) musical categories are formulated somewhat differently by musicians, critic-fans, and the music industry since their categorical impulses are directed towards distinct goals (2016, 11). The shifting ways these different communities employ genre and interact with each other provide the basis for Brackett's history of genre in the twentieth century, and he traces the tensions between these levels in order to reconstruct an historicist account of genre's role in the trajectory of popular music. By expanding his scope beyond the limits of the basic musician-music-listener triangle, Brackett explores a rich variety of complex consequences of differential musical orderings.

At a more general level, Georgina Born argues for a "social analytics that encompasses four planes of social mediation" rather than Brackett's three (2011, 378).[22] The first plane mirrors Brackett's musician category, but it also clearly houses the critic-fan; on this plane, "music produces its own diverse social relations—in the intimate socialities of musical performance and practice, in musical ensembles, and in the musical division of labor" (378). Across Born's second plane, "music conjures up and animates imagined communities, aggregating its listeners into virtual collectivities and publics based on musical and other identifications." Comparing again to Brackett's categories, this plane runs through critic-fan genres and music industry categories while also reflecting musical choices. The third and fourth planes collect and distribute all three of Brackett's community divisions across a wider, more abstract field: "In the third plane, music is traversed by wider social identity formations, from the most concrete and intimate to the most abstract of collectivities—music's refraction of the hierarchical and stratified relations of class and age, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality. In the fourth, music is bound up in the social and institutional forms that provide the grounds for its production, reproduction and transformation, whether elite or religious patronage, market or non-market exchange, the arena of public and subsidized cultural institutions, or late capitalism's cultural economy" (2011, 378). These planes all interact with each other, often reinforcing local maxima though occasionally interfering with the distributions of their respective fields. When the fields align, they produce additive genre-waveforms, and one can easily trace relative isographies between, say, how the intimate genre mediations of a musical performance (plane one) embody broader categorical concerns of identity formation (plane three).[23]

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[22] Benjamin Piekut summarizes Born's planes—from a slightly earlier formulation—by explaining that people involved in a musical grouping relate to each other "[1] as collaborators in the course of a musical performance, [2] in the imagined communities that are animated by these performances, [3] in the identity categories and hierarchies enacted in sonic practices, and [4] in the social modes of its production and distribution"(2014, 191). I give Born's full definitions instead since much is lost in this truncation.

[23] My discussion of #genre in Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss issues of homology—if only tangentially—in the ways that streaming services (like Spotify) create potentials for particular listening arrangements. But notions of homology are necessarily fraught with difficulty, since structural relations or resemblances between, say, how audiences listen to music

But discontinuities between planes or levels also frequently emerge, such as when *Billboard* suddenly stopped printing its "R&B" singles chart from 1963 to 1965. This remains a unique gap in an otherwise uninterrupted strand of industry-sanctioned African-American popular music categories that began with the stabilization of "race records" in the 1920s, and which lives on in *Billboard's* current "hip-hop and R&B" moniker. Surely R&B music still existed during the span between 1963 and 1965, and people still bought, sold, made, listened to, and thought about music that participated in or represented the genre, so why did *Billboard* stop their chart? For Brackett (2016), the blip that this interregnum registers on the popular-music-genre seismometer functions as much more than a curious historical footnote; rather, it presents a chance to explore the confluences and contradictions of musical and social worlds, of understanding how "the struggle over racial classification itself" that structured much of the 1960s might (not) relate to concomitant musical classifications (2016, 236).[24] By sniffing out a disjunction between the continuation of the imagined communities of R&B and their music (Born's plane two) and the industry's response to R&B's refraction of changing racial relations in the U.S. (plane three), Brackett explains that the loss of the R&B *Billboard* chart embodied an integrationist mindset that couldn't satisfactorily capture the goals of the Civil Rights era. When "soul" emerged as the de facto label for African American popular genres in the later 1960s, a new set of interrelations—between Born's planes—structured contemporaneous discourses, bringing them back into relative alignment.

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and how components of the music industry distribute music, are rife with feedback loops and overlaps, which means that ascertaining causal chains between planes is a somewhat artificial task. As I discuss in Chapter 4, for example, the way that Spotify creates links between musicians relies on an "ensemble model" (Goldschmitt and Seaver, forthcoming) that intimately intertwines various of Born's planes, making their separation tenuous at best. Raymond Williams (1977, 101–7) provides the classic summary and critique of homological approaches to cultural analysis. For the time being, I defer to Agawu, who cautions that "what we must not do is treat the isomorphism between musical structure and social structure as necessary or axiomatic beyond its most mundane sense" (2016, 57).

[24] For a further discussion of how Brackett's book engages with issues of homology and Born's planes of social mediation, see Johnson (2017a).

This brief example hints at the necessary confluence of genre and race in the U.S. where the history of style and musical taxonomies is inherently racialized. Even from the outset of the twentieth century, technological innovations and modes of distribution have often fundamentally and explicitly relied on racial delimitations, specifically between white and black musicians and audiences. In the 1920s, for instance, the profusion of recording technology and the search for economically viable styles (and their attendant audience niches) led the industry to include and distribute African-American musics en masse for the first time. These styles, though, were kept separate from their white counterparts. Benjamin Filene explains that:

> Race-record listings [of the 1920s] included not only spirituals and sermons, but blues, jazz, work songs, and story-telling sessions; if it would sell, companies would record it. This economic imperative, though, did not drive the companies to treat African American and white folk music as parts of a shared or interconnecting tradition. Even though blacks' and whites' songs were often recorded by the same people on the same field trips in the same cities, every company in the twenties treated its race and hillbilly selections as completely independent series that had separate numbering systems, separate advertisements, and separate markets (2000, 36).

Large-scale stylistic categories like "race-records" and "hillbilly" in the 1920s or new jack swing and grunge in the 1990s display the foundational institutionalization of race in U.S. genre categories, highlighting their blackness and whiteness, respectively. Bridging Born's large-scale planes and more intimate experiences of music, racial delimitation of genre undergirds the analyses both of specific pieces and of structural connections that emerge in my later chapters.

Most studies of genre explicitly acknowledge the role of both small-scale and large-scale layers of mediation and categorization, as well as their mutual interference or coherence. In his book on heavy metal and punk in the 1970s, for instance, Steve Waksman suggests that genre "informs the performance practice of musicians, the marketing efforts of record companies, the aesthetic judgments of rock critics, and the listening habits and consumption patterns of music audiences" (2009, 7). However, as I explain below, scholars tend to focus on only one or two of these layers, leaving aside

genre's effects on experience, its reliance on broad cultural formations, or the role of identity. This is understandable, since a completely comprehensive Theory of Genre that accounted for all planes of social mediation and all musical components would be either far too detailed or far too generalized to be of any value. The strategy throughout this dissertation is to shift between planes where appropriate, focusing on direct esthesic experience of generic meaning at times (Chapter 2), broad social discursive formations (Chapter 3), or a combination of the music-industry machine, artist demographics, and the role of the audience (Chapter 4).[25]

IV. Genre-as-Contract

One of the most prevalent definitions of genre in both academic scholarship and popular discourse is as a sort of contract between artist and audience, one that both parties tacitly agree to when engaged with music referenced by a particular label. The contract emerges most readily in critic-fan writings when a musician violates its strictures—for instance, when Dylan "went electric" or when Taylor Swift released her first self-described pop album, *1989* (2014), consciously rejecting the country roots that brought her initial fandom and success.[26] "Selling out" essentially equates to a musician foregoing the clauses of a subcultural contract in favor of a more generalized settlement that negotiates

[25] I should pause for clarification on what I mean by "esthesic." First, though it might seem like an appeal to the philosophical branch of aesthetics, I hope to avoid any of the *evaluative* or meritocratic notions present in most of those writings. For instance, Gracyk (2007) posits three "focal points or objects of evaluation" in dealing with the *aesthetic value* of music: evaluating the experience of music, evaluating the music, and evaluating other individuals and groups based on their differing responses to a given musical stimulus. Gracyk's project is clearly useful as a framework for teasing apart different arguments of aesthetics, but my "esthesic" position steers clear of the judgment-value driven "aesthetics" that Gracyk applies to genre when he says that genre *evaluation* "demands local standards of merit" (2007, 103–4). Furthermore, my use of "esthesic" is ultimately subsumed within my goal to blur the distinction between poiesis and esthesis, something that cannot be done without first questioning the primacy of either. Indeed, I hope I will be able to do so without relying on anything resembling Nattiez's (1990, 12–17) problematic "neutral" level of analysis. Aaron Harcus gives a lucid and convincing critique of the neutral level and its perniciousness in the field of music theory in particular. "There is no such thing as a neutral description of a physical trace," he explains, "because any act of description, especially the cultural phenomena that are the proper concern of semiotics, is always already an interpretive act (esthesic level) made possible by the analyst's cultural-historical relation to the object in question" (2017, 35). Harcus turns to Merleu-Ponty to show how "objective" analysis on the neutral level is epiphenomenal and ultimately an impossible perspectiveless position.

[26] Swift's "pop music emergency" (Walker 2014) was generally well-received by major critics, but those who adhered most closely to her previously signed country-contract felt betrayed by her pop sounds; for them, something was "lost" in her turn to pop (Greenwald 2014).

with a larger pool of participants. Broad social planes are inevitably involved in a contract's mediation no matter its subcultural value, but the contract is usually deployed across Born's first plane of an intimate social mediation, binding Brackett's musicians and critic-fans.

As an informal means of setting expectations for audiences, the concept antedates any academic coinage, but Heather Dubrow's formulation is generally credited as its explicit scholarly point of origin.[27] Writing in the field of literary criticism during the 1980s, Dubrow wrestled with competing notions of how large of a role authorial intent should play in determining the meaning(s) of poetry or literature. Dubrow understood genre as one way to barter between the combatants of literary criticism, taking both authorial intent and listener agency into account:

> The way genre establishes a relationship between author and reader might fruitfully be labelled a generic contract. Through such signals as the title, the meter and the incorporation of familiar topoi into his opening lines, the poet sets up such a contract with us. He in effect agrees that he will follow at least some of the patterns and conventions we associate with the genre or genres in which he is writing, and we in turn agree that we will pay close attention to certain aspects of his work while realizing that others, because of the nature of the genres, are far less important (Dubrow 1982, 31).

Genre establishes a way for seemingly polar actors in the writing-reading divide to interact with each other. In music studies, genre-as-contract guides Carl Dahlhaus's (1982) oft-cited claim that, as the nineteenth century wore on, genres lost their structuring power. Romantic and modernist composers no longer adhered to tonal conventions and contradicted definitional acts of titling, shaking loose from their inherited genre-contracts while leaving listeners in search of more transcendental modes of relating (to) pieces.[28] Liszt's tone poems, Schumann's character pieces, and, as Eric Drott

[27] In music theory, the most influential work on genre-as-contract surely stems from Hepokoski and Darcy's *Elements of Sonata Theory* (2006) in which they argue for a dialogic conception of form. In their formulation, the sonata is a genre with default options for prototypical modular elements, agreed on by convention. As a methodology meant for interrogating generic expectations, *Sonata Theory* fits squarely into the genre-as-contract formulation.

[28] Drott's (2013) excellent study of genre's role in post-1945 art music thoroughly rebukes this notion—and similar ones—by relying on a more flexible understanding of musical categorization.

notes, the later "proliferation of works bearing names like 'Constellations,' 'Figures,' and 'Prisms' during the 1950s and 1960s represented the externalized, verbal manifestation of an underlying musical reality, a visible symptom of the crisis in the traditional system of musical genres" (2013, 4). Whether or not Dahlhaus's genre-decline claim holds water is irrelevant to my current point; what matters is that he understands titles as paratextual signals of a generic contract, an act of consultation between composer and listener. Knowledge of these cues entails a tacit agreement to adhere to the contract in order to engage in meaningful dialogues. Jeffrey Kallberg emphasizes genre-as-contract's communicative nature, which, as a form of rhetoric, "actively informs the experience of a musical work" by "establishing a framework for the communication of meaning" (1996, 5).

Besides binding creator and receiver, such a framework clearly sets expectations for the audience, a connection that Ed Whitley makes explicitly in his discussion of the Beatles' "White Album": "A genre is a set of expectations, a contract between reader and text" (2000, 109). Note, though, that Whitley makes the postmodernist move of removing the artist from the contract. A similar move can be seen in David Huron's cognitive adaptation of the contract, which results in a conception of genre-as-firewall, defined generally as "the hypothetical physiological mechanism through which brains are able to segregate inductive lessons into distinctive contexts" (2006, 414). By taking in specific contextual clues (like titles), the mind employs genre to activate a firewall that only allows in pertinent musical or experiential information, focusing attention on a genre's important aspects. Again, the musician's role has been diminished in this contract, which is now completely within the domain of the receiver and "the music itself." This manifestation of the generic contract necessitates a consistent reiteration of musical stimuli to reinforce its boundary definitions and firewall settings. Such repetition plays an important role in assuring a musical contract, and it even generates its own generic capacity.

V. Genre-as-Repetition

Genre is often understood as an iterative or citational process of repetition. Basically, this suggests that musical objects involved in a genre constantly re-form its grouping, reinforcing a musical category by repeating its conventional aspects. Repetition plays a fundamental, defining role in Jim Samson's *Grove* article on genre. "Genres are based on the principle of repetition," he explains. "They codify past repetitions, and they invite future repetitions" (Samson 2001). Such a dual-natured temporality—tying both prior instances and potential future iterations to some present occurrence—accounts for genre's dynamic ability to guide expectations while tapping into a seemingly more stable, networked code.[29]

But such generality means that genre-as-repetition remains a bit more ontologically opaque than either the classical category conception of genre (wherein resemblance of elemental parts determines a category) or the contract position (in which a generic pact resides in some space between composer and listener). With repetition, it is not always clear what exactly gets repeated. If viewed through the lens of classical category theory, a musical object's genre is based on whether it repeats a stock collection of traits. Frequently, the repetition of a single potent trait is enough for a musical text to iterate its larger generic type. This is essentially Tagg's notion of a *genre synecdoche*: a specific musical thing which stands in for and calls out to a musical category, recreating it through allusion.[30] For a

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[29] I use code in a relatively strict sense following Klein's (2005) adoption of Eco (1976), "in which both producer and the receiver of a text bring to it their own conventions of interpretation.. . . A code is a constellation, a configuration of signs around a sign" (2005, 51–56). Codes remain ultimately unfinished and eminently flexible, relying on multiple competencies and conventionalities which create a foldable and ductile semiotic cartography. This dynamic mapping closely mirrors Drott's suggestion that "genre is not so much a group as a group*ing*, the gerund ending calling attention to the fact that it is something that must be continually produced and reproduced. Genres, in other words, result from acts of assemblage, acts performed by specific agents in specific social and institutional settings" (2013, 10). Whenever I use the term "grouping" throughout this dissertation, I have in mind Drott's gerund, articulating the dynamic and processual aspects of a genre.

[30] Tagg defines a genre synecdoche as: "*pars pro toto* reference to 'foreign' musical style, thence to cultural context of that style" (2012, 486). A question that naturally might follow is whether a reference to any style—or a repetition of some part of that style—would *not* lead through a semiotic chain to some "cultural context." I discuss this further in Section VI below. Further, the notion of genre synecdoche closely matches traditional definitions of topics which I discuss more fully in Chapter 2.

knowledgeable listener, the timbre of a Rickenbacker electric 12-string guitar, for example, would be enough to call forth the entire 1960s folk-rock soundscape, in some sense replicating the genre through a simple timbral meronymic relationship to prototypical bands like The Byrds.[31] The entire semiotic code of a musical object gets repeated whenever that object is connected to a genre, blending musical objects with the genres they repeat.

From a more perceptual orientation, genre-as-repetition is simply a matter of pattern-recognition. Musical categories help minds to parse and effectively experience familiar or unfamiliar musics, recognizing stimuli as repeated manifestations of a collection of schemata—schemata which remain pretty consistent for known categories. "The capacity for brains to protect schemas from overgeneralized learning," as Huron explains (2006, 214), means that genres remain relatively solidified as patterns at a single hierarchical level. In other words, once a category has formed, it remains intact, and various instantiations are understood as repeating those patterns.

These patterns are often applied not to musical categories but to artist identity. In his study of musical genres in the twentieth century, Brackett shows how musician identity plays a critical role in many cases of categorization.[32] Like generic categories, identity is performative, and Brackett explains that this performativity and its "successive iterations of an identification constantly modify the conventions (and thus the constraints) of the category (or categories) with which people identify, uncannily paralleling the iterative processes of musical. Attempts to understand musical and identificatory categories seem to share the same central conundrum: how to evoke simultaneously a

[31] George Harrison's "If I Needed Someone," for instance, shows his reliance on Roger McGuinn's Rickenbacker electric 12-string guitar to help give *Rubber Soul* its folk flavor. A comparison to "Bells of Rhymney" reveals close timbral connections, with Harrison's new jingle-jangle indexing and repeating the West Coast, flower power, and liberal folk. There is an irony in this relationship, of course, since McGuinn was inspired by Harrison's own use of the Ricky 12 on the previous year's *A Hard Day's Night* album, yet it is McGuinn's usage that became the prototypical, genre-signifying sound.
[32] As I have noted elsewhere (Johnson 2017a), prior published subtitles for the book—"Genre and Identity in Twentieth-Century Popular Music" and "A Generic History of Popular Music"—reveal two overriding goals that Brackett melded into this work: identity and history. These earlier subtitles can be found in the AMS book publication subvention awards listing (http://www.ams-net.org/pubs/Publication-subventions-2015-fall.php, accessed 12/1/2017) and Brackett (2015, 205), respectively.

shared system alongside numerous individual instantiations and interpretations that threaten to undo the legibility of the system" (2016, 24).[33] For Brackett's study, and for listeners or industry personnel more generally, this citationality of identity often plays out in the durable connection between musician and style category, repeating well-formed stylistic connections. For example, Kenny Rogers's hit "Lady" (1980) was a huge crossover success, topping the *Billboard* country, adult contemporary, and Hot 100 charts. But the song has very few sonic signifiers that would be considered country, as Brackett observes, with its use of non-country instruments (harp, English horn, etc.), rubato rhythms, key area (E-flat minor), and chord types (sus chords) all re-instantiating the adult contemporary generic milieu rather than country. Yet Brackett notes that the song was still considered country largely due to the iteration of Rogers's identity, which was firmly established as country, if on the pop side of that spectrum (2016, 290). The assemblage of this song's generic identities and repetition was made even more complicated by its writer, Lionel Richie, who brought a branch of soul into its hybrid genealogy. This complex connection between identity, repetition, precedence, and genre will be treated more thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4, especially in connection to Spotify's application of stylistic metadata to specific artists, but it is sufficient to note for now that repetition of artist identity can take a primary role in determining a song's generic category.[34]

Genre-as-repetition, then, claims a unique status in the constructions of "genre-as-…" that I lay out in this chapter. Be it genre-as-system, genre-as-contract, or the classical category theory of genre, these categories or relations slip easily into static crystallizations viewed from a removed, omniscient perspective. Even though other theories occasionally highlight their dynamism (e.g.,

[33] From a very different perspective, social psychologists have demonstrated that genre-preference fundamentally acts as a repetition of listeners' personality traits, with musical dimensions like "arousal, valence, and depth" serving as reliable predictive variables (Greenberg et al. 2016).

[34] Richie's stylistic journey is instructive as a typical process of genre formation. After crafting an artist-specific idiolect during his years with the Commodores, Richie's songwriting came to define the adult contemporary genre as a basic-level category. Jennifer Lena, both in her own work (2012) and with Peterson (2008), provides a robust typology of these types of genre trajectories, describing how a style like salsa or honky tonk might begin as an avant-garde or scene-based genre, moving then into other classifications like industry-based or traditionalist.

navigating the contract) or diachronic change (e.g., shifting relations in a network), genre-as-repetition most fundamentally embodies the constantly negotiated realm of musical categorization. Repetition is not the same as a mere resemblance; it relies on the constant reiteration and re-formation of the entire generic category each time a genre is instantiated or any time a musical object participates within it. Yet this formulation often devolves into a comparative exercise, placing a track, album, or musician next to a more prototypical example to determine resemblance. In the next section, I explore some results of the conflation of repetition and resemblance, which creates a binary between musical elements of style and social elements of genre.

VI. Genre, Not Style

A chief concern of many popular music scholars interested in categorization lies in the distinction between style and genre. Though often used interchangeably in most discourses—especially the vernacular and popular media I dive into more fully in later chapters—these two words are fraught with baggage when deployed more technically in popular music scholarship, representing a binary that relates to broader ideological issues throughout music theory. Scholars like Braae (2015), Moore (1998, 2001, 2007, 2012), Tagg (2012), Fabbri (1981a, 1982), Spicer (2010), and Rockwell (2007) all explicitly separate these two terms. Put succinctly, they suggest that "style" collects and describes shared, persistent patterns and musical materials, while "genre" points towards the extra-musical peripheral determinations of categorization. Put more simply by Moore, "style refers to the manner of articulation of musical gestures" whereas "genre refers to the identity and the context of those gestures" (2001, 44). Moore suggests that a conceptual distinction can and should be made between musical gestures and their subjective identities and contexts, driving a semiotic wedge between the terms. This notion reflects a broader trend in music theoretical discourse. For example, an almost identical definition is given in Rockwell's dissertation: style "refers to a manner of

performance (instrumentation, tempo, vocal delivery, harmonic structure, etc.)," while genre refers to a "wider cultural complex" (2007, 27). Or, in his article on Queen's idiolect, Nick Braae employs the term "genre" only once, used as an adjective for "issues" and with the modifier "extra-musical" (2015, 174). For all of these authors, analysis should focus on style and thus the music itself.[35]

More directly relevant to the current discussion of genre, definitions of style as collections of objectively determined (or analyzed) acoustic phenomena all rely on an older foundation of "style analysis" which guided music pedagogical practices during much of the twentieth century. As part of the post-War rise in university attendance and its complementary growth in the humanities, music appreciation classes became nearly ubiquitous. These classes almost exclusively focus(ed) on a canonical repertoire to be learned and analyzed in specific ways—namely through style analysis. In Donald Van Ess's textbook, for example, "the style of music" is defined by "its form, underlying ideas, and its rhythmic, melodic and harmonic characteristics" (1970, v). In order to listen to music studiously and intelligently, a student must know "what to expect in terms of musical style. In our study musical style encompasses the preferred scales, modes, chords, rhythmic patterns, musical forms, and the basic characteristics of melody, harmony and counterpoint" (21). This brand of style analysis was reflected in methodologies outside the classroom as well. For Meyer, the goal of style analysis is "to describe the patternings replicated in some group of works, to discover and formulate the rules and strategies that are the basis for such patternings, and to explain in the light of these constraints how the characteristics described are related to one another" (1989, 38). Jan LaRue's influential, if now-outmoded, SHMRG methodology—a less-than-appetizing-sounding acronym standing for Sound, Harmony, Melody, Rhythm, and Growth—essentially maps these same parameters onto a full,

[35] Drawing from political scientist Jane Bennett, Steven Rings (2018) recently celebrated a focus on the "music itself," suggesting that an "enchantment" with the materials of music "can provide the somatic and affective fuel for interpersonal generosity and real-world political action." This is no doubt a laudable goal, yet in practice, I believe a single-minded and unreflective enchantment with musical materiality bears traces of naïve analytical gatekeeping.

rigorous analytical framework. While ostensibly about "style," SHMRG reduces pieces to a single set of aesthetically derived criteria, flattening an understanding of musical categories into a base routine process of evaluation. No matter the type of music, these methods deploy the same set of tools; with the SHMRG hammer, all music becomes a shiny SHMRG nail.

Again, from a position like SHMRG's, music's historical or cultural contexts are understood as accidental to or of minimal importance in determining style and musical categories. Though musical elements may relate (perhaps homologously) to their cultural contexts somehow, they remain separable, objectively analyzable. For Meyer, such a separation of parameters entails a necessary externality. "When two parameters are thus distinguished," he suggests, "one is understood as being 'external' to the other. Thus, however much political events, social organization, or philosophical concepts may affect the constraints of a musical style, they are governed by different sets of constraints and are, accordingly, external to the parameters of music" (1987, 30). Attali , Goehr, Adorno, McClary, et al. be warned, since Meyer further suggests that "external parameters must be considered if the *history* of a style is to be explained, but they are not required for an *analytic* account of the structure and process of a style" (1989, 30). Here is the crux; genre encompasses the analytically unimportant stuff, peripheral to all but the "history" or the "context" of music.

But in practice, the twinned binary terms, style and genre, almost inevitably conflate, either in their usage or their referents. In classical music parlance, for instance, "genre" categorizes both performing forces (like a concerto) and formal traits (a symphony being a multi-movement piece, usually with a typical orchestration) across not-well-defined scales or hierarchical levels of organization, often including semiotic meaning as well. Allanbrook's (1984) foundational study of topics could even be read as the intentional collapsing of the style/genre binary, showing how types of music and their musical elements are inseparable from their semiotic, socio-cultural baggage. Even in a basic Saussurean semiotics, style's "manner of articulation" enmeshes within genre's "identity and

context" of the articulation, creating at least an integrated signifier/signified relationship. Is it really possible, as Moore suggests, that style "simply brackets out the social or at least regards this realm as minimally determining, where it is considered to operate with a negotiable degree of autonomy" (2001, 441)? How autonomous are stylistic units? Surely style creates chains of signification that extend beyond the "music itself." The ambiguity and irreducibility inherent in these pseudo-definitions reveals and introduces analytical and conceptual issues which I attempt to address in this dissertation. Most directly, I hope to reintegrate style and genre as interchangeable terms for discussing any kind of musical categorizational or relational act.

As a brief example of style's and genre's ambiguous relationship, even for those that theorize these terms separately, I provide here a quick survey of Moore's various explorations of the word "ballad" in his *Song Means* (2012). This mapping of a single generic signifier is not meant to refute, disprove, or denigrate Moore's work or conceptions of musical categorization. Instead, I merely intend to show how difficult it is to separate "style" and "genre" in practice—the two, even in academic discourses, tend to be conflated. In its typical later-twentieth to twenty-first-century popular-music sense, a ballad is a kind of song that usually employs a homophonic-melodic texture and deals with sentimental subject matter in an AABA form, often accompanied by the act of waving lighters in the air during live performances. Earlier repetitions of the "ballad" are less clear cut, but generally connote love, longing, or affection for someone or something, often set with an andante tempo and homophonic-melodic texture. My brief definitional positioning here seems to define a style, with only the embodied participatory action and lyrical content branching into the genre's cultural contexts.

Moore first introduces the ballad with adjectival stylistic descriptors that rely on geography and historical period, explaining how the AABA song form was "very common in the American inter-war ballad … as in the standard 'I've got you under my skin', as recorded frequently by Frank Sinatra" (2012, 58). This inter-war period saw the development of "the notable genre of the Broadway ballad,"

generated from the traditions of vaudeville and operetta traditions (2012, 128). Later on, Moore defines the "ballad structure" and "ballad form" as this general AABA outline which may then be deployed or performed in different styles—the prototype being the "refrain" of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (2012, 86–87). So, it seems that ballad is a genre with a specific historical provenance and formal outline.

But this general definition becomes slipperier the more that Moore utilizes the term. Drawing from Forte, Moore points out the "pervasiveness" of certain stock rhythmic patterns ("the ragtime figure and the Charleston figure") within the American ballad, which certainly seems like an element of "style" rather than genre (2012, 67–68). Similarly, when describing basic verse-chorus forms, Moore explains "the chorus is usually equal to or half the length of the verse although in some styles (such as the show ballad, music hall, some metal), it can last for twice the length of the verse" (2012, 83). Is the reader to assume that a "show ballad" is a style while the "Broadway ballad" is a "notable genre"? When discussing the impact of US popular music on UK audiences of the 1920s and '30s, Moore lumps together "swing, jazz, the Broadway musical and the ballad" as the only "mainstream US styles that existed"—but he then immediately claims that "although these are separate genres in the way they operate, they share a sound-world and cultural position" (2012, 130). These genre/style names are doing double duty, signifying multiply across a variety of (extra-)musical axes, with a shared "sound-world" (i.e., style) and a shared "cultural position" (i.e., genre) bumping into each other.

Again, this brief survey of his use of a single style/genre should not be read as an attack on Moore's methodologies or scholarship; it instead merely reflects the inherent difficulty in writing about and with these two pernicious terms. In my following chapters, I attempt to find appropriate ways for "healing" the split between macro- and micro-analysis of culture and music, to borrow a phrase from Born (1998, 213), through the re-integration of style and genre as terms for musical categories. This rift between music-as-music (style) and music-as-culture (genre) is at the very foundational core of

music theory's engagement with (popular) music. But following Born, this dissertation will attempt to "argue for the benefits of a unified methodological and theoretical approach to the study of music as culture, and for all musics to be studied that way," by collapsing "style" and "genre" through interdisciplinary methods.

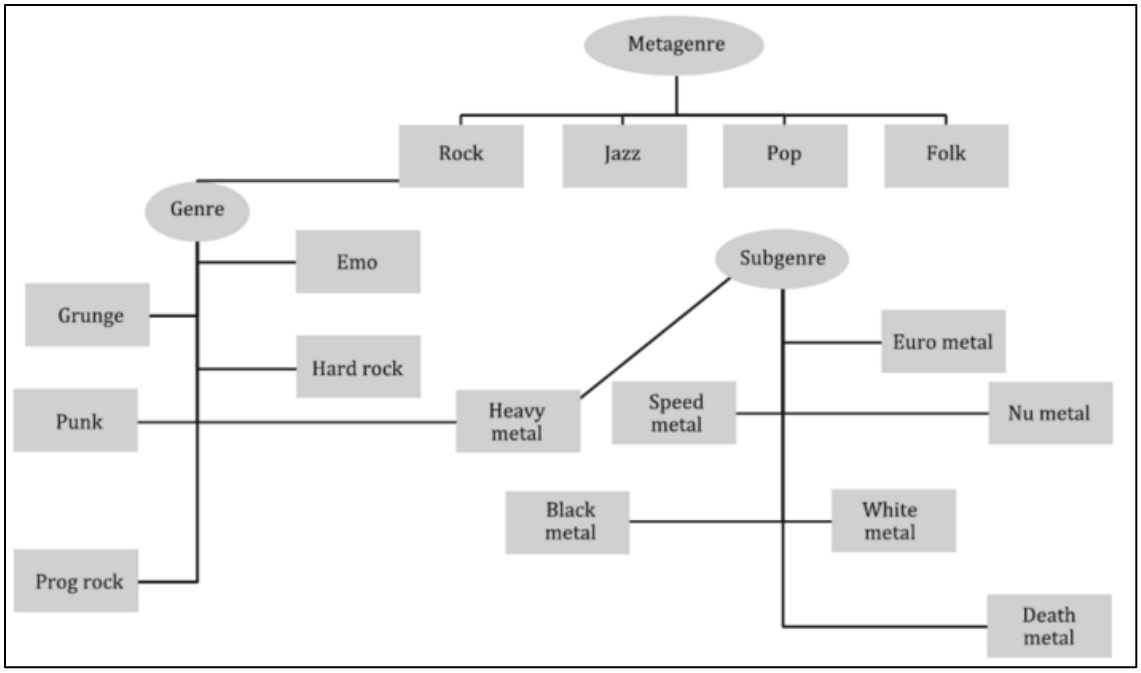
By unpacking the disciplinary and ideological reasons for their separation I hope to have demonstrated why "style" and "genre" should be reintegrated in music theoretical discourse. Even scholars who find pragmatic efficiency or convenience in their separation would do well to acknowledge what Tagg—another proponent of the segregation of these terms—has written about genre's role in style: "These issues of genre rather than style affect what music is actually made and heard: they influence which parameters of *musical* expression are operative. Even if cultural context isn't the main focus of your study they must be addressed in order to avoid the 'perverse discipline' of semiotics without pragmatics" (2012, 269). In the following section, I turn to one way that music scholars have implicitly brought these problematic terms ("style" and "genre") into closer contact via systems of categorizational relations and family trees which necessarily acknowledge the overlapping and entangled nature of the "music itself" with its cultural context and identity.

VII. Genre-as-System

The approaches I discuss above adhere to a generally perceptual or analytical stance, focused on categories somewhere within a matrix of specific pieces, listeners, and musicians. Another popular angle, which often incorporates an historical context, takes a more structuralist approach towards musical categories, following one of two strategies. Exemplified in the works of Fabbri (1981b), Moore (2012, 166–67), and Roy Shuker (2008), popular music is often represented as a nested hierarchy of categories, from artist-specific idiolects to the wide-ranging metagenres like "art music,"

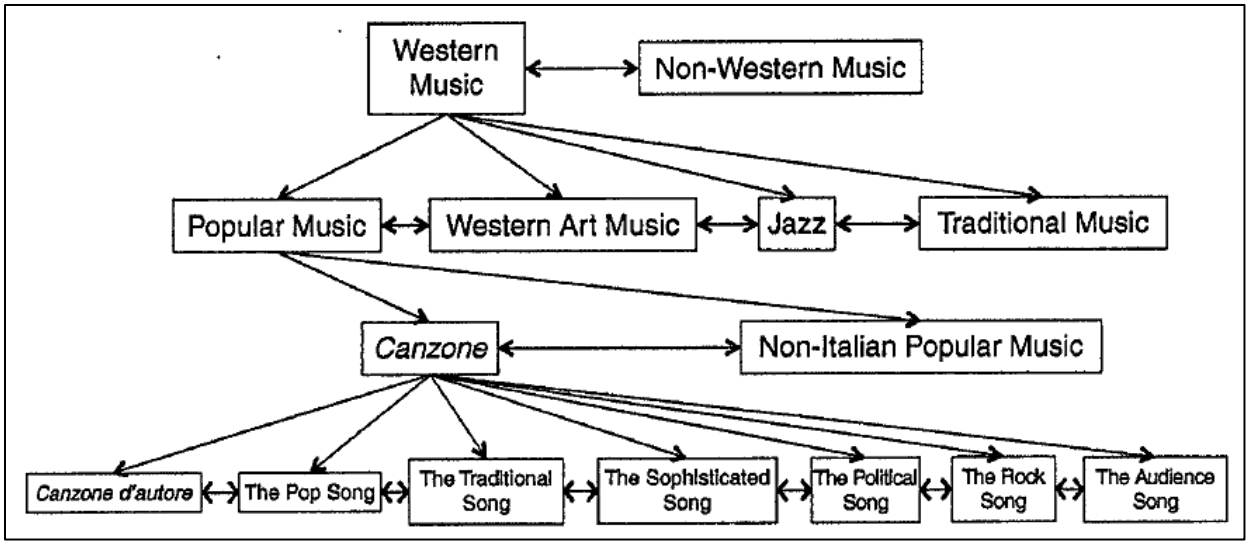
"non-Western music," or "traditional musics."[36] I replicate two representative arborescent tracings in **EXAMPLES 1.1–1.2** below. In between the metagenres and idiolects lie various levels of genres and subgenres, with appropriate amounts of specificity.

Another main strategy in describing a genre-system is to trace chronological stylistic lineages through genres or particular musicians, as in Fabian Hein's (2003, 136–37) metal taxonomy (excerpted in **EXAMPLE 1.3**), or Sam Dunn's (2005) more popular version below (**EXAMPLE 1.4**). In these phylogenetic mappings, metagenres or idiolects are replaced with a family tree of progenitors and their progeny, representing genres as connected only to other genres within their historical trajectory. The prevalence of these lineage tracings extends into less academic sources as well, two of which I include in **EXAMPLES 1.5–1.6**.

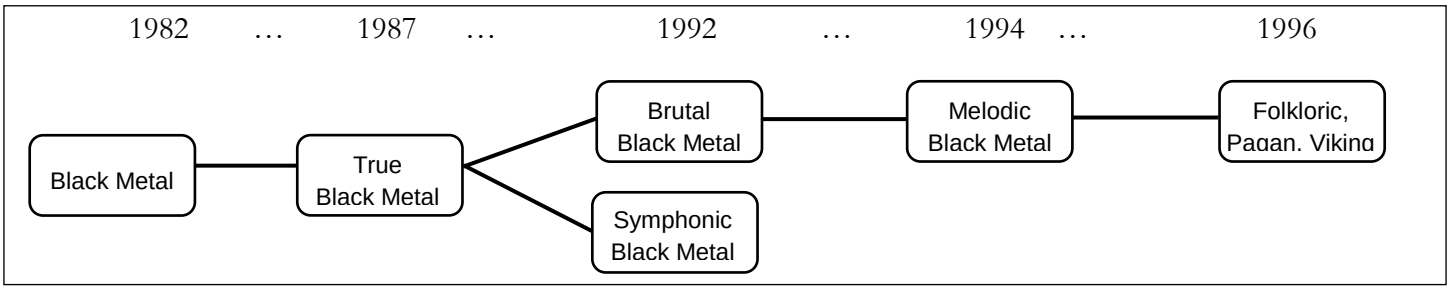


EXAMPLE 1.1. Drabløs's (2015, 54) application of Shuker's (2008) hierarchical system to a rock classification.

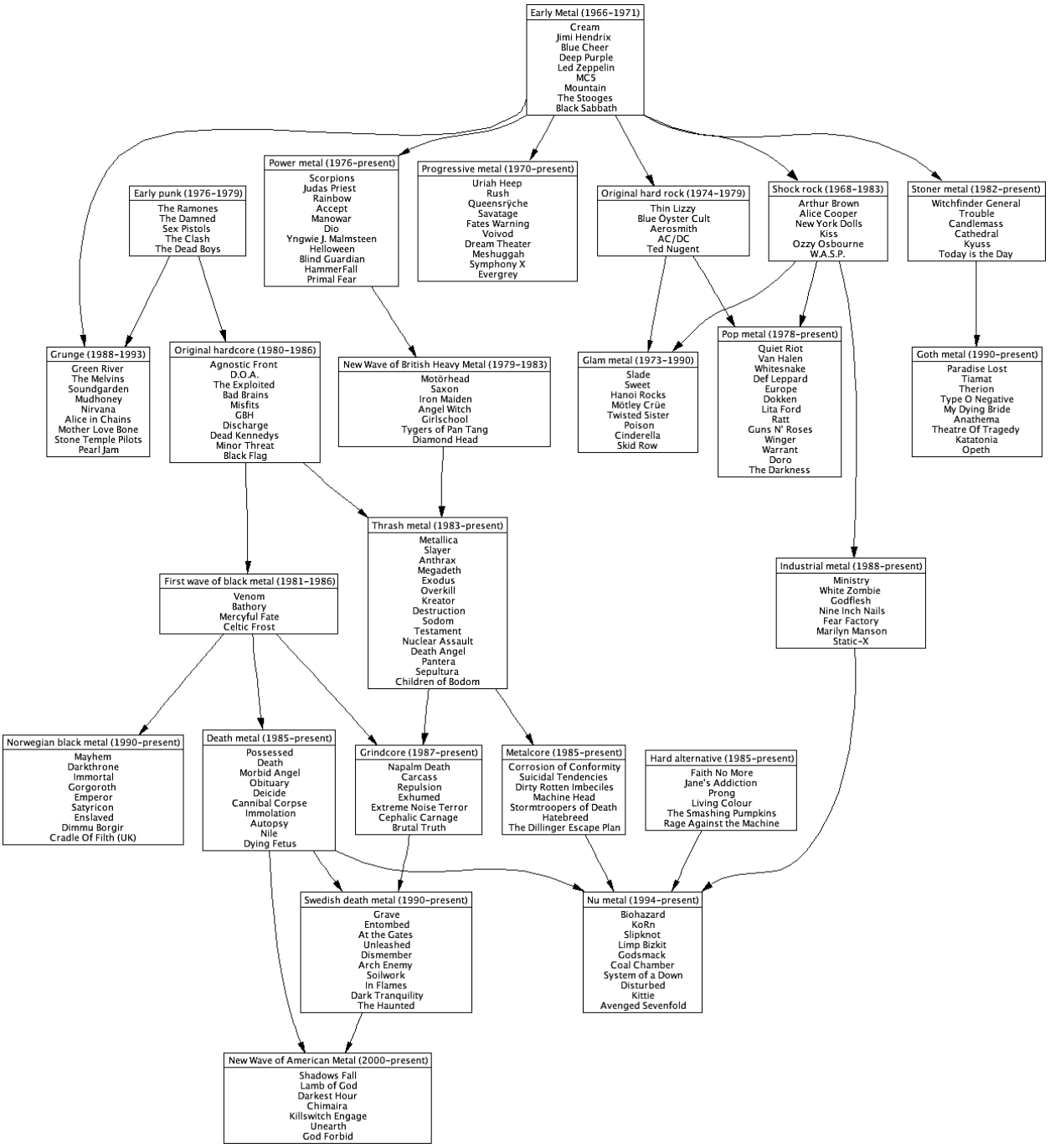
[36] The most common trifecta of large meta-categories is Tagg's division into art-popular-folk (as outlined in, for example, Tagg 1982, 42). These three categories are distinguished by their professional/amateur status, their scale of distribution, their mode of distribution, the types of society in which they tend to occur, their economic financing, their adherence to specific aesthetic dicta, and the (non-)anonymity of their creators. Gracyk (2007, 7–8) uses similar criteria for defining "popular" music, though he rightfully problematizes simplistic definitions based on how widely liked it is. This three-part split provides a useful starting point, yet it fails to adequately describe a majority of musical categories.



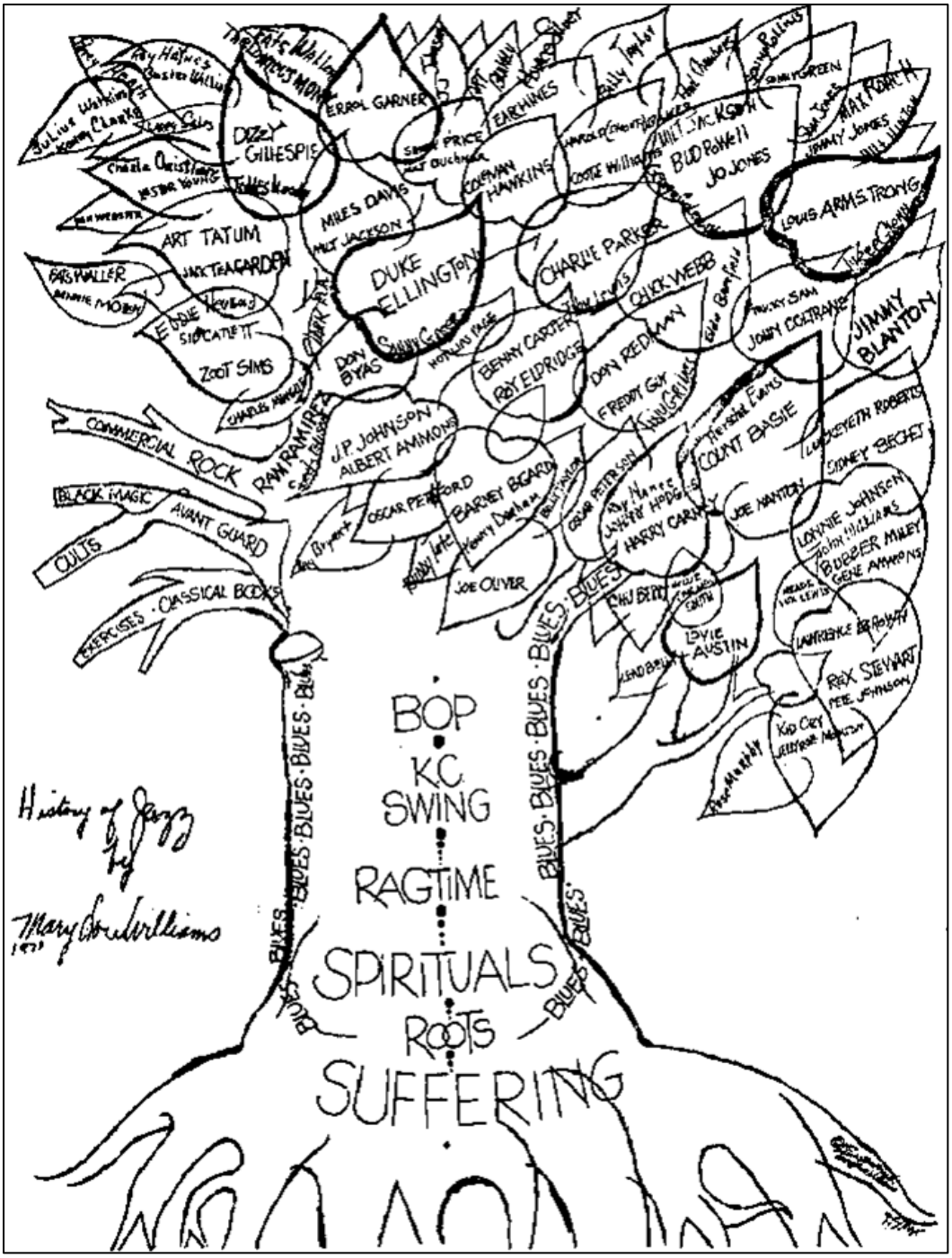
EXAMPLE 1.2. David Brackett's (2015, 193) visualization of Fabbri's (1981b) genre hierarchy, focusing on various subgenres of the Italian *canzone*. Some of these distinctions clearly reflect their author's subject position and ideology (e.g., Western vs. non-Western).



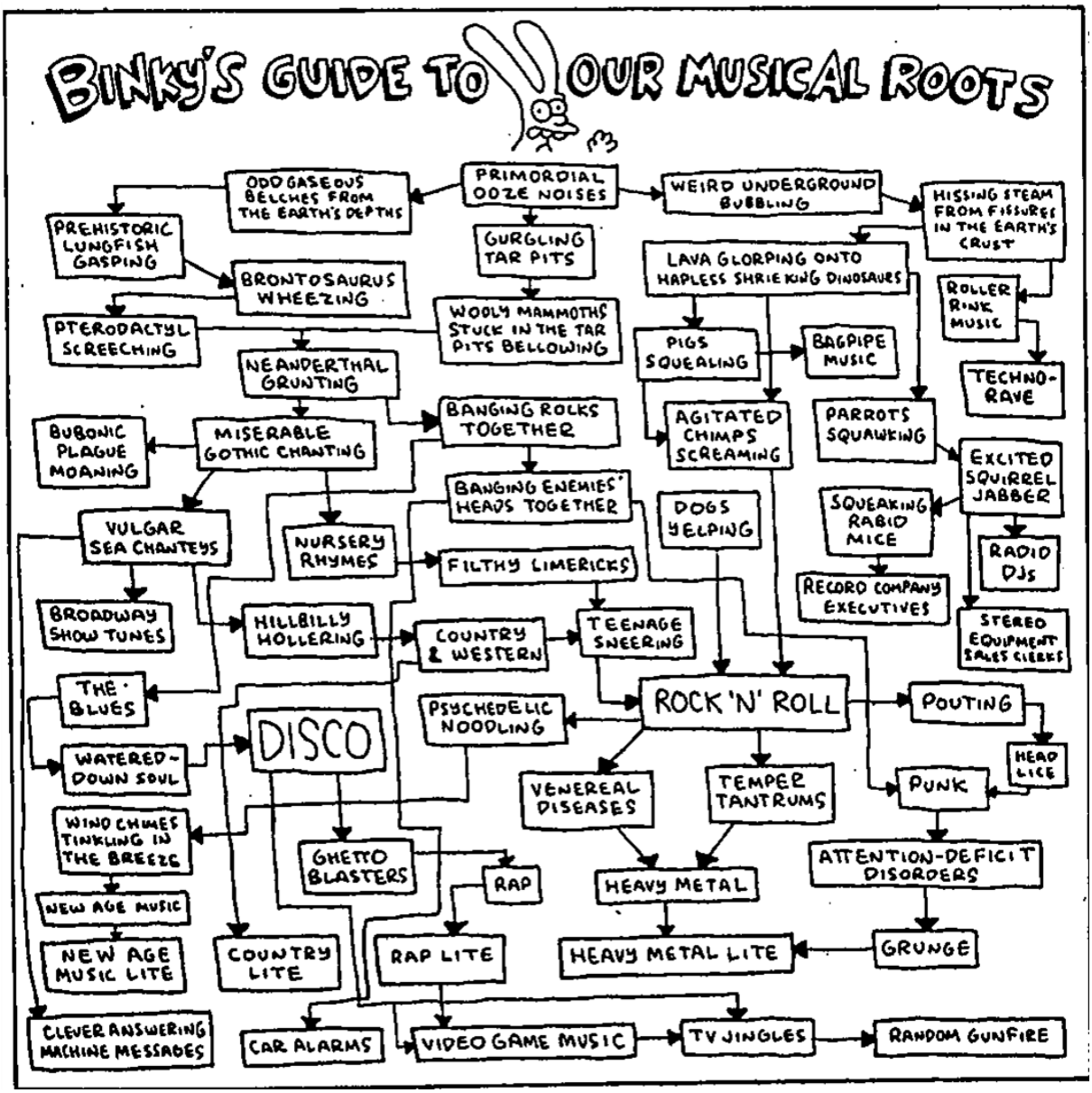
EXAMPLE 1.3. Extracted lineage from Fabien Hein's (2003, 136–37) *arbre phylogenetique du metal*, an exemplary chronological genre family tree.



EXAMPLE 1.4. Sam Dunn's (2005) "definitive" family tree of metal musicians and styles (reproduced from Smialek 2015). Smialek (2015, 36–43) analyzes this tree in depth, noting for instance some distinct shortcomings related to accuracy and its limitation placed on non-chronological relations.



EXAMPLE 1.5. Jazz musician Mary Lou Williams's (1973) phenotypical genealogy of jazz musicians and genres.



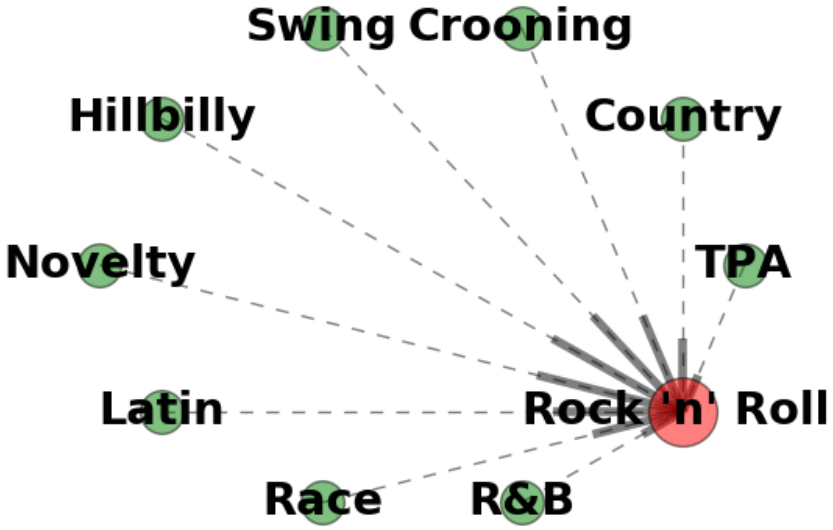
EXAMPLE 1.6. A satirical version of these phylogenetic cartographies by Matt Groening (1993).

Of course, some large-scale stylistic categories are more involved with systematization and genre differentiation than others. As **EXAMPLES 1.1**, **1.3**, and **1.4** indicate, the metal community has been especially active in this regard, and I will discuss metal briefly in Chapter 4 as it relates to concepts of generic overcoding. But perhaps the most prolific genre milieu is EDM, whose "continuous and rapid introduction of new subgenre names … is equaled by no other type of music," as Kembrew

McLeod (2001, 60) noted at the turn of the millennium.[37] EDM's early subgenres were inseparable from their localities, venues, and audiences, with style-identification acting as an agent of exclusion and differentiation. More recent EDM subgenres still rely heavily on geography and identity formations, and as Robin Lindop's (2010) analysis of UK psytrance reveals, they involve fairly complex manners of regulation and negotiation, raising issues of place and local phenomena which I tangentially investigate in this project. Though EDM falls largely outside my current purview, its profusion of subgenres and subcultural negotiations would provide a useful test case for the framework I build throughout this dissertation.

Returning to the graphs of genre-filiation, I suggest that any mention of stylistic streams follows a similar line of thought, except with multiple genre tributaries feeding into a single confluence rather than a river dividing as it spreads into a delta. The conventional narrative of early rock 'n' roll, for instance, suggests that streams like R&B and country flowed into the music of Chuck Berry and Elvis, a confluence of clashing binaries of the 1950s (white vs. black music, adult vs. teenage audiences). I represent this idea in **EXAMPLE 1.7**, adding various other stylistic rivulets that often get included in this narrative. As various stylistic elements flowed into rock, molded by binaries and roots, the industry helped reterritorialize these streams into rock 'n' roll, typifying an arborescent model—reifying categorizations of race and age along the way. Fabian Holt paints this synthesis as a genre transformation in which "resources of existing genre cultures were drained, and the balance between ages, places, and styles within each genre network changed" (2007, 59). In other words, rock 'n' roll shook up the popular music world and changed how the music and its classification changed in the 1950s—a trope common to much scholarship on the topic.

[37] McLeod (2001) explains how new subgenres of EDM could result from "genuine stylistic evolution," merchandizing strategies, an "accelerating consumer culture," or cultural appropriation, and how they might serve as gate-keeping devices. This latter point undergirds my discussion of Spotify's taxonomies in Chapter 4. Further, McLeod suggests that "extensive subgenre naming is … revealed to be deeply bound up in both the political–economy and group identity formations of electronic/dance music communities" (74). I agree, and would suggest that *any* genre naming, whether subcultural or not, is ultimately inseparable from political dimensions of categorization.



EXAMPLE 1.7. A loose understanding of many conceptions of early rock 'n' roll as a collection or confluence of musical streams, enacting a similar family tree as those in the examples above. Most accounts of the birth of rock tend to understand rock 'n' roll as the coming together of R&B and country, though many acknowledge an occasional extra source like Latin and swing. For some exemplary discussions of this genealogy, see Garofalo and Chapple 1989 and Starr and Waterman 2010. The thicker portion of this line corresponds to the graph's directedness, and proximity of genres to rock 'n' roll roughly correlates to their importance.

Though I will not completely distance myself from hierarchical or systematic conceptions of genre—any conception of category will necessarily contain both looser and tighter fitting manifestations, and thus, a relative spectrum of engagements—I think concretizing musical categories into trees like those given above might unfairly constrict possible connections *between* levels while simultaneously predicating such levels on listener competency.[38] Networks imposed by the analyst or phylogenetic cartographer might coerce specific associations that deny rich intertextual connections on the part of the listener, requiring a rigid competency to disentangle. As Erik Smialek (2015) has argued, these trees probably tell us at least as much about the cartographer as they do about the subjects of phylogenetic cartography, leading to "parallel universes" of genre determined by their

[38] The hierarchy, of course, cannot be "in the music," and it must necessarily be an outside structure, often used to enforce subcultural mastery.

creators.[39] Many subcultural musical communities—especially communities involved with metal—pride themselves on knowledge of niches, and a complete family tree is one way of flexing subcultural muscle. But this static arborescence raises difficult questions, especially about whether there are ways to create generic boundaries that cut across branches of the tree.[40] Such a model, I believe, fails to adequately answer the main questions of the dissertation, which seeks to understand genre's role in both the experience and structure of the current popular musical world. While these taxonomies may have historiographical interest and accuracy, they fail to capture what it's like to hear generic connections or to address a holistic perspective of genre's structuring potentials. These arborescences deny robust, complex connections that are non-linear or non-chronological.

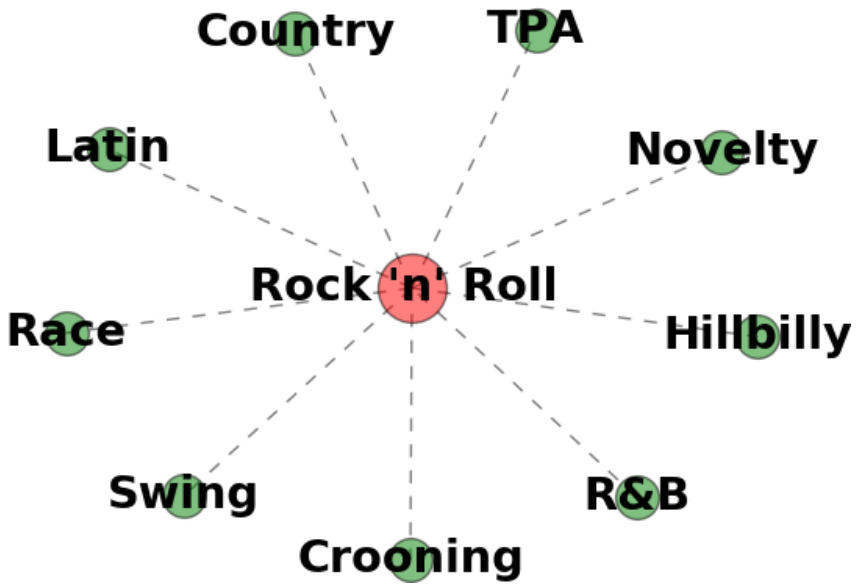
In Chapter 2, I essentially argue for an analytical focus on genre as an invitation to hear connections, to read a text as an originary central node from which experiential lines of flight might point outward towards potential stylistic interconnections. Rather than collapse genres into a tree-like structure, I think it might be more perceptually genuine to take a more rhizomatic perspective. Like classical musical topics, genre in popular music invites a dialogue between music and cultural or semiotic connections. I have elsewhere suggested that topics might be best understood in a state of becoming, where music exists in a state of becoming-topic that protends into potentially many topical possibilities, solidifying into being as analytical labels get applied (2017b, 1.4). Similarly, I will later argue that musical texts invite generic and stylistic connections that, though clearly dependent both on a listener's competence as well as their musical habitus, are shared more broadly among a musical culture.

Returning more specifically to the rock 'n' roll example, I believe that early rock didn't really shake up music classification at all; rather it helped to buttress existing categories, solidifying existing

[39] For a thorough investigation of a number of metal family trees, see Smialek 2015, 29–64.
[40] I agree with Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 190) who claim that arborescence in general denies rich, cross-cutting multiplicities and connections.

connections between genre and social, institutional, racial, gender and age-related groups. In Starr and Waterman's (2010) standard textbook, for example, the practitioners of rock 'n' roll are divided into two camps: the R&B side and the country side. These sides are conspicuously represented by black and white artists, respectively. In this traditional re-enactment of generic boundaries, though the music may have been new, the ways genre operated were not. I suggest that the shifting musical categories of the 1950s brought about an incomplete deterritorialization of musical styles and aesthetics, which ended up reterritorializing onto an arborescent model of genre from prior decades.

Lawrence Redd (1985) makes a similar argument about generic categorization of the time, showing how the emancipatory potential of radio, coinciding with the renaming of race-records as "rhythm and blues," brought African-American popular musics more commercial success during the late 1940s and the early 1950s. It was at this exact moment that "rock 'n' roll" entered popular discourse, and by employing that term instead of "rhythm and blues," "the media and the recording industry would succeed in segregating [R&B] again from mainstream popular music," following the same impulse to separate black and white musicians that had governed musical classification in the 1920s (1985, 35). Whiteness was ingrained in rock from the outset, and the regular practice of covering explicitly prevented black artists "from entering the large white consumer market by supplying consumers with recordings of white artists singing the rhythm 'n' blues of black artists" (41). Redd argues that, ultimately, "the distinction between rhythm 'n' blues or black music and rock music is a false one" (46), a distinction that precipitates from the institutionalized racism of generic conventions. The same categories and connections between types of musicians and types of music from previous decades continued to govern the popular music machine, and I will explain in Chapter 4 how this legacy apparently flows into modern streaming services and our contemporary genreme.



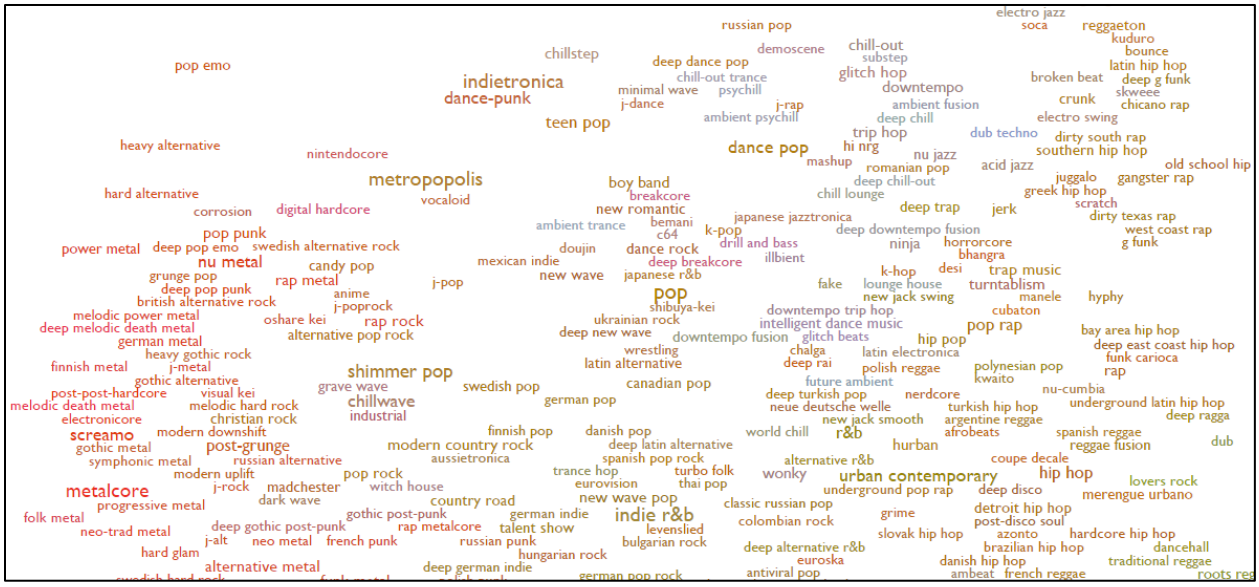
EXAMPLE 1.8. A reconfiguration of **EXAMPLE 1.7**, with a central genre functioning as a locus within a broader network of genres, inviting perceptual connections outward towards related stylistic worlds. These outer nodes may be connected in a networked code similar to, for instance, Klein (2005, 51–56).

To my understanding (and to my ears), texts of early rock might be better represented in the cartography I provide as **EXAMPLE 1.8** which models potential connective stylistic filaments that point outward, reaching to musical forebears and contemporaries through nonhierarchical branches. This lateralizes the relationships and stylistic proximity between styles from **EXAMPLE 1.7**, allowing multiple options for analysis that might better reflect a broader range of listening experiences and historiographical purposes.

Though rock 'n' roll lies at the center of this graph, it should only be understood as central in that it is the focus of my current analysis, the point of origin for radiating lines-of-flight. Throughout this dissertation, I will flitter between rhizomatic, de-hierarchized modes of genre filiation (like **EXAMPLE 1.8**) and more arborescent models. Rhizomes and trees, then, do double duty; they function as models for genre-thinkings, and they sometimes act as a sort of value-measure. As mentioned at the outset of the dissertation, I believe that too much music-theoretical focus has been placed on a hierarchical, arborescent understanding of genre-as-distinction—a negative space of stylistic

differentiation which resonates with a wide range of conventional theories concerning categorization, language, and culture (from Saussure to Bourdieu). This dissertation tends towards the opposite end of the spectrum, advocating a networked, connective role of genre. In reality, these two conceptions intermix and mingle, and generic definitions inevitably both consociate and separate. By focusing on a connective perspective, I hope to at least nudge the music-theoretical conceptions of genre a little towards the rhizomatic end of the spectrum.

Another alternative genre mapping is given in **EXAMPLE 1.9**. This detailed map was created by Glenn McDonald (2016a), a genre engineer for Echonest (now part of Spotify). In this lateralized, flattened network of nodes, genres are arranged along two main axes: "in general down is more organic, up is more mechanical and electric; left is denser and more atmospheric, right is spikier and bouncier," McDonald explains, noting the fuzzy nature of this algorithmically derived distribution. Does a graph that places "pop" in close proximity to "ukranian rock," "doujin," and "deep breakcore" make intuitive or rational sense? What does the leveling and lateralization of genre hierarchies do, and is it worth doing? Does this genre map allow for the kinds of interconnectedness I suggest in **EXAMPLE 1.8**? I'll explore these kinds of questions most directly and coherently in the final case study of my dissertation in which I survey some of Spotify's modes of categorization. For each of these examples, then, genres are presented in set relationships with each other in an attempt to grapple with stylistic genealogies. While these trees are all useful means for various ends, this dissertation will attempt to take a more active conception of generic relations to better reflect the complicated stylistic milieu of twenty-first century popular music.



EXAMPLE 1.9. Small section of the McDonald's (2016a) "genre map," with "pop" located near the middle of this excerpt. The x-axis is roughly from "denser and more atmospheric" on the left to "spikier and bouncier" on the left. On the y-axis, "down is more organic, up is more mechanical and electric."

VIII. Why Popular Music and Why Now?

A crucial motivation for this dissertation project lies in the novel means of musical engagement available to listeners and musicians in the twenty-first century. I believe that many older music-theoretical conceptions of genre or even theories of musical *experience* might lose viability in our current post-file-sharing era of constant access fueled by services like Spotify, SoundCloud, Bandcamp, and Pandora on the esthesic side, and by technologies like digital audio workstations and powerful compositional software on the poietic side.[41] Consumption, distribution, and production have shifted quite drastically even since the turn of the millennium, perhaps even as dramatically as the era that experienced the rise of recordings. Consequently, it would seem that discourses, theories, and formations of genre are neither monolithic nor rigid; they must change over time too.[42] This is not

[41] Of course, this is only a partial list of streaming services, meant to show the diversity in formats. Spotify seems to be the most common model, serving as the basis for Tidal, Apple music, and Amazon Prime music among others.

[42] This could mean that the synchronic requirement of a theory of genre for Fabbri (2008, 490) might be untenable. Again, I must stress that I am not necessarily interested in how certain genres change but rather in how genre navigation, genre discourses, genre webs, and genre-thinking in general might differ diachronically.

only to say that genres themselves change, since their evolution lies at the heart of popular music. Instead, genre itself, as a means of experiencing and structuring musical categories, must change as well. Different eras perhaps engage in different fundamental generic machinations.

While trying to avoid a presentist bias that treats contemporaneous culture as special, I do believe the discourses embedded in our current popular music world indicate a shift in the ways that musical categories *work*. For this dissertation, I focus on how this categorical shift necessitates a change in music analytical and disciplinary focus. As an oversimplification, the reigning conventional understanding in current music theoretical discourse is that, since much of popular music is distributed and consumed as recordings, its primary mode of being is as repetition, whereas classical and folk musics exist as performances (manifestations or representations) of works. Key to this conception is the ontological difference between an autographic recording and an allographic song; the former is fixed in its various physical media while the later may have many different manifestations or realizations in performances. As an example of this recording-ontology understanding, Ted Gracyk argues that rock "exists primarily on records," and thus fundamentally differs from a recording of "Robert Johnson, a Beethoven symphony, and an Aboriginal song" which would consist mainly of realizations of prescriptive allographic songs (Gracyk 1996, 39).[43] By giving preference to the "thick" ontology of the record over the "thin" ontology of the song, Gracyk attempts to "stabilize the 'object' that we are evaluating" (2007, 105).[44] Albin Zak's poetics of rock similarly involves a focus on the recording, defining his "genre" of study by the common "pervasiveness of compositional consciousness in the recording processes" (2001, xvi). In other words, for popular musicians in the

[43] Gracyk also informs the reader that he is going against the "realist" position that "performance has ontological priority over recordings" (1996, 43).

[44] Clearly, my concise summary leaves out many important confrontations of issues related to the ontology of the musical work. The expanding literatures on liveness and performance in popular music leaves this recording-ontology especially tenuous. In the next chapter, I will briefly show some of the effects the recording-ontology has on analysis of intertextuality.

latter half of the twentieth century "records are not simply carriers of their songs and performances but artworks in themselves whose crafting requires a particular sort of consciousness" (xvi – xvii).[45]

This situating perspective—from which recordings are viewed as the musical object of analysis—rests on a lineage of the popular music machine that emerged in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Specifically, as Brackett (2016) argues, the recording-as-commercial-medium took off with the rise of the musical category, "foreign music," which coincided with an influx of immigration from a variety of countries.[46] Industry executives sought to identify the most viable audiences, musicians, and labels for the plethora of musics recorded at this time, and they placed newfound focus on musical elements like timbre, vocal inflection, groove, and microtimings to make these distinctions. Unlike traditionally notate-able musical parameters, these sonic signifiers, Brackett suggests, were "associated with marginal elements of the population" (154), and they gained significant aesthetic import during this era. Along with simultaneous technological advancements (especially the rise and ubiquity of jukeboxes), the capital imbued into these musical elements helped generate a "sonic aesthetic" in which recordings became the dominant format for measuring popularity.[47] In other words, foreign music was the site where the industry initially recognized the record's potential for finer-grained distinctions of audience, and thus led to an increased focus on the success of individual recordings rather than songs. Such an emphasis opposed the inherited song-as-text work

[45] The rise of rock 'n' roll clearly marked a watershed moment in this new recording-based musical economy, which simultaneously concretized the importance of links between particular musicians and their songs. Elijah Wald suggests that "it was only with the coming of rock 'n' roll that it became standard for songs to be linked to particular artists, and right through the 1960s there were examples of two singers going head to head with similar versions of the same number" (2009, 88).

[46] I give a fuller account of Brackett's book elsewhere (Johnson 2017a).

[47] This sonic aesthetic certainly contributed to the delayed approach to popular music by trained musicologists and theorists. Born explains how a focus on recordings "centers on those elusive qualities that have so far proven resistant to music analysis in general, even in relation to art music. I am thinking of timbral inflection, … micro-tonal slides, minutely subtle shifts of rhythm within a highly structured but repetitive basic meter, and all these employed in a quasi-improvisational way. So that to analyze these popular musics…primarily in terms of pitch, melody, harmony, instrumentation, or 'global' structure is to miss the musical point" (1998, 215). Some of these "elusive qualities" have been investigated in the intervening decades since this quote was written, but it points directly to the role of Brackett's sonic aesthetic in the music-theoretical world.

concept that the sheet music and publishing industry pushed well into the 1940s. Brackett argues that the sonic aesthetic, unique to and characteristic of the recording era, thus stems from foreign music, a structuring pillar of the popular music field for the first 40 years of the twentieth century.

Brackett's evidence for the sonic aesthetic should serve to strengthen the typical materialistic notion of musical ontology that I showed with Zak and Gracyk above. Such a view has become relatively commonplace for pop music scholars, who treat the recorded object as the musical work, be it LP, 8-track, CD, or mp3. While this perspective ignores the always important live cultures of popular music, the attempt to "stabilize" the pop musical object has been a convenient move for theorists lacking the resources of notated scores. The long debates over the values of transcription in the ethnomusicological world have been only moderately felt within the realm of popular-music-theoretical literatures, and in practice, a majority of music theory articles on harmony, melody, form, or rhythm in pop make use of traditional musical notation or basic graphical representations of pitch space (e.g., Heetderks 2015) and metrical arrangements (e.g., Adams 2009).[48] But in the twenty-first century, these recorded objects have perhaps taken on a slightly modified ontological status, gathering and dissolving into material streams of distribution and consumption, rather than crystallizing into discrete objects. If Brackett's notion of a sonic aesthetic reigned during most of the twentieth century—spurred by changing modes of technological mediation, popularity tracking, and industry focus—it seems feasible that a new digital or streaming aesthetic might take over in the twenty-first during a similar sea change of consumption and distribution.

By focusing on this new digital aesthetic, my dissertation argues for a distinct shift of *genreme* or in *genre-thinking*. These terms represent something akin to Kuhn's paradigms, Negus's genre cultures, and DiMaggio's artistic classification systems (ACS). A period's genre-thinking captures the possible

[48] An illuminating discussion about the difficulty and value of transcription for pop music analysis can be found in Stanyek 2014.

ways that genres are experienced, structured, and understood at a certain time for large cultural communities. Genremes depend largely on their technological means of distribution and consumption, as well as their specific configurations of Born's planes. Like DiMaggio's ACS, genremes encompass "the way that the work of artists is divided up both in the heads and habits of consumers and by the institutions that bound the production and distribution of separate genres," referring to a "system of relations among genres and among their producers in a given collectivity" and reflecting "both the taste structure of a population and the structure of production and distribution of cultural goods" (DiMaggio 1987, 441). In many ways, a genreme implies something like the interrelations of Negus's "genre cultures," which arise from "the complex intersection and interplay between commercial organizational structures and promotional labels; the activities of fans, listeners and audiences; networks of musicians; and historical legacies that come to us within broader social formations" (1999, 29–30). Negus focuses on how individual genre cultures (e.g., a genre culture of country or a genre culture of rap) influence and are influenced by large-scale music industrial machinations, and the ways in which genre cultures involve both aesthetic concerns and broader social categories. My genremes broaden this scope a bit in an attempt to capture relations between "genre cultures" and different industry machinations, with special attention paid to musical texts and their experiential possibilities. Genremes forge multiple and actively mediated modes of genre navigation and construal through a functionally infinite network. As I discuss in the following chapters, a current hegemonic genreme depends crucially on new technological modes of production and consumption, but it is not the only possible way of structuring and hearing musical categories.

In short, then, an analysis of genremes interrogates all of Born's planes of sociality and the tensions or connections between them, with a focus that flitters between discursive formations, musical texts, experiential concerns, and structures enacted by the popular music machine. It analyzes the active processes involved in understanding musical style categories, communicating about them,

or experiencing them. This loose definition of a genreme will be sufficient for the purposes of this dissertation, since a satisfactory, well-formed conceptualization would require a thorough mapping of distinct shifts and changes in the imbricated, coeval manifestations of genre over a much broader timespan than my current purview. Future work focused on other key moments of generic change—in the mid-1960s and 1980s, for example—will take on genre-thinking itself as a distinct object of analysis.[49] But for this current project, I will explore a contemporary genreme that I call #genre, which I explain and explore in the following chapters. For now, I will simply suggest that the ways this genre-thinking differs from that during the 1960s or 1990s, for instance, seems an important and under-explored area in music theory, one that might establish significant and potentially far-reaching connections between our relatively esoteric field and other music disciplines, other academic disciplines, or even public discourses more generally.

This newer genreme also relates directly to what Baudrillard called a "technological society." In describing the shifting ways that interior design homologously represents changing subjectivities and attitudes, Baudrillard suggested that "as directly experienced, the project of a technological society implies putting the very idea of genesis into question and omitting all the origins, received meanings and 'essences' of which our old pieces of furniture remained concrete symbols; it implies practical computation and conceptualization on the basis of a total abstraction, the notion of a world no longer given but instead produced—mastered, manipulated, inventoried, controlled: a world, in short, that has to be constructed" (2005, 27–28). This is precisely the problem that Ratliff's book and Spotify's discovery and recommendation engines attempt to solve. Namely, when the world is too saturated and interconnected, it cannot be given as such; it must instead be constructed (via algorithms, search engines, recommendations, curatorial guides, etc.) Such virtuality ensures that genre cultures will be necessarily imbricated and intertwined. In other words, imagine that the tree structures given in

[49] I briefly discuss a potential 1970s genreme of *center-schism* in the conclusion to this dissertation.

EXAMPLES 1.1–1.7 above are not simply "there" to be experienced or argued over, but rather are re-constructed and reordered for each unique user of Spotify at a specific present moment.[50] But as I will show in Chapters 3 and 4, only certain of these ephemeral constructions—based on specific privileged subjectivities—gain an outsized role in our current genreme.

The preceding few pages should indicate some of the theoretical reasons why I think twenty-first-century popular music provides such a rich area of research for an understanding of how artistic categorization and experience work, and why it may be unique. But there is also a much simpler pragmatic reason to undertake a study of musical categories in the twenty-first century: few music theorists or musicologists have really done so in depth. Brackett's recent history of popular music categories in the twentieth century represents the most comprehensive view of the subject, yet he (graciously) leaves open the task of exploring the role of genre in the new millennium. Many scholars just outside of the traditional makeup of music departments have directly engaged with ideas of taxonomies and musical kinds in our current world. Representative of this diverse interdisciplinary network are Nick Seaver's (2017) ethnographic approach to algorithmic systems, Robin James's (2017a) philosophical investigations of post-genre, and less academically oriented sources like Ben Ratliff's (2016) guide to listening in an "age of musical plenty."

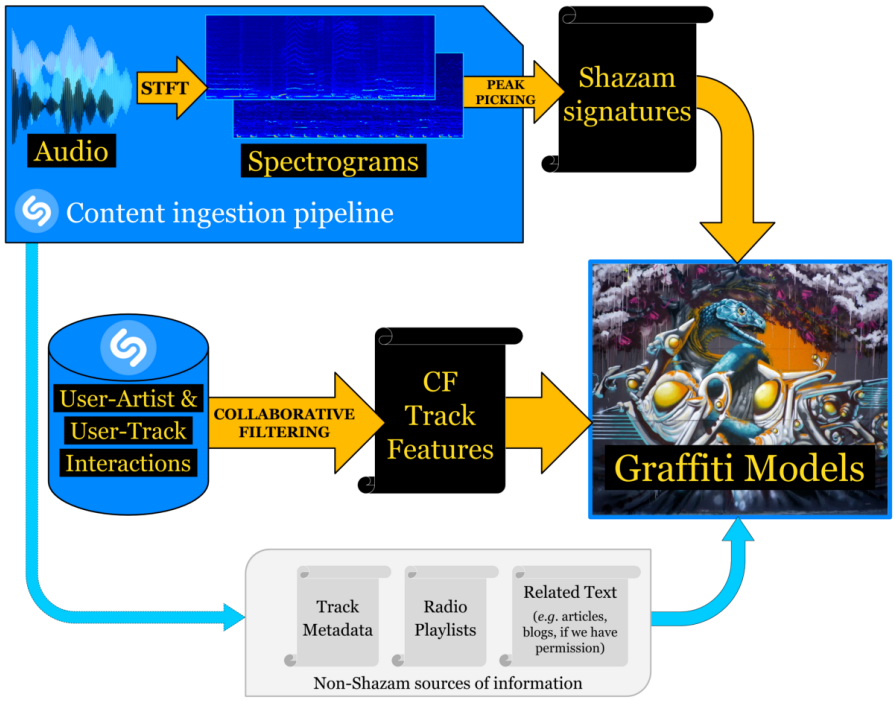
The most sustained research being done on musical categories, however, lies in the immense and ever-growing literature of computer science, data science, and empirical pseudo-musicology involved with music information retrieval (MIR) (e.g., Lamere 2008; Mauch et al. 2015; Ens, Riecke,

[50] The imbricated notion of genre-thinkings represents an apotheosis of Gjerdingen's and Perrot's claim that, when it comes to genre, "the customer is always right. If person X says that a song is in genre B, person X is subjectively correct regardless of what anyone else says. Only in reference to group norms can one properly talk about the 'correct' genre" (2008, 95). Smialek (2015) makes a similar claim when he suggests that various manifestations of genre-thinkings (like the tree examples above) represent "parallel" universes of genre, reacting to similar objects and basic rules, yet organizing and structuring them in unique manners. The rise of psychographics in marketing and recommendations fuels a similar move towards individualization, taking the continual re-construction of genre structures as its main function. An excellent summary of a shift from demographics to psychographics in music distribution can be found in James (2017b), and I discuss the issue more fully in Chapter 4.

and Pasquier 2017), neatly embodying a musical manifestation of Baudrillard's "technological society." Indeed, genre recognition emerged as MIR's first "flagship application" (Drott 2017), with immediate practical implications for online music retailers. MIR has been especially active in quantifying and measuring "similarity relations" between musical objects and/or listener response, attempting to understand the exact acoustic, physiological, and cognitive processes that constitute musical categories. MIR researchers have also increasingly incorporated semantic analyses and collaborative filtering to place their "objective" acoustic and psychological methods in dialogue with semiotic and social methodologies. Collaborative filtering—used most famously by Netflix—essentially builds a huge matrix of every user (row) and every object (column) in their database, with matrix values corresponding to user ratings of those objects (**EXAMPLE 1.10**). By then attempting to group similar users and similar objects together, these recommendation services taxonomize both their audiences and their objects into loose groupings, bypassing any analysis of either the users or the items themselves. Semantic analyses basically trawl metatextual sources like critic-fan writings or playlists for descriptions of musical objects or for co-occurrences of these objects to create a semantic network that measures prevalence and salience of descriptive terms. The results of these basic strategies—audio analysis, collaborative filtering, and semantic metadata—usually then get fed through a weighting model that renders a final verdict (or collection of characteristics) about a musical text's appropriate categorical functions. Goldschmitt and Seaver (forthcoming) describe this heterogeneous "ensemble model" as "composed out of human and algorithmic parts that are constantly reconfigured into arrangements that make it difficult to distinguish between the human and the algorithmic at any level." As such, the decisions that get made at many different levels filter into the modes of musical categorization that MIR employs, an example of which may be found in **EXAMPLE 1.11** above.

		Items					
		1	*2*	...	*i*	...	*m*
Users	*1*	5	3		1	2	
	2		2				4
	:			5			
	u	3	4		2	1	
	:					4	
	n			3	2		
	a	3	5		?	1	

EXAMPLE 1.10. A hypothetical matrix representing the process of collaborative filtering (reproduced from Melville and Sindhwani 2017, 1058). User *a* at the bottom of this matrix would be grouped with users *1* and *u*, who have given similar ratings to items *1*, *2*, and *i*+1. Since users *1* and *u* have given item *i* a low rating, the collaborative filtering algorithm would be unlikely to recommend that item to user *a*. Actual processes of collaborative filtering usually involve dimension reduction processes to improve efficiency across a very large, sparse matrix.



EXAMPLE 1.11. An example from developers at Shazam of the "ensemble model" from Goldschmitt and Seaver, outlined above. The three basic components are audio analysis along the top of the flowchart, collaborative filtering in the middle, and the metatextual analysis at the bottom, which all blend into an overarching strategy of tagging and indexing musical objects. Most audio recommenders and streaming services use a similar generic flowchart.

But as Drott (2017) suggests, even with these new foci and complementary strategies, MIR continued to define genre as "a cluster of items understood to be similar according to a set of quantifiable metrics. This was true of content-based approaches to genre identification; but it was no less true of context- and user preference-based approaches." These similarity relations and their reliance on quantifiable metrics—the yoked set of methodological ideals and ideologies underlying MIR's genre—seamlessly integrate into current streaming platforms, like Spotify, as companies seek means to automatically, algorithmically, and effectively sort their music.

As such, a certain bias towards a scientistic perspective of musical categories, brewed by MIR researchers in their quantifiable metrics and definitions, gets baked into the way millions of listeners engage with genre. In Chapter 4, I take a quantitative analysis of the resulting groupings enacted by Spotify and the experiential potentialities of genre thus made possible, and place them in dialogue with a survey of current popular music discourses dealing with genre in order to show how the music industry's continual work on musical categories influences mundane modes of grouping by listener and musician. Recalling Born's levels of social mediation above, I demonstrate how her third and fourth planes—those corresponding roughly to the music industry's role in refracting or magnifying broader social formations and the permeation of the neoliberal capitalist modes of production, respectively—impinge upon and ultimately affect the practical world of the musician and listener. In Born's words, "the socialities of musical performance and practice, suffused as these may be by wider social relations, as well as by the social imaginaries afforded by music: all these vectors of social mediation can enter into aesthetic experience for participants and listeners" (2011, 379). This dissertation's succeeding chapters, then, attempt to follow along these directed lines, mapping out the resulting multivector space while exploring their interrelations.[51]

[51] Negus takes a similar position when describing the imbrication of different conceptions of identity, analogous to Born's different planes of socialities: "the specific point I have tried to emphasize with regard to the study of popular music is that there is no straightforward or intrinsic link between the lives of fans, the meaning of musical texts and the identity of

Finally, I have chosen to direct this dissertation's focus towards twenty-first-century *popular* music in particular. The reasoning is basically threefold. First, music theorists have increasingly turned towards popular music as a site of analytical exploration, and this dissertation intends to feed another methodological stream into the growing disciplinary cascade. Second, the past 60 years or so have seen the continual blurring of a high-low art divide, with popular music standing comfortably at the fore. With recent major prizes given to Bob Dylan (cf. this dissertation's intro) and Kendrick Lamar (cf. this dissertation's conclusion), popular musics have clearly garnered institutional recognition, displacing further the cultural authority that classical or "art music" once held.[52] As such, popular music has clearly become a cultural and critical force de rigueur, which I discuss briefly in Chapter 3 as this trend relates to the debates between "rockism" and "poptimism." Third, while in later chapters we will encounter the notion that popular music has become increasingly homogenized, I believe current popular music's stylistic diversity embodies an apotheosis of the highly referential and densely intertextual nature of all musics, presenting an extreme case study for an investigation of genre and musical categorization.[53] When musics and styles mix and interact at extreme levels and at unprecedented volumes, it surely seems like the ways musical objects relate to each other should take a primary role in music scholarship.

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a particular artist. Songs and musical styles do not simply 'reflect,' 'speak to' or 'express' the lives of audience members or musicians. A sense of identity is created out of and across the processes whereby people are connected together through and with music" (1996, 133). Negus follows up this point with an abduction of Stuart Hall's ideas about how genre and identity serve two roles of articulation, with musical meaning acting both as communication directed towards others in addition to a process of linking together. This dissertation's later chapters implicitly take this dual-natured view of articulation by exploring the communicative potential of genre (via mashups and critic-fan discourses) and the connective role it plays (through my quantitative analysis of Spotify metadata).

[52] Robert Fink's lengthy essay on the changing landscape of "art music" at the end of the twentieth century cogently addresses many of the issues wrapped up in the institutional validation granted by prize committees. Of the many shrewd conclusions he reaches, Fink explains that "today, serious art music has to be tracked down all over the cultural landscape: the grittier end of the new age; the spookiest and most ethereal corners of ambient; the most uncompromising slabs of hardcore and techno; and, sometimes, the least academic products of the university new music ensemble" (1998, 147). Relatedly, Born (1998, 227) also suggests that no matter how separate the worlds of "mass" and "modern" musics may seem to be, "popular music plays an important, if partial, role in" the musical lives of classical (or "art") musicians, which lays bare the constructed-ness of any boundaries erected between these musical worlds.

[53] I engage more directly with intertextuality in Chapter 2.

IX. Summary

This chapter opened with a basic premise: music theory as a discipline should explicitly engage genre and issues of stylistic classification more directly since essentially every music theory article, book, talk, or study implicitly makes a genre-defining situating move. Choosing to analyze rock, hip hop, late eighteenth-century sonatas, Romantic *Lieder*, Helena Munktell's songs, Joan Tower's chamber works, or early post-tonal modernist music necessitates a direct (and often uncritically glossed) stylistic circumscription. These circumscriptions are, of course, natural and necessary, since a musical Theory of Everything would engage very little of specific value.[54] But the fact that they remain generally under-acknowledged creates occasional disjunctions between the music under analysis and the methodologies or theories applied to them. By not placing genre and style at the center of the discipline, theorists bracket out a huge variety of music for inquiry and investigation while simultaneously implicating themselves in the same disciplining, exclusionary work of the canon.

As just one indication of music theory's failure to address issues of musical genre and style, take Duinker's and Léveillé Gauvin's (2017) meta-theoretical content analysis of the discipline's four major journals. The authors analyze 1063 articles published in *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Analysis*, and *Music Theory Online* from 1979 to 2014 and tabulate their theoretical topics, repertoires, and composers of study. Two aspects of the meta-analysis are pertinent here. First, the authors hold repertoire and theoretical topics apart, an understandable move since a topic like harmony or form might well be of analytical interest across a wide variety of musical kinds. And though they later analyze the correlations between repertoire and topic, the two are kept segregated. This means that repertoire or genre itself is not treated as a theoretical topic since they take the analytical frameworks (based on, for instance, harmony or timbre) as something applied to kinds of

[54] Music theories and methodologies generally strive to strike a balance between generality and specificity, to find an analytical and theoretical sweet spot that allows engagements with multiple kinds of music without prescribing commonsensical or vague generalizations.

music.[55] Second, this segregation is apparent in both their and Goldenberg's (2006) lists of all the theoretical topics that music theory deals with (**EXAMPLE 1.13**). Out of their combined 40 or so unique topics, "style" only shows up in connection to sketch studies, a far cry from an independent subject of music-theoretical research. It also suggests an understanding of style that closely hews to "style analysis" as discussed in Section VI above, fitting into a long history of trying to get at the poietic side of musical categories.

Of course, genre and style have been directly confronted on occasion, as outlined in the preceding sections of this chapter, but there remains a general lacuna. I believe, however, that in addition to the many "genre-as-…" conceptions that I covered above, a sustained exploration of genre by music theorists might open up new space for analytical inquiry that allows a fresh reengagement of now-canonical popular artists.[56] More importantly, I hope this dissertation's methods for addressing generic connections, experiences, and structures might simultaneously deterritorialize potential repertoires, creating novel ways of investigating under-explored genres and artists.[57] Though my exploration of these topics concentrates specifically on popular music, the resulting framework will hopefully be germane to music theoretical discourse more broadly, addressing issues of categorization and analysis suggested recently in studies like Piekut's (2014) appraisal of actor-networks in music history and Drott's (2013) previously mentioned ruminations on the role of genre within ostensibly genre-less modernist art music.

[55] These authors tangentially acknowledge this deficit by pointing out the inherent difficulty and structuralist perspective generated by their definition of repertoires by large-scale periodization.

[56] In so doing, I liken my project to similar attempts at bringing new perspectives to bear on familiar problems: topic theory's fresh reengagement with Classic music, modern *Formenlehre*'s debates, or perhaps even transformational theory's paradigm-shifting analytical attitude.

[57] One result, for instance, is that mashups no longer lie as passive points of humorous contact between sources; rather they become dynamic motivating forces of meaning creation through their perusal of generic interactions. I explore mashups in the following chapter.

Topic (Goldenberg, 2006)	Topic (Duinker & Léveillé Gauvin, 2017)	Abbreviation
History of Theory	History of Theory	
Metatheory	Metatheory / Philosophy / Hermeneutics	Philosophy
Philosophy as Object		
Hermeneutics		
Psychology / Cognition	Psychology / Perception / Cognition	Cognition
Acoustics	Acoustics / Tuning / Temperament	Tuning
Tuning		
Pedagogy	Pedagogy	
Schenker	Schenker / Hierarchy	Schenker
Hierarchy		
Harmony	Harmony	
Tonality	Tonality	
Modality	Modality	
Scales	Scales	
Melody	Melody / Contour / Motive / Theme	Melody
Contour		
Counterpoint	Counterpoint / Fugue / Voice Leading	Counterpoint
Fugue		
Forms	Form	
Neo-Riemann	Neo-Riemann, Riemann, Transformation	Transformation
Riemann		
Set Theory	Set Theory	
Dodecaphony / Serialism	Dodecaphony / Serialism	Dodecaphony
Symmetry	Symmetry	
Rhythm	Rhythm / Meter / Temporality	Rhythm
Texture	Texture / Register	Texture
Organology	Organology	
Timbre	Timbre	
Technical / Electronic	Technical / Electronic / Software / Notation / Computer	Technical
Software		
Notation		
Prosody	Prosody	
Motives		
Sketches	Sketches / Composers / Style / Composition	Sketches
Performance	Performance / Improvisation	Performance
Information	Information	
Linguistics	Semiotics / Linguistics / Rhetoric / Narrativity / Movement	Semiotics
Rhetoric		
Narrativity		
Movement		
General: Bibliography	General: Bibliography	Bibliography
General: Eclectic	General: Eclectic / Other	Other
Other		
	Mathematics	
	Corpus Study	

EXAMPLE 1.12. Duinker and Léveillé Gauvin's (2017) Example 1, indicating the representation of various topics in four major music theory journals (*Music Theory Spectrum*, *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Online*, and *Music Analysis*.) "Style" is the only genre-related topic—indicated with the arrow—yet it is placed into a category with "sketches/composers/composition," clearly indicating a poietic conception. No topics related to musical categorization appear on these lists. Of course, style is implicit in many of these (e.g., Schenker, corpus study, or dodecacphony).

Perhaps indecorously, then, I borrow a general working definition of genre from Drott which traverses notions of levels, contracts, repetition, and systems. Genre is "a dynamic ensemble of correlations, linking together a variety of material, institutional, social, and symbolic resources: repertories, performance practices, distinctive formal and stylistic traits, aesthetic discourses, forms of self-presentation, institutions, specific modes of technological mediation, social identities, and so forth" (2013, 9). This definition, however loose, allows one to circumvent the requirements of something like Samson's *Grove* definition of genre as "a class, type or category, sanctioned by convention" (2001). It attempts to capture potential experiences of genre as an emergence of connections into a networked set of relations, as well as a way of engaging the structural and discursive practices of this code. And yet, even this extensive definition renders an uncomfortably deficient methodological position. The "so forth" of Drott's definition leaves out much of the political ramifications of genre definitions and stylistic circumscription, especially as they relate to economics, human geography, and, it must be said, issues of racial, gendered, sexual, ethnic, and class identities. Though I cannot hope to tackle all of these in a single study, this dissertation aims to nudge theorists towards a more expansive and inclusive vision of genre studies which addresses the essential political nature of the topic. Throughout the dissertation, I explore how genre inhabits different conceptual worlds and generates disparate theoretical realms: genre-as-meaning, genre-as-topic, genre-as-discourse, genre-as-relations, genre-as-identity, genre-as-index, genre-as-economic determination, genre-as-signification, genre-as-….

In the immediately following chapter, I explore how this dynamic understanding of genre affects listening experiences and interacts with two more traditional domains of music theory: form and topic theory. More than a simple function of labeling, genre critically determines and affords various matrices of meaning creation in popular music, especially in a format like mashups which entail the coming-together of distinct stylistic sources. For Heather Dubrow, some works of literature

"dazzle and disturb us with a kaleidoscopic array of hues in which it is difficult to discern a dominant one, a single genre with whose name we can confidently label the work," (1982, 29) and the next chapter will attempt to parse mashups' kaleidoscope of generic multiplicity by diving into the ways that the colors of musical genres interact.

Chapter 2: Genre-as-Topic in Mashups

I. Introduction

As the twenty-first century got underway, easy access to digital music files and sophisticated software allowed a broad range of musicians to create new works involving nothing but the combination of multiple pre-recorded artifacts. These prevalent "mashups" pose some unusual situations for conventional music-theoretical concerns of form, meaning, and genre. How does a song composed entirely of intact extractions of layers from various sources create novel meaning? What kind of meanings might it create? And how might the samples form a coherent structure? In this chapter, I suggest that such questions about meaning and coherence in mashups can be answered better with a broad focus on the knotted, multifarious generic web of twenty-first-century popular music that mashups unearth, rather than answered with a reliance on an understanding of the relationships between the literally sampled tracks. I also contend that the formal structures of mashups often play an active role in this meaning creation, functioning as more than an inert musical container in which humorous juxtaposition plays out. By placing mashups in dialogue with discourses of semiotics, topic theory, formal analysis, and genre, I suggest a deep relationship between meaning, genre-signification, and form in a variety of mashups.

To frame my approach, I start with an abstract formulation of the basic mashup.[58] Mashup μ is made up of: lyrics α, from song β representing genre γ, while the instrumental backing χ, comes from song ψ representing genre ω. Each sampled track, then, subsists of a tripartite unit ($\alpha\beta\gamma$ or $\chi\psi\omega$) with each component expressing varying degrees of literalness in the mashup.[59]

[58] I adopt the term "basic mashup" from Boone 2013. These mashups are commonly referred to as "A+B" or "A vs. B" mashups in various mashup communities.

[59] These layers might also be meaningfully mapped onto Born's (2011) planes of sociality as they describe modes of signification across different scales. This formulation will be slightly more complicated when μ contains more samples from a variety of sources, but my general approach remains the same.

"Smells Like Teen Booty" = μ		
Layer present in μ:	α = Destiny's Child's vocals	χ = Nirvana's instrumentals
Original track:	β = "Bootylicious"	ψ = "Smells like Teen Spirit"
Genre of sample:	γ = Early 2000s pop/R&B	ω = 1990s grunge rock

TABLE 2.1. A tripartite formulation for describing layers of meaning in a basic mashup, μ. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to both the distinct planes of signification (e.g., the γω plane) and to the coordination of meaning between levels (e.g., between α and β). In addition to the original track, the βψ plane also contains the original artists and their identities, so this plane requires a familiarity with the sources.

As an example of this formulation, take the frequently analyzed and referenced mashup, 2ManyDJs' "Smells Like Teen Booty" (c. 2002) which places the vocals from Destiny's Child's "Bootylicious" (2001) on top of the instrumentals layers of Nirvana's "Smells like Teen Spirit" (1991) given in **TABLE 2.1** above.[60] I will return to this mashup in the following sections, but it should be clear how these disentangled planes of signification make it easier to acknowledge and explain the different facets of mashups and their sources with which musicologists and music theorists usually engage. Most music theoretical writing on mashups focuses on their combination of sampled elements (αχ) and their autosonic intertextual sources (βψ). For example, Christine Boone's (2013) taxonomy of recycled music focuses on the constructive aspects of combining α and χ, defining various categories of mashups by the number and alteration of their samples. In her later work on gendered power dynamics, Boone (2018) classifies mashups in a "masculine/feminine interaction chart" that essentially compares the performed gender of the sampled artists with how altered the samples are (β:ψ::α:χ).[61] Anthony Cushing's dissertation covers many of the harmonic, formal, and textural aspects

[60] The most recent investigation of "Teen Booty" can be found in Adams 2015. I discuss some other studies (Serazio 2008; Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins 2012) of "Teen Booty" later in this chapter. Since authorship of many mashups is nebulous and difficult to determine, titles and variations of almost every mashup can differ widely in the literature and online. Such an effect reflects the infinitely unfinished and contingent nature of pop cultural units today.

[61] This latter work fundamentally relies on whether or not the instrumental samples have been transformed from their original context. To hear αχ as changed, one must know what they have been changed from (βψ). This change is placed into dialogue with the performed genders of αχ, a task that frequently relies on knowledge of the identity of their artists' identities (which lie on the βψ plane). The resulting interaction categories are "masculine/feminine is heard out of context; feminine/masculine takes control" or "masculine/feminine is heard as changed; feminine/masculine takes control."

of mashups (αχ), in addition to the interactions between sampled artists (βψ), which only superficially involves their generic commitments (γω) (2013, 89–124). Though most mashup scholars mention genre and style as a matter of course, I will suggest in this chapter why more emphasis should be placed on the γω plane.[62] With the new formulation of μ in place, analytical attention may turn outward, away from the mashup as a collection of intramusical elements (αχ) or as a place of sample encounter (βψ), and towards mashups as an edge between nodes in a vast network of genre (γω). Shifting foci between these layers reveals their imbrication, and I hope to demonstrate that a focus purely on the αχ and γω planes is sufficient for successful and sensitive musical analyses.[63]

One reason why a genre-focused methodology might prove rich is that scholars too often focus on the basic humorous and subversive potential of mashups.[64] Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins claim that successful mashups should provide humor when a listener concludes that two sources "should definitely not work together . . . but they do!" (2012, 100). They suggest that a mashup should exhibit "musical congruity," where α and χ fit together smoothly; but there should also be "contextual incongruity," which will generally create a sort of comedic wit through the cultural contrasts that the listener recognizes between β and ψ. In other words, Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins focus on the relationships α:χ::β:ψ, requiring the listener to identify the constituent songs in order to understand

[62] In his study of *The Grey Album*, Adams (2015) presents a more nuanced interpretation of the relationships between different members of my abstract formulation. That album, though, falls well outside of the "basic mashup" category, instead aligning with other remixes or, in Boone's terms, the category of "paint-palette" mashups. That said, his performative understanding of mashup creation compares favorably with my semiotic interpretation later in this chapter.

[63] These planes of signification essentially comport with Serge Lacasse's (2018) most recent adaptation of Gerard Genette's typology of intertextuality. The γω level roughly matches Lacasse's archiphonography, which covers relationships between songs "occurring at the highest, most abstract level" of discourses or large-scale ad hoc groupings. The βψ level resembles hyperphonography in its recognition and reliance on the sources of borrowings. Finally, the local αχ level presents us with an interphonographic relationship, focusing on the actually present samples/quotations within the mashup, μ. Relatedly, the lower two levels map clearly onto Mark Spicer's (2009) strategic intertextuality, while the broadest plane matches his use of stylistic intertextuality. I will discuss common conceptions of intertextuality in slightly more detail in the following section.

[64] Boone, for instance, summarizes that meaning in mashups "is treated subversively. Mashups subvert meaning through genre clashes, which are often deployed to extract irony or humor" (2011, 150–62). Subversion and clash remain the highest form of musical meaning in mashups in her newer work as well: "the best mashup artists combine markedly dissimilar tracks into a musically cohesive whole" (2018, 4.1).

the musical joke, and the aesthetic merit of these digital compositions is derived from a witty, humorous mix of sources.[65] An explicit engagement with the **γω** plane should provide a much broader set of aesthetic criteria with which to evaluate the success of mashups beyond humor or subversion; earnestness, complementarity, reinforcement, and other positive valences might arise as well. This explicit engagement also reveals the implicit role of the **γω** plane in most analyses.

By adopting aspects of Robert Hatten's brand of topic theory, I will investigate some potential avenues left unexplored by these prior approaches. I suggest a reorientation towards mashups that allows for a broader conception of meaning creation, both with and without recognition of the sampled songs. I generally shift the analytical focus from the relationships of **αβ:χψ** and **α:χ::β:ψ.** to interactions between **αχ** and the larger generic space, **γω**. This requires a shift of Peirce's interpretant, the third part of his tripartite signification model, which better acknowledges the mutable and contingent nature of musical signs than Saussure's simpler binary connection between signifier and signified.[66] I believe prior analyses have flattened this generic space by relying too heavily on a one-to-one notion of the relationship between a sample and its parent song; often, possible generic interpretants of the mashup and its components have been neglected in favor of interpretants centered on the original recorded context. By the end of this chapter, I will show that this **βψ** plane is in fact

[65] Like John Covach (1995), Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins base their conception of meaning and humor on a basic reading of John Morreall's work. Morreall's adaptation of incongruity theory explains humor as a "cognitive shift," involving a set of pre-existing expectations and a punch of the unexpected, moving from normative relationships to contrast. A key aspect of this theory is that the observer stands at some remove from the potentially frightening, disturbing, or serious cognitive shift, understanding the incongruity from a disengaged, aesthetic perspective of sorts. Typically, some "play signal"—usually laughter for Morreall—lets the observer know that the environment is meant to be taken humorously rather than seriously. Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins enumerate three such "play signals" in their discussion of mashups without calling them such: the witty, entendre-filled combinative titles of most mashups; the bizarre montage videos and collaged cover art that accompany many mashups; and the stated value of humor from "many hard-core mash-up fans and producers" on online mashup forums. But what if these play signals are muted or absent? Similarly, Morreall suggests that a cognitive shift "does not have to be between opposites, but it usually involves a significant difference between the mental states" of pre-conceived notions and the resulting incongruity (2009, 51–52). What if the distance of cognitive shift is rather small? Putting into Morreall's terms, "contextual incongruity" fails to account for what happens when a cognitive shift occurs between closely related mental states separated by a relatively insignificant distance. Are such shifts possible in a mashup of two songs from the same genre network?

[66] For an excellent summary and more thorough application of Peirce's semiotics to music, see Turino 1999.

unnecessary for an analysis of many mashups; indeed, the **αχ** and **γω** significations are ultimately intertwined and inseparable, a notion which I have alluded to in the prior chapter's arguments against the separation of "style" and "genre."

To contextualize and wrangle the results of this shift of interpretant and perspective, I adapt three interrelated analytical technologies from Hatten's work: topics, troping, and expressive genres. Namely, I treat the **α** and **χ** units of signification as general signs that might be understood *topically*, synecdochally standing for **γ** and **ω**. In other words, I argue that mashed-up samples serve as topics in addition to their role as literal quotations. This may not seem like too radical a notion, but I think it's an important interpretive step that places mashups into a much broader conversation regarding borrowing, allusion, and meaning creation in music. As Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins representively suggest, "recognition of the music's sources is crucial if a song is to be identified as a mash-up and if it is to succeed in creating an effect of incongruity" (2012, 99). In other words, the focus typically falls on the samples and the source songs themselves rather than their generic network. Instead, how might mashups create or display meaning without a listener's recognition of the original songs? Is there a way to deal with mashup meaning in anything more than an *ad hoc* manner based on the literal quotations? Topics allow analysis to easily connect and move between the levels of signification I outlined above without relying on relations between sources.

Later in this chapter I'll return to the logic behind my topical understanding, and will suggest how these topics undergo a process of troping to create an overall interaction similar to an expressive genre. With this framework, I show that prior analyses are ultimately about the **γω** plane, and my analysis—focused on that plane—provides some alternative means of analyzing mashups' effects and affects through their negotiation of a signifying web and through their formal construction. Of course, I will still need to resort to specific **αβ**:**χψ** relationships to explain some kinds of meaning that arise through more intimate knowledge of parent sources, but I hope to show that meaning created in those

dimensions may often be a special condition of the larger chain of signification in my formal and semiotic approach. Sampling (literal quotation), intertextuality, and genre relationships all play crucial roles in mashups, creating networks of meaning.[67]

II. Intertextual(ilty) Interlude

Recall from Chapter 1 that this dissertation focuses on popular music of the twenty-first century in part since I believe its densely referential nature and stylistic eclecticism are important characteristics of its unique genremes. A bevy of recent books and articles support the claim that popular music has become ever more reliant on previous texts and iterations of styles. Simon Reynolds' (2011) *Retromania*, Kevin Holm-Hudson's (2001) "sonic historiography," Rebecca Leydon's (2010) "recombinant style topics," and much of Lori Burns's (e.g., 2014, 2015) and Mark Spicer's work (e.g., 2009, 2018) all dive into what Burns and Lacasse have dubbed the "Pop Palimpsest" (2018), wonderfully capturing the densely layered web of influence, citation, and borrowing in (mostly) contemporary popular musics.[68] As part of the genreme of the early 2000s, mashups represent a veritable apotheosis of the trend towards intense intertextuality, with relations between texts and genres structuring their entire existence.

Recall also Brackett's sonic aesthetic that I outlined in Chapter 1, which suggests that popular music's primary cultural and economic driving forces since the mid-1950s manifest in its modes of distribution and consumption—i.e., in recordings. In general, recordings also constitute music theorists' chief ontology of popular music. In other words, music theorists take records as their main

[67] My investigation may also provide a fresh perspective on the relationship between topics and formal analysis more generally, a quagmire of an issue in the study of Classic music. As William Caplin (2005) has argued, topics in Classic music seem to only occasionally correlate with formal concerns. I believe that this largely stems from many scholars' attempts to plaster a topical veneer onto an already-established formal theory, with Rumph (2011, 2014) being a key exception.

[68] This new edited collection by Burns and Lacasse was previously titled "Incestuous Pop" rather than "The Pop Palimpsest," which the publisher perhaps felt was too graphic a metaphor for the interpenetration of related musical texts. Regardless, the metaphor of a palimpsest, with multiple texts obscuring and overwriting each other on the same material base, seems more apt.

musical object, treating the "text" of music as the recording. This perspective clearly makes analysis simpler since it brackets out more abstract exegetical pursuits; but it also can turn intertextual analysis into a game of discovery driven by a search for relations hidden within a text. In his influential summary of the work of Gerard Genette, Lacasse offers a conception of relations between pieces of music that is fundamental to how many popular music scholars approach intertextuality.[69] In short, intertextuality occurs "eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another" (2000, 37). Elements of one recorded track (whether allo- or autosonic) are rather literally placed in another track; intertexts involve persistent, iconic traces of other texts. This demands that the recorded object functions as a container into which artists or producers may place various elements that can be excavated by listeners or analysts, who become intertextual sleuths trying to get at the meaning of a text by uncovering hidden references. Of course, this mode of analysis can be done in a robust and musically sensitive manner. Exemplary is the work of Lori Burns and Alyssa Woods, who take care to contextualize intertexts within a broad sociocultural context. "We not only name the references in the works we examine," they explain, "but also unearth the cultural and historical significance of those references and seek to understand why and how they are integrated into new musical contexts" (2018, 217). The "unearthing" and "why," though, imply a governing rationality and authorial intent that can be teased out through analysis.

I think an understanding of intertextuality as borrowed elements that can be read and extracted from a musical work—a natural consequence of a recording ontology—limits the agency of the listener by bracketing off the rich potential of a larger cultural or semiotic code.[70] Mirroring my critique of the style-genre binary in Chapter 1, I think this prevalent definition of intertextuality fosters a

[69] Lacasse's review of Gerard Genette's transtextual typologies has proven to be especially influential in pop music theory scholarship.

[70] One could argue that I'm simply interested in a different *kind* of "transtextuality," according to Lacasse. His *architextuality* perhaps more closely comports to my notion of intertext here, but that *too* unnecessarily restrains possible connections between *different* genres or *diverse* modalities. For a full listing of his types of transtextuality, see Lacasse (2000, 36–37).

simplistic Saussurean semiotics, in which signifiers and signifieds are uniquely bound to each other (e.g., this particular borrowed element is tied to its source). Moore's approach, via his adaptation of Ricœur's definition of a text, makes the excavation part unnecessary since he's interested in interpretation rather than an attempt to get at the author's intended references. He muses that "explanation, then, where others' activities are concerned, seems to me a problematic quest" (2012, 208). Instead, Moore suggests that a recording, like a text, "is something that is 'read', that is, made sense of, interpreted" (11). This places primary importance on the recording per se, and Moore prefers "first-order" interpretations that are "made directly in relation to a listening to the track" (2012, 164).[71] I believe that this perspective essentially renders the musical work inert as an object to be examined for its hermeneutic implications, which is reflected by Moore's understanding that an interext is the "presence within a text of other texts" (272).

Instead I take a more radical misreading of Ricœur's notion that meaning is "in front" of a text, rather than behind it: there is no meaning within the text itself.[72] The text opens space for interpretations and creates possibilities for understanding by pointing outward. As my analysis of mashups turns towards the **γω** plane, I adapt Umberto Eco's semiotics which empties out the sign,

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[71] Elsewhere, Moore claims that, in short, "it is thus, at root, the experience [not the musical work itself] which is subject to interpretation" (2003, 6) and "reflection on that experience can produce for us an understanding of ourselves within that experience" (2012, 5). The reader is left to wonder, is it the experience (an esthesic engagement) or the text (the poietic construction) that is primary in interpretation? Or is it neither? Dahlhaus has a similar view of *a posteriori* reflection or contemplation for the musical work: "Like a work of plastic art, music is also an esthetic object, a focus of esthetic contemplation. However, its objectivity is displayed not so much immediately as indirectly; not in the moment when it is sounding but only if a listener, at the end of a movement or section, reverts to what has passed and recalls it into his present experience as a closed whole" (1982, 11). This focus of theorists on an inert object drives Susan McClary's and Robert Walser's early critique of popular music studies, in which they suggested analysts often treat popular music as a gynecologist treats their patients: with a cold, mechanical approach and methodology that separates their objects of evaluation from larger contexts (1990, 287).

[72] Ricœur argues against the "Romanticist ideal" of interpretation which is essentially an act "of coinciding with a foreign psyche" (1976, 92). Instead, "the sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the non-ostensive reference of the text" (87). And later, he suggests that "what has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. In other words, what has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text" (92). While Moore underscores "the meaning of the text itself," I instead emphasize the "pointing towards a possible world" and the "direction of thought opened up by the text."

placing it instead within a larger network or economy of signs (cf. Eco 1976, 48–50, 125–29). The sign—be it the recording, elements within the recording, or any other aspect of our musical ontology—is therefore less of an object than a node in a mutable network; it is a process of connection in the creation of meaning.[73] By problematizing the connection between a material ontology and an intertextuality of borrowed elements and containers, I hope to forge a broader idea of intertexts that figures more prominently in a rhizomatic conception of genre. By allowing the intertextuality of mashups to spill over the boundaries erected around text-specific readings, a turn towards generic connections makes possible broader and deeper stories about how this type of music-making creates meaning.[74]

III. "Smells Like Teen Booty" and Questions about (In)Congruity

To see how this might play out in a specific example, I return to 2ManyDJs' "Smells Like Teen Booty." I first analyze the mashup via Brøvig-Hanssen's and Harkins' formulation of musical congruity and contextual incongruity since these values undergird most scholarship on mashups. Essentially, musical congruity explains how well two samples work together in terms of harmonic-melodic coordination, formal resemblance, rhythmic complementarity, etc. Songs that possess chord progressions with many shared common tones or songs that follow related vocal contours provide good candidates to be mashed together, since their combination would likely express a clean musical fit. Music scholars interested in mashups have often aimed to create a taxonomy of these relationships.

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[73] For a basic overview of Eco's semiosis and intertextuality in the study of music, see Klein (2005, 51–56). Similarly, a networked understanding of intertextuality opens up a space in which both the text itself "plays" and the reader (or listener) plays (with) the text, a notion I adapt from Barthes (1977, 162). Leaving the ontology of the work fixed on the recording restricts these experiential concerns and creative possibilities of the listener, which significantly limits the opportunities for the generic connections that are necessarily intertextual.

[74] This understanding of intertextual analysis resonates with Klein's conception of a poetics of musical narrative. He argues that analysis should "concern itself with intertextuality in forms that range from the limitations of documented influence to the boundless possibilities of the open text. How we position ourselves with respect to intertextuality effects the stories we tell about the stories we hear" (2004, 52).

Besides Boone's taxonomy of recycled music, Cushing, for example, tackles the harmonic and textural compatibility issue of mashed sources in his dissertation (2013, 91–107 and 119–124), where he catalogs different ways that key relationships, chord progressions, and instrumental densities can be combined in a variety of contexts. Adams's (2015) theorization of mashups as performances similarly demarcates specific categories of reinterpretive relations based on how well the musical layer **χ** supports the lyrics **α**, continuing the taxonomizing impulse of musical congruity.

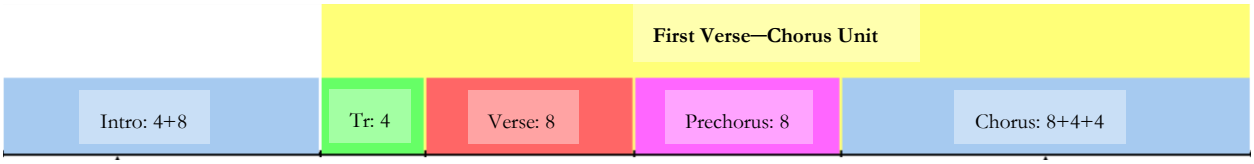
In "Booty," the samples fit together rather smoothly across many domains of **αχ**, meaning the mashup exhibits "musical congruity."[75] Adams (2015, 3) outlines the easy relationships between the harmonic, rhythmic, timbral, and other domains of the background and melodic foreground. In addition, musical congruity frequently arises in mashups through the inherent modularity that many pop songs express in their form. In other words, much popular music since the mid-twentieth century follows a small collection of relatively well defined formal layouts containing interchangeable structural units.[76] "Smells Like Teen Booty" is no exception, which is immediately apparent in **EXAMPLE 2.1**. This example shows three formal layouts, corresponding to the first verse-chorus units of "Smells Like Teen Booty" and its constituent tracks. The numbers next to the section labels denote the length in measures of each unit.[77] The initial structures of the two samples match almost exactly despite their

[75] Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins disagree with my assertion that "Smells Like Teen Booty" exhibits musical congruity, concluding that "the contextual incongruity of this virtual collaboration is weakened by the lack of musical congruity in the mash-up." Though they never thoroughly articulate or define what exactly musical congruity is, it seems clear that they require an uncluttered agreement between the two source tracks' harmonic-melodic fit, micro-timings, and phrase structures. Their main reasoning for dismissing musical congruity in this case lies in its rather texturally dense makeup and the fact that the tempi of **αχ** seem to occasionally misalign. As they explain, "the music often sounds chaotic as too much is happening at the same time; the musical elements are often competing for the listener's attention....There is neither consensus between the rhythm of the music and the vocal—Beyoncé is early on every beat while the rhythm of Nirvana's music is late on the beat—and this contributes to the feeling of disjunction between the two tracks, or the experience of hearing two separate recordings simultaneously by accident" (2012, 99).

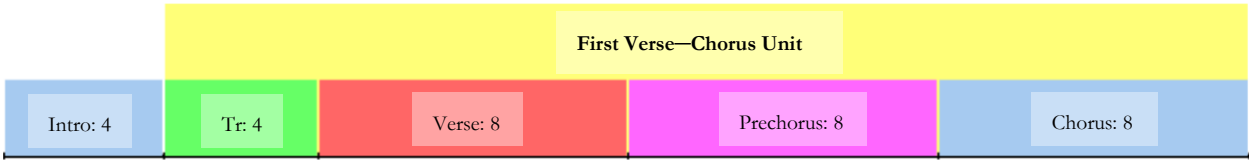
[76] The locus classicus for discussing form in popular music is Covach 2005. Some recent work on form includes Jocelyn Neal's (2007) work on country and narrative paradigms, the *Music Theory Online* special issue on form in rock (summarized in Spicer 2011), Trevor de Clercq's (2012) prototype conception of form, and Robin Attas's (2015) adoption of Hasty's (1997) projection model.

[77] For this and later formal examples, I employ Audio Timeliner, previously called Variations Audio Timeliner, a free audio annotation tool maintained by Brent Yorgason.

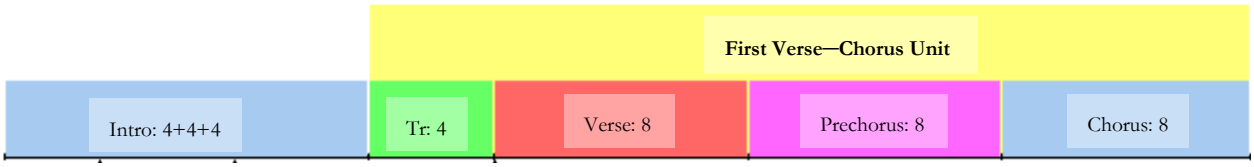
small differences in section lengths, which leads to an easy formal fit in the mashup. By expressing such musical congruity across so many domains, the mashup, as Adams explains, "also makes an implicit statement about popular music in general—that perhaps for all of their differences in values, Nirvana and Destiny's Child express themselves using many of the same formal types, harmonic progressions, and melodic gestures" (2015, 3).



A. Nirvana, "Smells like Teen Spirit."



B. Destiny's Child, "Bootylicious."



C. 2ManyDJs, "Smells like Teen Booty."

EXAMPLE 2.1.A–C: First Verse–Chorus units for "Smells Like Teen Booty" and constituent tracks. The clear formal similarity expresses musical congruity, with the chorus of the Nirvana needing to be cut slightly to conform to the standard 8-measure formal unit length.

More might be said about the musical congruity of these tracks, but I turn now to the contextual incongruity of the mashup. The genres of the two sources in "Smells Like Teen Booty" are different, creating some cognitive dissonance for a listener familiar with the normative contexts of both. Destiny's Child presents a 2000s pop and R&B sound; Nirvana exemplifies early 1990s grunge

rock. Taking on the formulation from my **TABLE 2.1** above, these are **γ** and **ω** respectively. This mashup clearly exhibits "contextual incongruity," both via this genre clash as well as the disjunction between lyrical or textual content on the **αχ** level: Beyoncé and company, sure of their sexual prowess, are out to dance (at least), while Cobain and his bandmates frame themselves in the middle of a cultural identity-crisis.[78] In Michael Serazio's words, the mashup "marries a rarefied music snob text like Nirvana to the vulgar, vacuous *TRL* pleasures of Destiny's Child" (2008, 91).

The analysis of "contextual (in)congruity" can be usefully understood in relation to the aesthetic values that Liam McGranahan (2010, 69–70) unearths in his ethnographic work on a community of mashup producers: recognizability, genre clash, humor, and satire. Corresponding to the criteria from the authors previously mentioned, samples should come from recognizable songs (the **βψ** level), and their combination should provide humor, satire, or subversion through genre clash (the **γω** level). This particular mashup displays these values on its proverbial sleeve. As Michael Serazio argues, "'Teen Spirit' has been stripped of its suicidal self-seriousness and Nirvana's sound is now enmeshed with precisely the sort of glossy pop that the band so despised" (2008, 83).[79] By using musical congruity along with the juxtaposition of **γ** and **ω**, 2ManyDJs makes a wry commentary about the inherent similitude of popular music, no matter the genre.

Serazio's reading is instructive in that it ignores at least half the semiotic story of this mashup. For Serazio, even though the mashup shows that all three planes of signification (**αχ**, **βψ**, and **γω**) are similar, the process of mashing brings the grunge down from its more authentic status. The mashup producer does violence to the grunge ethos of the Nirvana sample by subjecting it to the R&B of Destiny's Child, juxtaposing elements on the **γω** level. He implicitly asserts that the white male rock

[78] As will become clear in the following, this reading is typical of scholars analyzing "Smells Like Teen Booty." I think it is ultimately a naive and actually destructive way to understand this mashup in particular as it perpetuates a simplistic and troublesome (lack of) perspective of the interstices of race, gender, sexuality, and popular culture.

[79] I discuss the role of gender, genre, and authenticity a bit more in Chapters 3 and 4, though a full discussion of these intimately woven concepts would require a much longer and more focused study.

is a truer, legitimate form of popular music, leaving the black female group to serve as little more than general debasement. There is a clear delineation of cultural capital and worth in Serazio's reading, placing the "outsider" status of grunge on high.

In general, Serazio thinks mashups have a "limited political function" in their ability to rewrite "the pop canon in a way that critics and musicians wouldn't prefer and subvert taste hierarchies that dominate pop music" (91). The question left unasked is who these critics and musicians are, and which pop canon they champion. In Serazio's reading, Beyoncé can only be used as a foil to Cobain, a tool of parodic irony: "swimming upstream against the current of useless media images," he muses, "everything can be reduced to, and parodied at, face value. That is, after all, what the mash-up does best" (92).

What about a reading that understands a greater importance for Destiny's Child's agency? For instance, the male-dominated, grunge rock setting could be understood as a general negation of or even an attack on Destiny's Child's endorsement of female empowerment. The original "Bootylicious" (β) includes an obvious sample of the signature chugging sixteenth-note guitar riff from Stevie Nicks' hit rock song "Edge of Seventeen" (U.S. #11, 1982), which, by iconically representing Nicks, indexes a certain construction of powerful femininity—a message that Beyoncé has championed throughout her career.[80] This message is portrayed through α and γ as well. Cobain's repeated "hello" during the prechorus's textural build seems to heckle Destiny's Child, but in the chorus, they rise above the melancholic distorted guitars. In this view, the R&B vocals from "Bootylicious" triumph over the negative masculinity represented in grunge. Unpacking the racial dynamics of this mashup would follow a similar trajectory, with the tension between white-encoded grunge instrumentals undermining the black-encoded R&B vocals.

[80] For a brief overview of Beyoncé's not unproblematic brand of feminism, see Weidhase 2015.

Even though both Serazio's analysis and my brief interpretation rely on a distinction between rock and pop, the latter engages with the indexicality of their generic objects while the former simply posits that the distinction is worn down. Mine is not simply a reiteration of the polar taste hierarchy between pop and rock, with the mashup acting as a mediator between high and low. It engages with some broader signifying potential of the genres. Notions of musical congruity tell us little besides the fact that these tracks "fit together," and contextual incongruity tends to focus largely on an analysis of the mashup's relation to the particular identities of the parent samples, which provides little help for resolving multiple potential hermeneutic interpretations. In the following section, I begin to build my methodology by drawing from topic theory in order to resituate the interpretive process more squarely onto the **γω** plane. Highlighting genre allows me to ask broader questions about how mashups create meaning, even providing means to analyze mashups that draw from similar sources rather than opposing ones. By the end of the chapter, this new method will allow me to bypass the autosonic intertexts altogether.

IV. Genre as Topic

To better handle the modes of signification that I will address for the rest of this chapter, I turn to topic theory which, I hope to show, can provide a rather fruitful approach to mashups.[81] As mentioned above, this is certainly not a new move for popular music scholars, but what I suggest perhaps expands upon these prior topical notions in important ways. In particular, I argue that samples—in addition to their iconic role as autosonic quotations—function indexically and

[81] I will not provide a full review of topic theory, since many recent additions to the literature have repeatedly covered this ground. A few summary accounts of topic theory can be found in McKay 2007, Agawu 2008, and Mirka 2014. Topic theory has of course spread not just to studies of popular music, but to art music of the twentieth century as well. See, for example, Narum 2013, Biró and Krebs 2014, Schumann 2015, Johnson 2017, and Frymoyer 2017 for recent attempts. William Echard's work on psychedelia, which I return to later in this chapter, is the most sensitive and rigorous use of topics in popular music scholarship so far, and his review of topic theory is notably effective (2017, 15–20).

symbolically as topics, connecting to a networked web of genre(s).[82] Rather than treat the **γω** implicitly, I emphasize this plane.

The notion of topics (or *topoi*) has been of interest to scholars of common-practice-era music for over three decades, and many recent popular music scholars have found the basic outline of topic theory to be of considerable value to this relatively newer repertoire.[83] To understand why this branch of musical analysis has been so attractive to popular music theorists, it should suffice to peruse a few definitions from early topic scholars. Leonard Ratner famously suggested that "music in the early 18th century developed a thesaurus of characteristic figures, which formed a rich legacy for classic composers. … [These figures] are designated as topics—subjects for musical discourse" (1980, 9). Writing nearly 30 years later, Agawu describes a synchronic collection of topics as a "universe made up of commonplaces of style known to [contemporary] composers and their audiences" (2009, 43). Like Ratner's rich thesaurus, this universe relies on a particular kind of listener versed in these commonplaces.

For topic theorists, a topical analysis usually follows a two-pronged process. First, one has to identify a topic, which often involves laying out its signifiers and signifieds, along with an historical contextualization or justification for doing so. For topics in music from centuries ago, this can be an especially daunting task. In Raymond Monelle's (2006) work, for instance, a single topic requires about 70 dense pages of historical detective work spanning hundreds of years to adequately establish. In so doing, one can lay the ground rules for recognizing these historically sanctioned topics in their actual

[82] The icon/index/symbol triad comes from Peirce. Their adaptation to music signification varies rather widely in the literature, especially when it comes to indices. In their strictest definitions, icons refer to signifieds that resemble their signifier, as in the walk sign to cross a street. An index usually entails some sort of co-presence, as in a smoke signifying a fire. Symbols are abstract signs based on convention. In music, all topics are in some sense a confluence of all three of these signs, depending on the interpretant.

[83] Even though a turn to topic theory is not the only way to understand how style and genre create indexical modes of signification, I believe the theory's status in the discipline makes it an especially valuable and attractive avenue for analysis. Other potential methods might interrogate recording practices and processes at an ethnographic level, surveying and theorizing the strategies and techniques that studio musicians and producers deploy to signal an adherence to specific genre contracts.

musical settings. The second part of this process, intertwined with the first, is to then interpret and analyze the topics, both in terms of their musical, structural, and narrative contributions, but also in terms of their larger "real-world" semantic meanings. Music theorists have tended towards the intra-opus portion of this interpretive process, and I will stick to this strategy for my following examples.[84]

Luckily for pop scholars, we can draw on our own cultural experiences and those of our relative temporal peers to sort through the identification and interpretation of topics.[85] There is little or no historical remove from the object of study, as long as the analyst is clear on how their own habitus and knowledges limit their potential modes of engagement. We can skip the step of reconstructing a universe of topic that scholars of eighteenth and nineteenth-century music must take, since modern audiences are awash in the very culture under investigation—not to mention that, as Monelle warns, it is "ill-advised to strive for a comprehensive dictionary of topics" (2000, 7).[86]

Similarly, since the purview of the current chapter is how these topics play out in mashups, the task of identification is trivial for these tracks: the producer gives the listener and analyst topics first as literal samples or icons. Recognition of any element of the **αχ** plane *as a distinct element*

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[84] Topics' broader construction of semantic meanings and their role in our current discursive formation serve as the basis for the following two chapters, where stylistic labels and tags closely mirror this connection between topics and genre.

[85] Pop music adaptations of topic theory essentially follow one of two strategies. Representing the first strand, Kevin Holm-Hudson essentially ports topical methods through his "sonic historiography," which describes the "packaging of rock's history in sound, as sound" (2001, 247). As popular music—and especially rock—became "increasingly imbued with a sense of its own history" (248) during the 1970s, Holm-Hudson finds a need to analyze the ways this history manifests in specific songs through self-quotations, quotations of others, and stylistic references. Holm-Hudson's method of analysis is a genealogical one, geared towards a listener who is competent in the musical discourse of this rich legacy. Rebecca Leydon (2010), on the other hand, deploys topics to cope with the stylistically eclectic music of Beck and Mr. Bungle, identifying formal sections of individual tracks by their topical instantiations. Her analytical attention remains on single complete songs, with their historical lineage serving a secondary (though important) and dependent/consequential role in analysis. Both authors treat the stylistic world of popular music as inherently topical, and I follow both of these related strategies in my theorization of mashups.

[86] Though musical semiotics has taken on a Peircian mode for some time, many traces of Saussure's structuralist tendencies run through writing on topics. Especially pernicious is his discussion that language (*langue*, not *parole*) is a homogeneous, self-contained whole, which has tempted theorists to tabulate a comprehensive list of topics. Yet, Saussure himself acknowledges that there can be no complete synchronic system of signs, suggesting that "the inventory of signs in any language is countless" (1959, 73). In Chapter 4, I very directly map Spotify's "universe of topic," creating one particular snapshot of how a synchronic slice of genre might stitch together. That graph, though, is contingent on time, place, and only one particular collection of genre groupings, so is thus not a "comprehensive dictionary" in any sense; yet it is fairly representative of certain communities' generic understandings, for reasons I cover in that chapter.

automatically suggests a topical interpretation. Such an idea matches rather directly with Mirka's recent definition of topics from the authoritative *Oxford Handbook*: "topics are styles or genres taken out of their proper context and used in another one" (2014, 2). These samples are taken out of their original or unmarked contexts—I prefer this to the problematic notion of "proper" in Mirka's definition—and are employed in a new one, placed into direct contact with other topics.

Of course, some samples in mashups may come from decades ago, when their meanings were very different than in our current constellated stylistic landscape.[87] And even now, significations, associations, references, or other forms of musical or cultural meaning tied to genres are inevitably in flux as their contracts get constantly renegotiated, repeated through a game of musical telephone as they manifest in novel signifiers. But there are at least two reasons for my choice to treat these topics in our current genreme rather than engage their original historical milieus. First, I agree with Agawu's conviction that we ultimately rely on a present understanding of music in analysis. "There are those considerations," he explains, "that arise when history, culture, and convention inflect the search for meaning. …While interpretation can be framed dialogically to ensure that original meanings and subsequent accretions are neither ignored nor left uninterrogated, the final authority for any interpretation rests on present understanding. Today's listener rules" (2009, 4). Relatedly, as my argument at the outset of the intertextuality interlude suggests, the increasingly densely networked realm of popular music genres suggests that past genres continue to provide important stylistic cues and accompanying cultural units in new contexts, deserving new analysis. Of course, any media object that evokes a past time necessarily revises it (c.f., TV shows like *Happy Days* or *Stranger Things*), as my discussion of genre-as-repetition in Chapter 1 attests. But I believe something new has happened in

[87] Take, for instance, the rebranding of doo-wop, early rock 'n' roll, classic rock, early soul, and '50s–'70s bubblegum pop as "oldies."

the twenty-first century's accumulation of past popular musics into a collection of topoi.[88] The chronological lineage of pastness—Holm-Hudson's historiographic account—is flattened in the digital era, lumped into an enormous storehouse of semiotic potential.[89] These are not just inert styles to be ironically stitched together, as Serazio's (2008) or Gunkel's (2008, 2012) disparaging critiques of mashups might imply. Rather, genres constitute the materiality of their genreme's milieu, and mashups revel in alternatively prying apart or folding together this stylistic fabric.

Sorting through these mashup significations is the second step of topical analysis, that of interpretation, and it constitutes the crux of my argument here. Pop topics used in mashups, I claim, represent distinctive features that compose genres. In other words, pop topics are those units or characteristics that are typical in a style of music, unmarked within their own genre but explicitly marked by juxtaposition in mashups. In this way, I build on a common assessment of genre and semiosis expounded by authors like Fabian Holt (2007), Spicer (2010), Leydon (2010), and Tagg (2012). Discrete musical elements frequently assume the status of genre signifiers, like certain 12-bar forms representing the blues, or certain vocal stylings alluding to soul music. I suggest that the topics in mashups are usually such elements that have assumed the status of genre signifiers.

Taking this a step further, I transfer analytical energy away from identifying these genre synecdoches and towards genres as meaningful in and of themselves, not merely as inert labels or signifiers of something extra-musical. In other words, I'm not necessarily interested in how topics connect to the "real world," so to speak, but instead how they function as cultural units. To explain,

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[88] Bruno Mars's output and its popularity perhaps best embodies this earnest retro trend. Lavengood (2017, 57) notes how his *24k Magic* (2016), employs timbres from the Yamaha DX7 synthesizer as a meronym for pop music of 1980s, a decade of music that has undergone a powerful revision of meaning from cold, overused futuristic potentiality—represented most clearly by the use of new synth sounds in so many disparate genres—to a singular genre of danceable kitsch. Mars's collaboration with Cardi B, "Finesse" (2018), faithfully reproduces a '90s new jack swing sound, refurbishing the genre for a new generation of young listeners.

[89] Chapter 4 will highlight some of the problems that occur in this flattening process. Essentially, as particular audience and artist identities become unmarked in the move to the streaming era, their cultural values and competencies become normative. The semiotic potential of this vast topical storehouse gets directed towards these perspectives and cultural values.

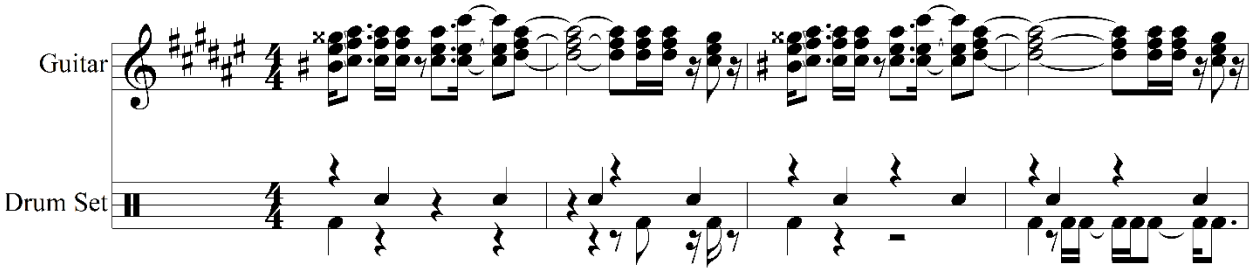
let me turn to Monelle's discussion of the "horse" topic, in which he makes a seemingly radical claim that "all horses are cultural; there is no 'real' horse" (2000, 23). He quotes Eco to explain that "every attempt to establish what the referent of a sign is forces us to define the referent in terms of an abstract entity which moreover is only a cultural convention" (Eco 1976, 66). Genres are exactly this cultural unit; they exist by convention and are "referenced," in some sense, by musical signifiers. Yet they are musical signs themselves, not something extramusical or distinct from style. In a similar situating move, Echard latches onto this notion by explaining that many topics of early psychedelia arose from conventions of film music and TV soundtracks whose genres connected both "to the real world (albeit often in a highly stylized and imaginative form) and to the virtual worlds of the genres themselves. … In order to treat such signifiers as topical, we need to expand our view of topicality far enough to accept the idea of an indexical connection to a virtual world and to allow this virtual indexicality a role in topic formation similar to the role played by real-world indexicality" (2017, 32). Pop music genres themselves generate a sort of virtual world—ripe with meanings, connections, agents, conventions—which can be indexed.[90]

This excursion on why I treat samples as topics in mashups should show two things. First, samples can and do function topically, even when defined in a relatively strict sense derived from traditional classical music studies. Second, these topics are essentially the same as genres, which serve as hermeneutically rich cultural units. To investigate the utility of treating mashup samples as topics, the following section explores how layers of signification interact within a larger semiotic web of genre as well as within the structure of mashups themselves.

[90] By shifting my interpretant outward, I also hope to show how a focus on literal sampling might benefit from what Leydon calls a "second-generation" of sampling practices in which "stylistic allusion … acts as a kind of displacement of overt sampling" (2010, 201). In her examples, she explains how "the deployment of 'stylistic *topoi*' … and stylistic allusion in many ways 'exceeds'" the semiotic capabilities of literal samples. My use of topics builds on her excavation of these topoi.

V. Towards a Topical Methodology

To situate this methodology, I turn to another example of a basic mashup, "Party and Bullshit in the USA" by Red Flag Productions. This track places The Notorious B.I.G.'s lyrics (α) from his track, "Party and Bullshit" (β) on top of the instrumentals (χ) from Miley Cyrus's "Party in the U.S.A." (ψ); Cyrus's voice enters for chorus sections as well.[91] At the αχ level, there is little of analytical interest besides form, since Biggie's rap fits cleanly with the instrumental layers. **EXAMPLE 2.2.A** below transcribes the two basic components of χ, guitar and drums. Other layers enter, but these two directly interact with α. The guitar riff from the verses of "Party in the USA," the most prominent layer in the instrumentals, contains some rhythmic variety at the very beginning and end of its two-measure loop, creating space for Biggie's rhythmically varied flow during χ's long, sustained notes and rests. The modified basic back beat follows suit, with sparse kick drums until the end of each two- and four-measure phrase. To show how Biggie's lyrics (α) play in this space, I follow Adams (2009) and provide a TUBS-style analysis of the first verse in **EXAMPLE 2.2.B**.[92] For most mashups that involve rapping, little can be said about the αχ plane since points of musical congruity tend to manifest around issues of pitch—though as this example's popularity demonstrates, there is much to be said for pairing a beat and a flow that complement each other in ways I mention in the caption for **EXAMPLE 2.2B**.



EXAMPLE 2.2.A. The two main instrumental layers from χ of "Party and Bullshit in the USA." Notice the modified back beat, with plenty of space for Biggie's varied flow.

[91] As with most popular basic A+B mashups, multiple versions of "Party and Bullshit in the USA" exist, following slightly different formal layouts and sample interactions.

[92] Though Adams doesn't use the term, TUBS (or time unit box system) has been used in ethnomusicological work since the 1970s. As Joti Rockwell explains, TUBS "contains less musical information than …staff notation," but "likewise carries less conceptual baggage and is thus somewhat more effective at representing the patterns as complementary collections of rhythmic events" (2007, 186).

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1		I	was	a	**TER-**	ror	since	the	**PUB-**	lic	school		**ER-**	a		
2	**BATH**		room	**PASS-**		es	cutt-	in'	**CLASS-**		es	squee-	zin'	**ASS-**		es
3			Smok-	in'	blunts		was	a	dai-	ly	rou-	**TINE**			Since	
4	thir-		**TEEN**			a	chubb-	y	n--	--a	on	the	**SCENE**			I
5	used	to	have	the	tre		**DUCE**		and	the	duce		**DUCE**		in	my
6	**BUB-**	ble	goose		Now	I	got	the	mac		in	my	nap		sack	
7	Loung-		in'	black			smok	in'	sacks		up	in	acts		in	
8	side		**KICKS**		with	my		side	**KICKS**		rock-	in'	fly		**KICKS**	
9	**HON-**	**EYS**	wann-	a	**CHAT**			but	all	we	wann-	a	know	is	where	the
10	**PART-**		**Y**	at				and	can	I	bring	my	gat?			If
11		**NOT**		I	hope	I	don't	get		**SHOT**			Bet-	ter	throw	my
12	**VEST**		on	my	**CHEST**			cuz	n--	--az	is	a	**MESS**			It
13	don't		take		**NOTHIN**		but	**FRONTIN'**		for	me	to	start		some-	thin
14		**BUG-**	in'	and	**BARK-**	in'	at	n--	--az	like	I	was	**DUCK**		hunt-	in'
15			Dumb	in'	out		just		**ME**	and		my	**CREW**			cuz
16	all	we	wann-	a	**DO**		**IS**		*(....bull*			*shit*			*and...)*	

EXAMPLE 2.2.B. The first verse of α in "Party and Bullshit in the USA." Accents are indicated by bold, small caps. The densest beat on average (3) slots neatly into the sparser part of χ. The frequent emphasis on beat 4, often made more salient by the lack of attack in the second sixteenth note of the beat, coincides with an accented snare. α's prototypical syntactic trajectory towards the end of a 4-bar unit is supported by the hypermetrically longer loop of χ, which similarly builds towards the end of its cycle.

If a listener recognizes the source tracks (βψ), they may hear an incongruity given the juxtaposition of the musical agents' rather disparate identities and chronological positionings. There are pretty clear racial, gendered, geographical, and socioeconomic factors at odds in the mashup: Biggie and his rap's mascuilinity and blackness are juxtaposed with Cyrus's white pop femininity; the streets of Brooklyn are contrasted with a glitzy Los Angeles. The narrative of Biggie's lyrics are transformed dramatically by his new backing. The beat from Biggie's original (β) has a somewhat dark, churning aesthetic, with a high swirling synth line over minor-mode background of organ and bass. The dense layering is reminiscent of slightly earlier hip-hop practices, especially those of Public Enemy. Biggie's lyrics in the original track revolve around a party atmosphere, but it is not necessarily a pleasant scene.

Between romantic pursuits, fights break out. Biggie fears being shot. The sinister instrumental foundation helps reinforce not only this attitude, but also contributes to the slightly anxious nature of his flow which is often slightly ahead of the beat. Yet in the mashup, Biggie's legitimacy is questioned with the new backing (χ). He seems to have forgotten his harsh original surroundings. And for good reason; the fight that occurs in the bridge of his original song (β) has been removed, silenced in the mashup's gentrified sound world.

His post-fight entreaty near the end of the track, "can't we all just get along?" takes on an ironic twist in the mashup: perhaps this paraphrased version of Rodney King's famous plea in the midst of the L.A. riots would be fulfilled in Cyrus's 21st century L.A. A further irony for those who know the original comes from the eponymous lyrics of the chorus, which are sampled from The Last Poets' song, "When the Revolution Comes" (1970). In that track, the singer criticizes those in black communities who only want to "party and bullshit" instead of joining the revolution. Biggie instead takes "party and bullshit" to be a radically liberating act in itself. This relation (αβ) is effectively turned from the revolutionary to the personal by ψ, in which Cyrus dances to escape her anxiety. When she lands in L.A. in her original song, she's worried about not fitting in, but when she hears a Jay Z or Britney song on the radio, she's able to escape her anxiety.[93]

As this analysis stretches farther across the βψ plane, it falls into what ethnomusicologist Brian Barone (2016) has called "sampleology," or a tracing, accounting, and description of all the various genealogical references in the original tracks. This could reveal some further interesting relations. For example, Biggie's original (β) samples John Hammond's cover of the Jackson 5's "I'll be There." But the beat only samples a minor-mode turn (tonicizing vi) within the largely major track, providing a tongue-in-cheek manipulation of a prior iteration of a pop topic to better fit the darker mood of "Party

[93] Compare these songs to Biggie's lyrical allusion (β) to Brand Nubian's "Punks Jump up to Get Beat Down."

and Bullshit." This is negated by the new backing (χ), returning Biggie to the pop landscape that his original sample manipulated beyond recognition.

Such an analytical pursuit diffuses rather thinly across βψ, quickly moves too far away from the mashup to warrant further exploration. After all, what does this endeavor really tell us about possible listening experiences of the mashup? To take this notion to the extreme, what if a listener had a different competency, unable to identify Biggie's voice or Cyrus's backing? Like "Smells like Teen Booty," this example's broadest plane of signification connects two seemingly antagonistic genres: mid-1990s East Coast hip hop (γ) and late 2000s pop (ω).[94] Even without recourse to the βψ plane, an analysis would arrive at a similar meaning by treating these samples as *topics* instead of mere autosonic quotations. Biggie's flow is prototypical of his genre, his voice a style marker or gangsta rap meronym that indexes all the cultural capital and identity-definitions of that genre. The instrumental backing produces a sugary pop topic, indexing a white, suburban youth. The opening four bars, in which our rapper lays out the adolescent origin of his identity, is almost comical against the high-pitched, clean electric guitar riff and pop percussion: the teen troublemaker rather than the budding rap star. As the song progresses, the message seems to be that this ragamuffin will be alright, that we can all get along in a gentrified twenty-first century L.A. or Brooklyn.

This brief γω-focused analysis may seem somewhat redundant, given my earlier comments on the βψ plane, and indeed it covers much of the same interpretive ground. This is simply because the βψ plane is tethered to the broader γω plane, largely dependent on it for structure. By turning more completely towards this larger plane, an analysis of the indexical level of meaning—instead of a reliance on the literal iconic signs—can provide enough grist for the analytical mill. Even without recognition of the parent samples, I think a focus on topics as a mode of mediation in mashups adds

[94] Anecdotally, Biggie seems to be rather highly represented in mashup practices more broadly, likely due to his distinctive vocal timbre and inflections. As such, he often serves as a stand-in for the entire 1990s hip-hop scene, his recorded voice often removed from its pre-gentrified Brooklyn when brought into a digital omnivorous aesthetic.

an important and extremely accessible hermeneutical door through which to approach their creation of meaning.

Before moving onto my formalization of the troping spectrum and my adoption of Hatten's expressive genres, I want to pause on an important point about the role of the listener in the identification of topics. These large genres should be understood from a dialogical perspective, which Echard—borrowing from Bakhtin—describes as "taking special interest in the way that meanings and interpretive practices emerge from ongoing negotiations of power and identity between different individuals and groups within an interpretive community" (2017, 7). The **γω** plane and the agglomeration of various perspectives that generate it, then, are always under negotiation, and an analysis should acknowledge the multivalent potential significations. So, for example, **γ** might simply take gangsta rap or hip hop as its dimensional contribution depending on phenomenological determinants.[95] This means that all of my identifications of genre-topics in the following examples should be understood as one potential reading rather than an authoritative, static interpretation. Recalling my discussion of cultural units, though, these genres are usually relatively widespread within a discourse, as I will discuss further in my following two chapters. Mashups, then, provide unique entries into this shared dynamic genre space by providing commentary on their topics, which I now place into dialogue with some more traditional musical semiotic methodologies.

VI. Troping

To strengthen my topical approach, I suggest here two adaptations of Hatten's semiotic methodologies: namely, troping and expressive genres. For Hatten, troping is "the bringing together

[95] Besides these genres, Spotify tags Biggie with a label of "southern hip hop," an incongruous geographical distinction that is based on his co-presence on user-generated playlists with more prototypical southern hip-hop artists like Scarface or T.I. I investigate this type of categorization a bit more in the following chapters but raise it here to exemplify how multiple competencies might open rather different interpretive paths along the **γω** plane.

of two otherwise incompatible style types in a single location to produce a unique expressive meaning from their collision or fusion" (2004, 68).[96] This definition is reminiscent of Turino's "creative indexing," which "involves the juxtaposition of two or more indices in novel ways that play off of the original meanings of the signs" (1999, 242). Of course, Hatten's tropological analytical methods involve more than the straight juxtaposition of disparate topics; tropes occur at various syntactic and semantic levels, requiring different foci. There are "formal genre" tropes, textural tropes, thematic tropes, tonal tropes, gestural tropes. Mashups engage all of these, but in terms of topics and the **γω** plane, I'm most interested in how they engage in discursive tropes that play with, fold up, and tear apart preconceived pop music genre cartographies. Like our first example, "Party and Bullshit in the USA" certainly seems to collide rather disparate topics, revealing a web of style-generated semiosis in the collaboration of the instrumental backing with the rap.

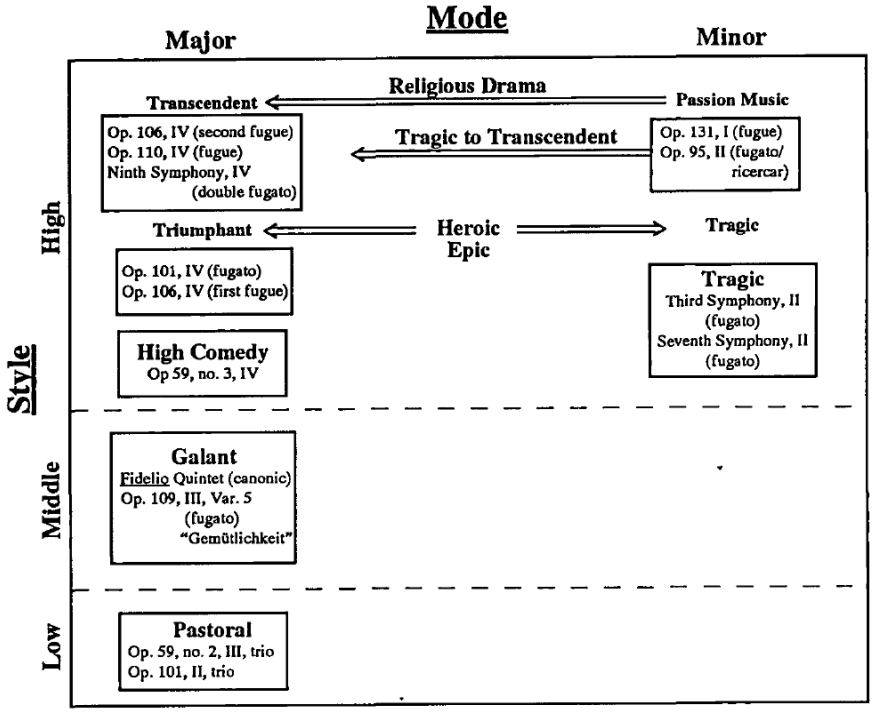
These tropes, however, do not remain static. An analysis should not simply identify the contrast between one topical layer and another (or a few). The interaction of topics and their role in the structure of a musical work matters a great deal for the possible resulting tropological formations. In "Party and Bullshit in the USA," for example, it might initially sound like Biggie is repackaged in Cyrus's song, merely placed on top of the pop instrumentals. This would corroborate my previous interpretations, wherein the legitimacy of the gangsta topic is questioned in Cyrus's world. But the '90s hip-hop topic drives the structure, with 16-measure verses leading directly into the choruses. There's no prechorus buildup, something more common to the 2000s pop topic.[97] In fact, there is a

[96] Hatten elsewhere explains troping as "one means by which incompatible or unexpected entities are brought together to provoke a fresh interpretation from their interaction" (1994, 74). Since "topics are style types that possess strong correlations or associations with expressive meaning…they are natural candidates for tropological treatment" (2004, 68). Mashups, with their direct combination of topics, are then themselves prime candidates for troping potential, with rich possibilities for fresh interpretations based on the interactions of their samples. The types of meanings created by the collision or fusion of topical particles in mashups—or indeed of any music—propagate through my three interrelated planes of signification, and the analytical focus determines a sort of relativistic semiotic reference frame.

[97] In general, I'd argue that prechoruses are unmarked in 2000s pop, but are marked in 1990s hip hop. Biggie's most popular tracks (e.g., "Juicy," "Hypnotize," "Big Poppa," "Mo Money Mo Problems") serve as representative prototypes for the '90s hip-hop topic, and none of them have prechoruses. I discuss markedness in more detail in Chapter 4.

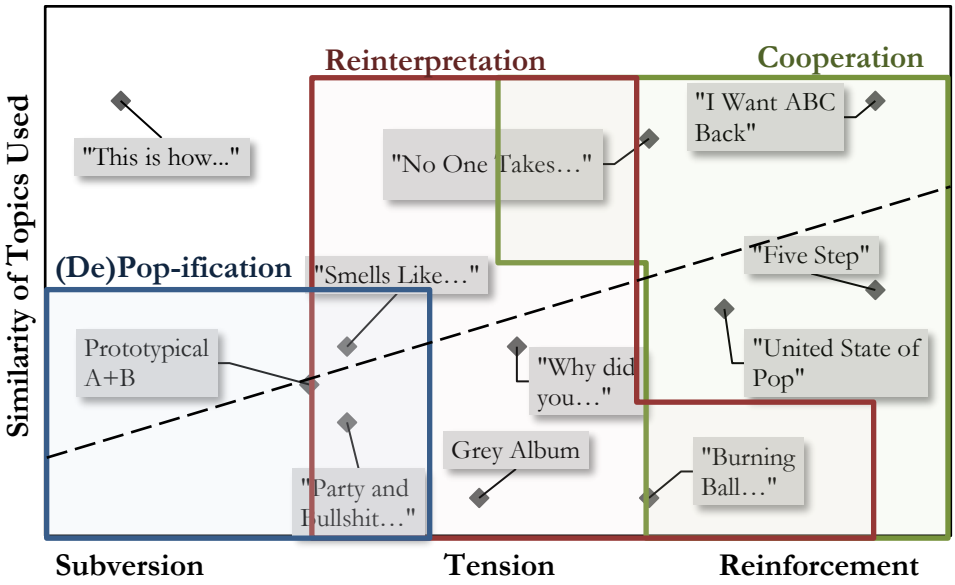
bit of formal fluidity in "Party and Bullshit," with the title lyrics starting two measures before the chorus proper begins, the structural overlap negating the regularity of 2000s pop. There is a tension here between interpretations of the thematic and structural tropings. In the former, a 2000s pop topic gentrifies the hip-hop topic; in the latter, the hip-hop topic pulls the pop topic into its orbit, bending it to its structural will.

In trying to generalize and interpret this tension, recall Hatten's definition of troping, in which the relative similarity between topics ("otherwise incompatible style types") is compared with the emergent meaning of their "collision or fusion." For mashups, I argue the similarity of sampled topics and the tension (or lack thereof) that emerges through troping provides the fundamental components for understanding mashups' artistic communication, mediated through their form. Further, this means it's not even necessary to recognize the original samples in order to pursue an analysis. We may simply treat a mashup (or any piece of popular music) as a locus for topical interaction.



Example 2.3. Hatten's Figure 3.8 (1994, 85), showing a collection of Beethoven pieces that exhibit various expressive genres. Hatten's two axes are mode and style, the latter based on a general sociocultural positioning.

In **EXAMPLE 2.4** below, I lay out a field of semiotic engagement in mashups, taking my inspiration from Hatten's graphs that represent an "expressive oppositional field as defined by a matrix of structural oppositions for the classical style" (1994, 76). I reproduce one of these graphs in **EXAMPLE 2.3**. for comparison. For Hatten's analytical repertoire, the axes are based on structural oppositions between high and low styles on the one hand, and major and minor on the other. These clearly won't quite work for popular music of our current millennium. Instead, the ostensible flattening of the highbrow-lowbrow binary in the arts of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries (which I discuss much more in the following chapter) and the weakening associations of major-minor modal inflections in recent popular music means a new set of axes must be deployed. For my chart of interaction methods, I suggest the new axes should be the similarity of topics and the collision or fusion of their troping.



EXAMPLE 2.4. A field of interaction methods for mashups, including the mashups discussed in this chapter and some from recent music scholarship. The horizontal axis measures troping between topics along a spectrum of subversion to reinforcement (roughly matching Hatten's collision and fusion, respectively). The vertical axis indicates the relative similarity of topics used in a mashup. The diagonal "trend line" indicates the average, negative proportionality between similarity and subversion.

The vertical axis shows the similarity of sampled topics; the more closely related, the higher on the graph they will be. This similarity is clearly subjective, and will depend on a variety of factors, but such is the case for classical-music topics as well.[98] In common-practice-era topic theory, similarity of topics might be based on traditional musical domains and elements. Wye Allanbrook (1984), for instance, gives an example of how the exalted march and the passepied share the same patterns of accentuation, though their associative indexical meanings are rather distant. Or topical similarity could be based on farther flung semiotic relationships, like the socio-cultural connection between the courtly minuet and the stately French overture, both conjuring up images of nobility or regal spaces.[99] As a pop example, the mashup "Five Step," by DJ Overdub, brings together Radiohead's "15 Step" with Dave Brubeck's standard "Take 5."[100] This can be found in the middle right of **EXAMPLE 2.4**. Radiohead's "art rock" topic and Brubeck's "cool jazz" topic legitimize each other as their combination reinforces their relative similarity both in terms of musical features—e.g., the marked 5/4 meter that each track employs adds to their cohesion—and in terms of their performativity of cultural capital.

The most similar mashups on my graph ("This is how you remind me of someday" and "I Want ABC Back") are those that combine the topics from the same generic milieu. But their interaction methods are very different since they inhabit opposing points along a spectrum between tropes of subversion and reinforcement of original topics, my own adaptation of Hatten's collision

[98] My method for choosing both similarity and place on the troping spectrum are admittedly ad hoc, but they adhere somewhat tenuously to Nicholas Cook's (1998, 98–106) analytical model used for instances of multimedia (IMMs). His analytical flowchart has two steps: first, determining similarity of media—whether they are coherent or consistent, the latter being a narrower, marked term of direct agreement between media. If the relationship is merely coherent, then the analytical process moves to its second step, a difference test, again with two outcomes: contrariety or contradiction. Again, the latter is the marked term. In contradiction, elements of multimedia are in clear contestation with each other, while contrariety merely implies some undifferentiated difference. For the current study, I prefer to keep these strategies for understanding how mashups and their topics relate within a general spectrum, rather than attempting to whittle my analytical options down into these binary processes. But there are clear overlaps between my interaction methods and Cook's processual identification tree.

[99] See especially Allanbrook's "Metrical Spectrum" (1984, 67) that ranges from ecclesiastical to galant and provides a nuanced semiotic inflection to historical concerns of tempo giusto.

[100] For a brief analysis of this mashup's form, see Cushing 2013, 180–82.

and fusion of tropes, respectively. This is shown on the horizontal axis. In DJ Gauffie's "I Want ABC Back," two Jackson 5 songs are combined. McGranahan (2010, 50–53) lays out the many similarities between the two source tracks, judged via the usual **αχ** criteria. Yet they need a rather complex structural rearrangement to fit together in the mashup. Their combination reinforces the pop-funk topic. But on the far left of the graph, a mashup of two songs by the band Nickelback takes on a subversive role. Rather than take individual elements from the **αχ** plane, the mashup "This is how you remind me of someday" takes two songs and places them on top of each other wholesale with only minor edits, subversively commenting on the similarity between "How You Remind Me" and "Someday."

In general, the more similar topics are the more easily they fuse together, legitimizing and/or reinforcing each other. Dissimilar topics tend to collide and subvert each other. The dotted diagonal line represents this general correlation. This seems rather obvious, and it forms the basis of the contextual/musical (in)congruity methods I discussed above. But some mashups stray from this general trend, providing different explorations of the **γω** plane.

The large shaded boxes represent what I term "interaction methods," my adaptation of Hatten's expressive genre. Basically, expressive genres are archetypal ways to organize music in order to mediate meaning. In the late works of Beethoven, for instance, Hatten finds an "increasing kinship" between formal types and expressive genres, leading to "expressive associations for formal types or procedures" (2004, 70). Expressive genres usually involve a dramatic trajectory of sorts, along the lines of "tragic-to-transcendent" or the heroic epic. As Hatten describes, one "way of conceiving contrast, however, is in terms of an ongoing, dramatic 'working out' of oppositional forces, and it is this characterization that underlies change-of-state expressive genres" (1994, 74). Interaction methods typically do *not* involve such a change-of-state, though my final analysis engages with narrative implications of troping. Instead, expressive genres, I claim, can be reinterpreted for mashups as the

significations that precipitate out of the productive tension between general troping and similarity of samples in the work, which serves to organize and structure the samples or topics into a coherent new song. Like the large-scale pastoral, comic, and Galant expressive genres, my interaction methods suggest "modes of interpretation" that have an "overarching influence" on the mashup, to borrow Hatten's language (2004, 67). As such, I hope to capture how interaction method and troping are integrally related through my field in **EXAMPLE 2.4**. These interaction methods overlap, representing the shifting negotiation of topics and their significations, allowing for multiple interpretations to coexist.

Those mashups discussed in some depth already—Biggie vs. Cyrus and Nirvana vs. Destiny's Child—both fall under the (de)pop or de-pop-ification method, which combines of an obvious top-40 pop topic with an at least slightly more marginal one. The majority of mashups studied in the existing literature (the "prototypical A+B" mashups) fall under the control of the (de)pop method, and their structures and semiotic relationships usually produce subversive tropes through the tension between topical relationships and structural power dynamics.[101] They can also reveal the gendered and racialized landscape of the early twenty-first-century popular music genreme. In "Smells Like Teen Booty," for example, the white, masculine grunge topic is threatened by the black, feminine R&B topic, which ultimately triumphs by repurposing the grunge backing into a dance anthem. Both it and "Party and Bullshit in the USA" negotiate these racial and gendered dynamics rather directly through their arrangement on the multifaceted **γω** plane.[102] I will not comment further on (de)pop mashups here except to note how a turn towards this focus on troping and interaction method and the **γω** plane

[101] See, for example, all the analyses in Boone 2018.

[102] For an excellent summary and investigation of the general notion of "race and the feminized popular," see James 2013. Boone 2018 similarly discusses the relation between gender and mashup samples in her discussion of "slick" and "raw" musical elements, but she relies more heavily on the individual sources rather than on their place within a broader genreme.

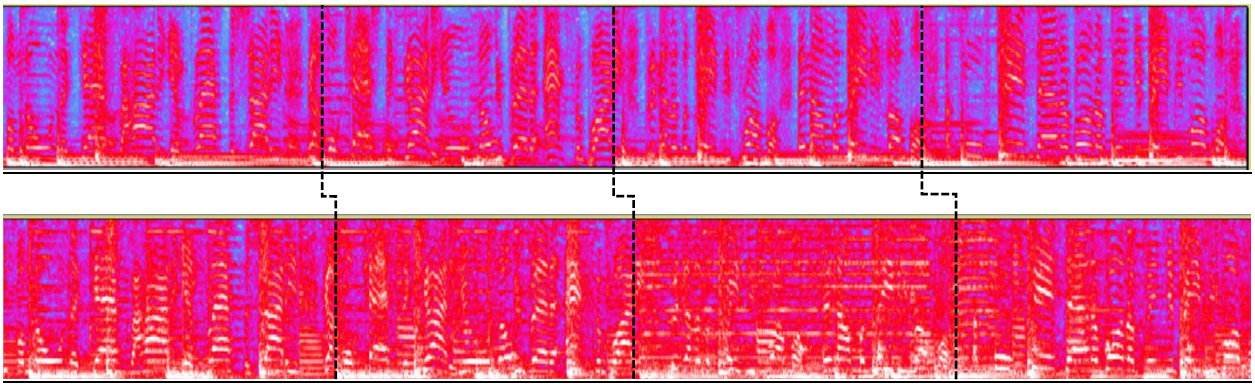
places the study of mashups more directly into dialogue with decades' worth of scholarship on musical meaning.

For the rest of this chapter, I will briefly engage facets of two more mashups—one basic, one slightly more complicated—that play on the boundary of the other two interaction methods: reinterpretation and cooperation. These suggest a closer relationship to the *fusion* pole of Hatten's troping rather than the *collision* pole. This will allow me to approach the questions of how the interaction of similar topics can create meaning within mashups and how contextual congruity sometimes plays a profound role in many mashups.

VII. Legitimation, Cooperation, and Tension

In this section I distill a clearer methodology from my previous theoretical claims. This essentially entails analyzing each of the three planes of signification in order from most local to most global, and then understanding the connections between them. As I show, a focus on the level of genre provides much of analytical interest, just as it did in our prior two examples, by opening the entangled popular music stylistic world. Indeed, I will show how skipping the $\beta\psi$ plane can still yield plenty of analytical interest.

As a quick example, take producer KMT's mashup "Why Did You Put It On?" of Big L's rap from his 1994 track "Put It On" with the instrumental backing of Stretch's 1975 hit, "Why Did You Do It?" At the $\alpha\chi$ level, Big L's rap fits somewhat uneasily into the rather dense texture created by Stretch's instrumental in both the pitch and rhythm domains: he inhabits the same pitch register as the horns and guitar, and his shuffled/swung eighths and occasional triplets clash occasionally with the straight ahead duple funk-rock beat. His densest rhythmic phrases of the first verse, for example, are accompanied by eighth and sixteenth notes in the horns. The struggle to be heard creates an immediate power dynamic in these verses.



EXAMPLE 2.5.A. Two spectrograms showing the densities of Big L's original track (above) and the mashup (below). The dotted lines correspond to measures. Note that the third measure of this section contains both Big L's fastest densest flow in addition to the mashup's inclusion of sustained horns, obscuring Big L's rhymes and calling into question the smoothness he raps about. A TUBS transcription of the lyrics is given in Example **2.5.B** below.

1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
known		to	gas		a	hottie		and	blast		a	shotty			got
more	cash		than	Gotti		*(you*	*don't*	*know?)*		you	better	Ask	some	body	
	Big	L is	a	cray-	zy	broth-	er		and	I'm	a	La-	dy	lov-	er
		A	smooth	kid		that-	ll	run	up	on	your	bab-	y	mother	

EXAMPLE 2.5.B. A TUBS transcription of a representative section of Big L's flow, with each row corresponding to a measure of **EXAMPLE 2.5.A** above.

Along the βψ plane, there's some incongruity between the Stretch backing and Big L's original, minimalist beat. Note in **EXAMPLE 2.5** how the density of this texture compares to the mashup. Big L is allowed to roam a bit more in the original. The αχ level shows how Stretch's thicker funk-rock confines and limits his rap, vying for attention in the sonic space. A more intimate knowledge of β reveals that Big L's producer for the track, Buckwild—a member of the "Diggin' in the Crates Crew"—samples James Brown and Buster Williams to create a much more minimalist beat by mining African-American jazz and funk records.[103] By replacing this beat with a British, all-white group's

[103] For an ethnographic study of "digging through crates," see Schloss 2004.

straight-ahead funk, KMT replaces the groove-robbing aesthetics championed by producers who dig through crates.

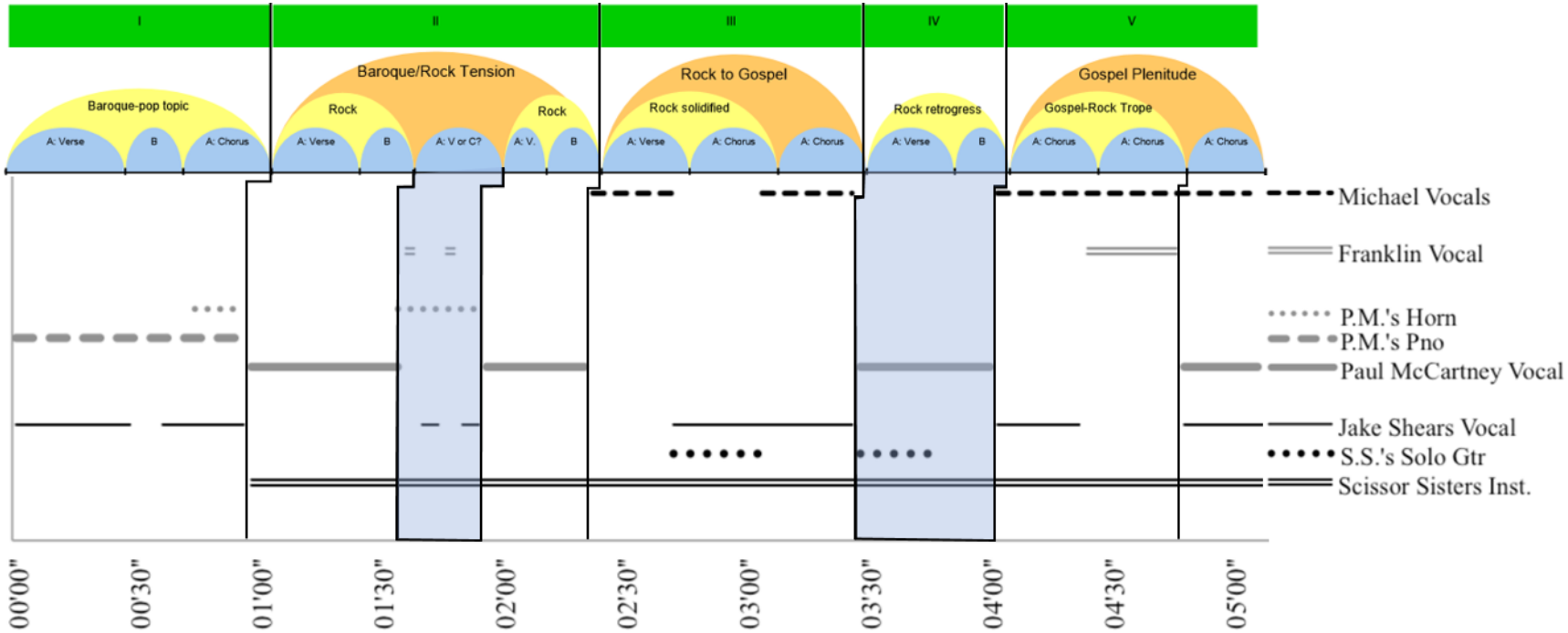
But what of those listeners who had never heard either track or who had no access to the **βψ** specifics I suggest above? Personally, I had only a passing familiarity with this Stretch song and hadn't heard the Big L track before hearing the mashup. Yet I still found the combination compelling, largely because of its navigation of the third, least-specific plane available to me in my abstract formulation: the relationships of genres represented by **γω**. Guided by my general pop competency, I identified an East coast rap above a disco-tinged 70s funk-rock instrumental backing. The combination wasn't necessarily subversive or incongruous upon first hearing, but I was struck by the uneasy fit between genre aesthetics, knowing that the instrumental backing sample lies close to but removed from a more typical '90s beat. I don't need to rely on my knowledge of the original tracks since the **γ** and **ω** troping is on the mashup's proverbial sleeve, immediately hearable. The **αχ** and **γω** planes reinforce each other as co-constitutive signifiers. The mashup's accompanying video—with the white band's obvious cultural appropriations clearly on display—further reifies the play between foreground **γ** and backup **ω**, acting as a vehicle of markedness assimilation. The mashup falls into the general category of reinterpretation and tension, with Big L's virtuosic rap topic battling the funk-rock for salience.

Since the **βψ** plane requires the most specific and occasionally arcane knowledge on the part of the listener, what happens if we leave it out of an analysis entirely? With this mindset in place, I turn to my final example that problematizes poietic analyses and subversive tropes common to the analytical literature. I explore "No-one Takes Your Freedom" (2007), in which DJ Earworm combines the Beatles' "For No One" (1966), Scissor Sisters' "Take Your Mama" (2004), and George Michael's "Freedom! (90)" (1990), using both vocals and instrumentals from each. He also brings in a brief vocal sample from Aretha Franklin's "Think" (1968), though it serves a role that's somewhat removed from the main structural action, as I discuss later. This means our **αχ** plane is rather saturated with autosonic

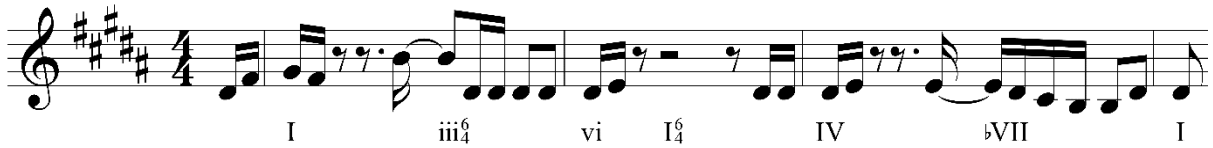
materials. **EXAMPLE 2.6** provides a formal overview of the mashup, and I will refer to it throughout my analysis. The top layer presents the five large-scale formal sections, with the smaller-scale formal units in the bubbles just below. The bottom part of the graph is my adaptation of Cushing's (2013, 133) textural analysis of the mashup, showing the entrances and coincidences between different elements of **αχ**. I will discuss the formal and topical elements later, but for now I focus on the musical fit of various aspects of **αχ**.

In **EXAMPLE 2.7**, I give transcriptions of a few central melodies and harmonic progressions used throughout the track to give a general idea of their musical congruity. Essentially, there are two main types of formal units in this song, which I'll refer to as A and B sections. In terms of harmony, A sections use one of two progressions: 1) the double-plagal progression found in both the Scissor Sisters' (SS) A and in the George Michael backing (GM), or 2) Paul McCartney's (PM) A progression. These A sections may be either verse-like or chorus-like depending on their accompanying melody and texture.[104] I call them both "A" since the first large structural unit (I) follows an SRDC trajectory—that is, statement, repeat, departure, and conclusion—with the conclusion functioning as a chorus-like formal unit. The B sections are "bridge-like," marked by a tonicization of ii, a slightly different lyrical affect, and often a change in texture.[105]

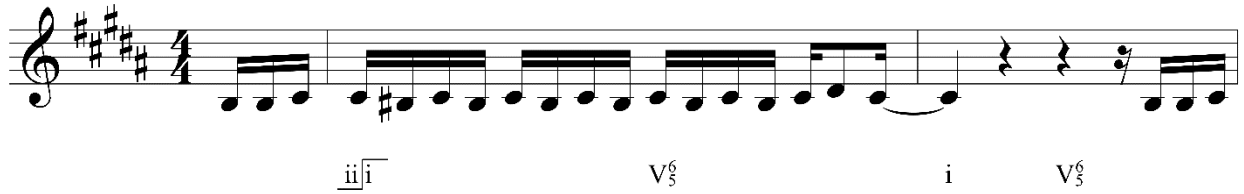
[104] The SS and GM use a modified double-plagal in most verses, altering the IV to a ii. The choruses employ the strict harmonic schema. I tend towards a more flexible conception of formal units in a manner similar to de Clercq 2012.
[105] I have chosen, at this section, to refer to the musical agents of these samples by their initials to further distance my analysis from the **βψ** plane.



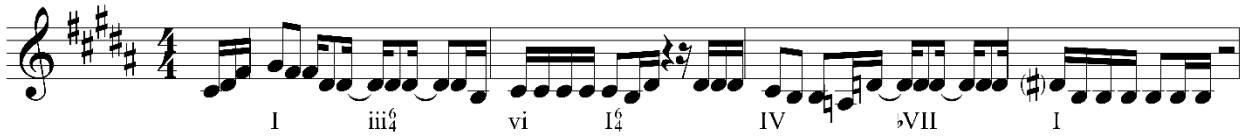
EXAMPLE 2.6. A formal outline of "No One Takes Your Freedom." The bottom part of the graph is adapted from Cushing 2013, and it diagrams the presence of different elements of **αχ**. The top part presents my formal analysis, which I discuss in more depth in the text of this chapter.



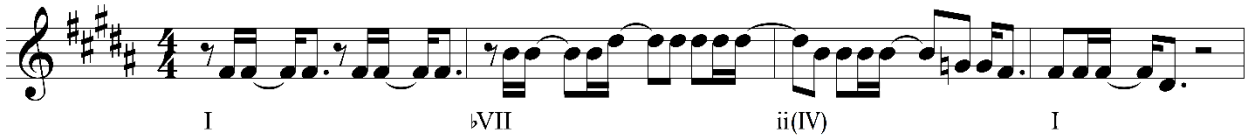
A. The first four measures of Section I's A verse, with SS singing above PM's instrumental backing. This provides the antecedent of a straightforward period structure, with the consequent following the same harmonic progression and the melody arriving on $\hat{1}$. The final measure of this harmonic progression involves a retrograde double-plagal, which gets normalized in all following sections.



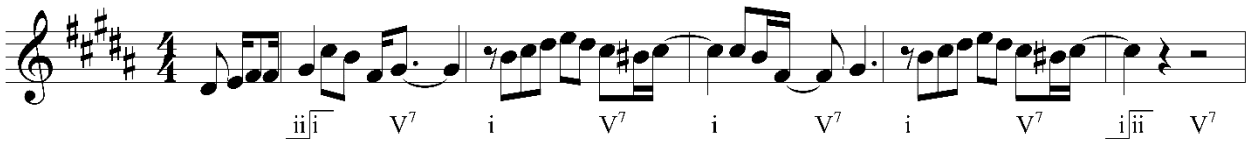
B. The first measure of Section I's B, again with SS singing above PM. The pivot to ii presents a harmonic contrast which is matched by the melodic and lyrical shifts. Like the **EXAMPLES 2.7.A AND C**, this excerpt serves as the antecedent of a basic small-scale period structure.



C. The antecedent of Section I's A chorus.



D. The antecedent of Section II's A verse. Now PM is singing above the harmonically simpler SS backing. Note the alteration of the double-plagal progression.



E. Section II's B section, with PM singing above an altered sample from SS.

EXAMPLE 2.7.A–E. Representative homophonic-melodic textures (αχ) from Sections I and II of "No One Takes Your Freedom." Section I places SS over PM, and Section II places PM over SS.

In terms of musical congruity, since SS and GM samples make use of the double-plagal progression, all pitch elements from those two tracks fit together quite naturally (and I have chosen to exclude their combination due to this triviality). The PM piano texture is a bit more harmonically complex, but it is only used for Section I's opening ABA unit, where it fits easily under the SS's vocal line (**EXAMPLE 2.7.A–C**). Similarly, though PM's generally pentatonic vocal melody produces some traditionally dissonant intervals above the modified double plagal progression (**EXAMPLE 2.7.D–E**), its fit with the instrumental backing still seems quite idiomatic given rock's general reliance on the harmonic-melodic divorce (cf. Temperley 2007; Nobile 2015). In addition to these musical parameters, the combined lyrics fit together in a cooperative narrative directed towards the listener as a second-person subject. I give the full lyrics in **EXAMPLE 2.8** below. Without getting bogged down in poetic or narrative details, the lyrics are all basically concerned with consolation and advice after a breakup, presented in what Lori Burns would call direct communication (clear "I/you") and sincere expression (2010, 164). There is no subversion, irony, or ambiguity in their combination. Yet the mode of address is initially unclear; two distinct musical characters—the voices of SS and PM—commiserate with and urge the listener or another musical agent. When GM enters with a first-person narration, it would be easy to hear him as the private addressee within the mashup. By the conclusion of the song, multiple shouts of "freedom" express a somewhat triumphant story, tinged by a slight sadness when PM's voice enters again in Section IV just before the final chorus with lyrics about an aching mind—a last reminder that this unnamed "other," the former love, will always remain somewhere in the back of the protagonist's mind. So, to summarize the **αχ** plane, we have musical congruity and (con)textual congruity that suggests a reinforcing, cooperative interaction method, moving from a tension between sorrow and hope towards a resolute, supportive ending.

SECTION	VC-UNIT	LYRICS
I	A: Verse	*SS*: When you grow up, livin' like a good boy oughtta. And your mama takes a shine to her best son. Something different, all the girls they seem to like you, Cause you're handsome, like to talk and a whole lotta fun
	B	*SS*: But now your girl's gone a missin' and your house has got an empty bed The folks'll wonder 'bout the wedding, they won't listen to a word you said
	A: Chorus	*SS*: Gonna take your mama out all night, yeah we'll show her what it's all about We'll get her jacked up on some cheap champagne, We'll let the good times all roll out And if the music ain't good, well it's just too bad, We're gonna sing along no matter what Because the dancers don't mind at the New Orleans, If you tip 'em and they make a cut
II	A: Verse	*PM*: Your day breaks, your mind aches You find that all the words of kindness linger on When she no longer needs you She wakes up, she makes up She takes her time and doesn't feel she has to hurry She no longer needs you
	B	*PM*: And in her eyes you see nothing No sign of love behind the tears Cried for no one A love that should have lasted years
	A: V or C?	*SS*: Do it. *AF*: Think about what you're trying to do to me *SS*: So she'll have no doubt that we're doing oh the best we can *SS*: We're gonna do it *AF*: Let your mind go, let yourself be free *SS*: You can stay up late 'cause baby you're a full grown man
	A: Verse	*PM*: You want her, you need her And yet you don't believe her when she said her love is dead You think she needs you.
	B	*PM*: And in her eyes you see nothing No sign of love behind the tears Cried for no one A love that should have lasted years

III	A: Verse	*GM*: I won't let you down, I will not give you up Gotta have some faith in the sound, it's the one good thing that I've got I won't let you down, so please don't give me up Because I would really, really love to stick around
	A: Chorus	*SS*: Gonna take your mama out all night Yeah we'll show her what it's all about We'll get her jacked up on some cheap champagne We'll let the good times all roll out And if the music ain't good, well it's just too bad We're gonna sing along no matter what Because the dancers don't mind at the New Orleans If you tip 'em and they make a cut
	A: Chorus	*SS*: We will take your mama out all night, so she'll have no doubt That we're doing oh the best we can, We're gonna do it, take your mama out all night You can stay up late 'cause baby you're a full grown man + *GM*: Freedom, freedom, freedom You've gotta give for what you take.
IV	A: Verse	*PM*: You stay home, she goes out She says that long ago she knew someone but now he's gone She doesn't need him Your day breaks, your mind aches There will be times when all the things she said will fill your head You won't forget her
	B	*PM*: And in her eyes you see nothing No sign of love behind her tears Cried for no one A love that should have lasted years.
V	A: Chorus	Same as IV final chorus
	A: Chorus	*AF*: Freedom + *GM*: Freedom
	A: Chorus	*PM* Verse + *SS* Chorus + *GM* Freedom + *AF*

EXAMPLE 2.8. A full transcription of the mashup's lyrics, separated by section and VC unit.

Analysis along the **γω** plane provides a similar result, and I direct the reader back to **EXAMPLE 2.6** to follow along with the text here. Given such a broad chronological span of sources, the diversity of topics is rather robust, despite their overall proximity within a post-millennial networked genreme. Section I utilizes a baroque-pop topic, signified by the PM clavichord part.[106] Given the sparseness of **χ** and the nostalgic or mournful lyrics, the topic contributes to a rather intimate opening. Section II—which I dub "Baroque-Rock Tension"—transitions into a rock topic, moving the topical affect from Baroque sentimentality towards a more resolute, straightforward progression and thicker conventional rock texture. But in the middle of Section II, the texture thins abruptly as PM's voice and SS's instrumental backing get interrupted after the B section, regressing to the topical associations of Section I with its lack of percussion and bass instruments. The baroque-pop topic is buttressed by some contrapuntal polyphony generated by a reverb-soaked sample of Aretha Franklin (AF), a French horn sample from PM, and SS's voices. The topics—rock and baroque-pop—collide, setting the narrative trajectory into question.

As the song progresses into Section III, the rock topic initially gets solidified with what Echard would call a clustered "topical moment." Here, the rock topic is "mobilized by several different signifiers simultaneously" (2017, 174), whereas Sections I and II placed the rock and baroque-pop into a more dialogic contact. GM's voice, along with the combination of piano, guitar, bass, and drums, all run through a typical rock progression (the double plagal), moving from tropological collision to fusion; our interaction method seems to shift further to the right on **EXAMPLE 2.4**.

The gospel topic coalesces at Section III's chorus, having been suggested already via the double plagal, AF's role in the polyphonic texture in Section II, and the general ensemble singing in

[106] This shouldn't be confused with a seventeenth or eighteenth-century Baroque topic, but instead the "baroque-pop" aesthetic that began with 1960s groups like The Zombies and Procol Harum and continues today in the "chamber pop" of Feist or Beach House. The early iteration usually incorporated classical instruments like the harpsichord or bugle and often employed sparse textures and classical harmonic schemata.

the choruses. Now, "freedom" rings through the texture, hinting at a liberating shift from rock and gospel. Additionally, there are no B sections in Section III, no move towards minor, no blockages on the mashup's march towards hope. Salvation from misery seems at hand.

Section IV presents a challenge to this destination, emptying the background of its cooperative background singers, instead reverting to PM's solitary pangs of heartache. Section IV's B unit, with its attempt to tonicize minor ii, heightens this tension as the rock topic seems to have triumphed over the gospel. PM mourns the "love that should have lasted years" as his voice fades. But when Section V arrives, all doubt is thrown out. This final coda tropes rock and gospel together, fusing and legitimizing them as the final telos of an accumulative process (Spicer 2004). All A materials (**αχ**) except the PM progression come together in this recapitulatory section, and all the musical agents sing out together in tandem. We reach a topical plenitude, a fusion of rock and gospel that transcends either. The multiple voices, double-plagal progression, and extended chorus-based coda further suggest an intertext with the closing section of "Hey Jude," a prototypical Beatles track in which the protagonist is consoled in the midst of a breakup and an identity crisis.[107] So as the mashup progresses, "No One Takes Your Freedom" displays how similar topics can create meaning *without* contextual incongruity through a reinforcement trope, and how the cooperation interaction method—relying on semiosis and genre—can mediate meaning without recognition of the parent sources.[108]

To summarize the **γω** plane, then, there's a general trajectory mimicking Hatten's tragic-to-transcendent expressive genre as the narrative moves from potential topical collision to their ultimate fusion. A cooperative interaction method results, effected by the shift from a baroque-pop topic towards one of plentiful gospel, passed through the filter of a general rock topic. But in the two shaded

[107] This would present another case of what Daniel Mathers has informally called the "let it all hang out" topic, bolstered by the gospel topic's fusion. For the full context of this suggestion, see Klein 2005, 59–61.
[108] The music video further supports and asserts the cooperative interaction method, especially in the coda, where the idea of plenitude and "letting it all hang out" reaches a frenzy in fast cuts and a milieu of images from the original sources.

areas of **EXAMPLE 2.6**, slight hiccups emerge, throwing the topical progress and its healing narrative into question. Ultimately, the topics all merge and fuse into a culminating cooperative final coda.

So, what was missed by ignoring the autosonic intertextual aspects of this mashup's samples? The βψ level, it turns out, does indeed offer some fertile interpretive ground. Both "Take Your Mama" and "Freedom" strongly index sexual liberation, respectively, through lyrical allusions, iconography, and their artists' identities. Familiarity with these songs and the paratexts and metatexts surrounding them (all manifested on the βψ plane) intensifies the possible intertextual meanings. For example, George Michael torches his leather jacket in the original music video for "Freedom! (90)," clearly symbolizing him shedding his old artistic identity in a cathartic release.[109] When this catharsis is placed into context of Michael's sexual identity, the shouts of "freedom" take on additional weight. Similarly, "Take Your Mama" can easily be read through the lens of Jake Shears' homosexuality; the narrator struggles to be released after a loveless heterosexual relationship, enforced by social norms and pressures. The cooperation and reinterpretation interaction methods take on a more nuanced meaning as they latch onto these dimensions of the βψ plane.

Another useful intertextual relationship to the autosonic sources is with the form of the original Beatles' "For No One." The original song comes to an abrupt close on a dominant chord that functions as a giant unfulfilled structural retransition from ii. The yearning, unresolved dominant acts as an extremely effective musical portrayal of the protagonist's failure to comprehend the finality of his lost love. In the mashup, this part of "For No One" is placed in the shaded Section IV, the retrogressive part of my topical narrative above. If a listener had an intimate knowledge of that iconic autosonic intertext, they might anticipate a similarly searching dominant chord, capitulating to the rock topic in a retreat from the gospel topic. Instead, McCartney's dominant is fulfilled (and how!)

[109] George Michael had previously been one half of the duo Wham!, which built its massive success on a popular post-disco dance-pop style.

with the huge, gospel inflected double-plagal coda. The structural troping displays a reinterpretation interaction method by manipulating formal expectations from the original McCartney song. Recognition of an *iconic* relationship on the **αβ:χψ** surface (in this case to the formal structure of "For No One") strongly influences some potential meanings of "No One Takes Your Freedom."

Granted, these interpretive avenues are hidden from my general analytical focus on the **αχ** and **γω** planes, but as I hope the prior two analyses have shown, those two levels are sufficient dimensions to explore mashups beyond mere broad strokes of musical and contextual (in)congruities. A renewed engagement with genre can provide a rich interpretive environment.

VIII. Some Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shown how a mashup's form, its musical materials, its similarity of topics, and their troping all constitute interaction methods chock full of indexical meaning(s), even without intertexts between parent songs or samples. Like Nicholas Cook's analysis of instances of multimedia (IMMs), my focus on the broader relationships between topics and samples in mashups "represents the opposite of the top-down principle embodied in the idea of hierarchy, which begins with an image of the whole that is then elaborated through successive layers of subdivision." An analytical method geared towards genre and stylistic relationships should "provide orientation, to guard against a priori assumptions, and to get the analytical process started" (1998, 146). Spicer's analysis of the topical worlds of The Police, Leydon's analysis of a second-generation of sampling practice in the late nineties, and Echard's work on psychedelia all point to instances where similar approaches have proven fruitful. What I hope this chapter has demonstrated is that we can explore the same kinds of analytical paths in music reliant on samples, rather than getting enticed by the direct

iconic intertextual relations to their parent sources.[110] Topics, troping, and interaction methods open an interpretive space from which to interrogate genremes, and mashups can serve as a diagnostic for the genre-thinking of the early 2000s. Their reliance on the **αχ** and **γω** planes posit a move towards a more general method, away from the individuated enterprise of specific musical objects

The shift towards genre seems only natural for musical analysis. "Compared with the visual and literary arts," Born explains, "which we associate with a specific object, text or representation, music may therefore appear to be an extraordinarily diffuse kind of cultural object: an aggregation of sonic, social, corporeal, discursive, visual, technological and temporal mediations—a musical assemblage, where this is understood as a characteristic constellation of such heterogeneous mediations" (2011, 377). Topics, troping, and interaction methods play a profound role in meaning creation through formal structuring and genre signification in mashups. Mashups probe popular music's thick, intertwined semiotic webs, making far-flung connections between branches of the hierarchical, arborescent models of genre-as-system I showed in Chapter 1.

There are broader historical resonances for this approach as well. In Mirka's summary and history of topic theory, she notes that the conditions of possibility for classical music *topoi* arose when the "disorderly style … of instrumental music [gained] the upper hand in the first half of the eighteenth century" (2014, 6). Like mashups, this musical "mishmash" (*Mischmasch*) and "disorder" (*Unordnung*) were subject to much criticism, "related to the fact that different styles were associated with different affects. The division into the high, middle, and low style was based on the dignity of affect" (6). For many scholars, mashups deserve similar criticism. For David Gunkel, they have a "derivative, illegitimate, and monstrous nature. … mashups cannot be said to innovate anything" (2008, 503). Or as Serazio suggests, mashups are simply "in-jokes for music geeks," a "simple wink wink, tongue-in-

[110] In the turntablist "megamix mashups" (Boone 2013) of producers like Girl Talk, it would be unreasonable for most listeners to expect to identify each and every sample in a track that draws from dozens of sources. A topical approach allows a more faithful experiential reading.

cheek prank about nothing" (2008, 87). Like Mirka's assessment of the eighteenth-century critiques, "ultimately, the charge of "disorder" and "mishmash" raised against the new instrumental style was a charge against its comic spirit" (2014, 9).

This chapter has sought to reframe this discussion by focusing on genre, rather than the "in-jokes," by understanding how a mishmash might fuse into something new. In so doing, it also points to a contradictory view on genre which has come to dominate popular music discourses in the second decade of the twenty-first century. In a way, mashups inhabit a paradox of genre: they juxtapose topics to blur the lines of genre which the popular music machine has inscribed, but they also rely on the indexical relationships between those topics to create meanings. They both question and reinforce genre's utility. In the following chapter, I will show how this tension manifests in the discursive practices of the 2010s, leading me to conceptualize a genreme of the streaming era.

Chapter 3: #GENRE AND OMNIVOROUS TASTES

I. New Generic Constellations

My partner recently taught music and dance in an after-school arts program, and, to get to know her young students, she asked them to write down what kind of music they liked. Some answered with conventional genre labels like "rap" or "hip hop," but many named particular tracks or artists.[111] Rather than dismiss these answers as immature misunderstandings of authentic popular musical categorization, I contend that, in a time when algorithms spit out playlists and recommendations of ostensibly similar or related music based on a single input, we should take seriously the notion that "Hotline Bling" or Drake might be considered kinds of music in themselves.[112]

As the first decade of the new millennium closed, popular music categorization entered a centrifuge when novel means of music distribution and consumption radiated changes in musical experiences. The genre-thinking embodied by these young students indicates the consequential separation of the term "genre" from earlier formulations, flung out from institutionalized centripetal forces of the music academy which continue to unconsciously cling to classical category conceptions. What happens if we allow the centrifugal forces of public understanding—in addition to music industrial and musician based usages of "genre"—to pull us away from centrist ideas of categorization? It surely seems like a highly valuable approach to the dizzyingly complex popular musical world of the 2010s.

The previous chapter on mashups provided a case study in how genre can create meaning in a particular form of digital music praxis, made possible by the technological and cultural era of the *fin du millénaire* in which a relatively stable set of sonic and stylistic signifiers functioned essentially as

[111] Many thanks to my fiancée, Emily Autrey, for sharing this illuminating experience with me.

[112] Of course, the "single input" is usually mediated by either vast swaths of demographics or personal data, as will be discussed later in this chapter and the following.

musical topics. But as the second decade of the twenty-first century's ubiquitous access, algorithms, and professional playlist curators continue to throw wrenches into conventional music-industrial machinations—tailoring recommendations and suggestions to the most extreme of niche audiences (of one) while relying on mysterious machine-learning and AI-mediated similarity measures—the imbricated, coeval genre-groupings of prior popular music "generations" appear on the verge of collapse. As I will show, this "death of genre" mindset dominates recent popular thought on the utility of genre. Whether genre is in its death throes or not (and as the reader might suspect, I will argue that genre is very much *alive*), it seems that older music-theoretical conceptions of genre and musical experience could lose viability in our post-file-sharing era of constant access.[113] I stress that I am not necessarily interested in how *certain* genres change but rather in how genre navigation, genre discourses, and genre-thinking in general might mutate, shift, or contrast.[114] How the twenty-first century's genre-thinkings differ from the era that saw the rise of rock 'n' roll, for instance, seems an important and under-explored area in music theory that might inflect analytical explorations of popular music. This

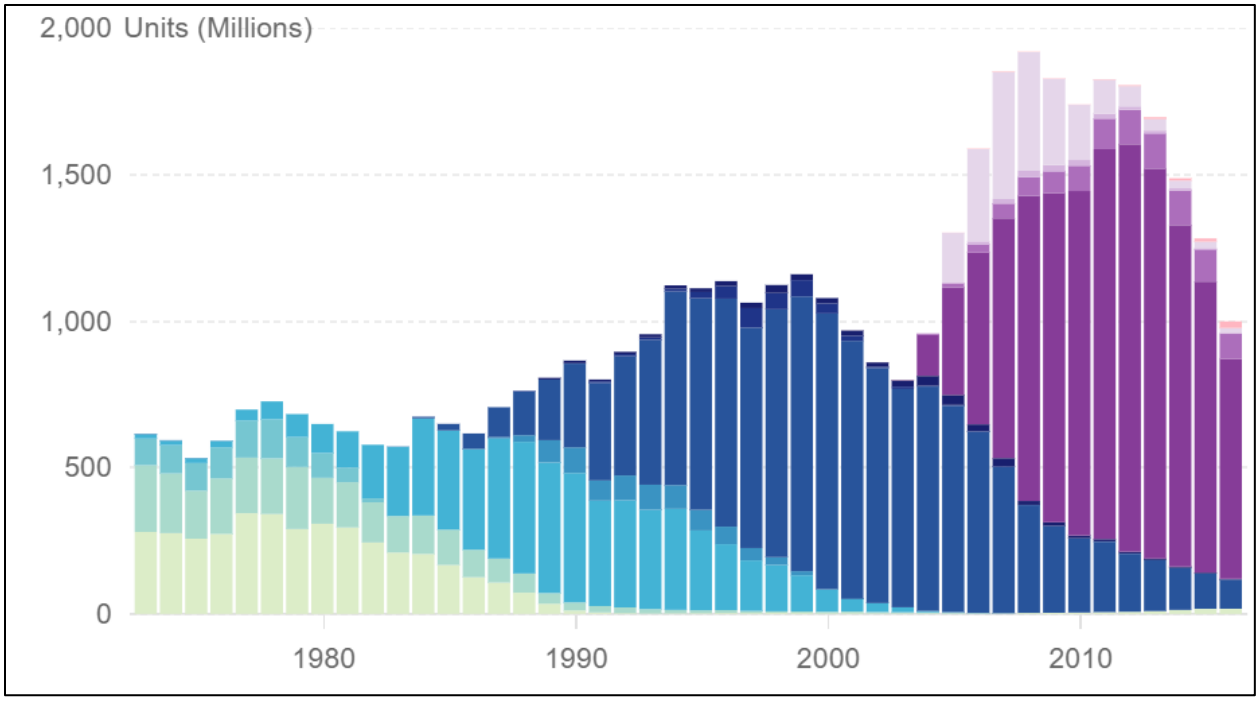
[113] At the very least, ever-changing musical consumption and rapidly shifting discourses both suggest that a singular "Theory of Genre" might ultimately be untenable. In his review of Stefan Holt's *Genre in Popular Music* (2007), Franco Fabbri laments that he was unable to "find the following: (i) a theory of genre, even in the weakest possible sense … (ii) that could possibly be applied to any kind of music, including popular musics; and (iii) a number of case studies, presented to put the theory to test in various historical, geographical and social contexts: from tango to arabesk, from French chanson to rockabilly, from νέο κύμα (Greek contemporary singer-songwriter genre) to ska, from raï to bossa nova" (2008, 490). He then chastises Holt for explicitly refusing "to build a systematic theory of genre and [criticizing] any former (or future?) effort to create anything similar, suggesting that this would be an impossible task." I have to concur with Holt on this particular point. While all "genres" or acts of categorization share the impetus to connect, to explain, or to manage, they frequently do so in multivalent, diverse ways. The rest of Fabbri's review rightly points out Holt's limited scope of musical semiotics, a troubling oversight for a book so invested in genre as meaning.

[114] A successful attempt to generalize the growth, decay, and general trajectory of genres rather than genremes can be found in Lena and Peterson 2008. Lena and Peterson's approach derives four distinct genre forms (avant-garde, scene-based, industry-based, and traditionalist) that can be usefully placed into dialogue with Brackett's and Born's distinctions of communities and planes as discussed in the introduction to the dissertation. (Lena and Peterson make some peculiar axiomatic moves about how genre works, claiming for example that music categories "crafted for specific types of venues or referred to as commercial categories" like "pop," boy-band, Broadway showtunes, or easy listening are "non-genred music" [2008, 699]. As I discuss in reference to Derrida later, all texts must participate in a genre, so I find this a rather odd methodological point.) Other recent studies interested in the diachronic evolution of genres include Mauch et al. 2015, Echard 2017 and Pearson 2017.

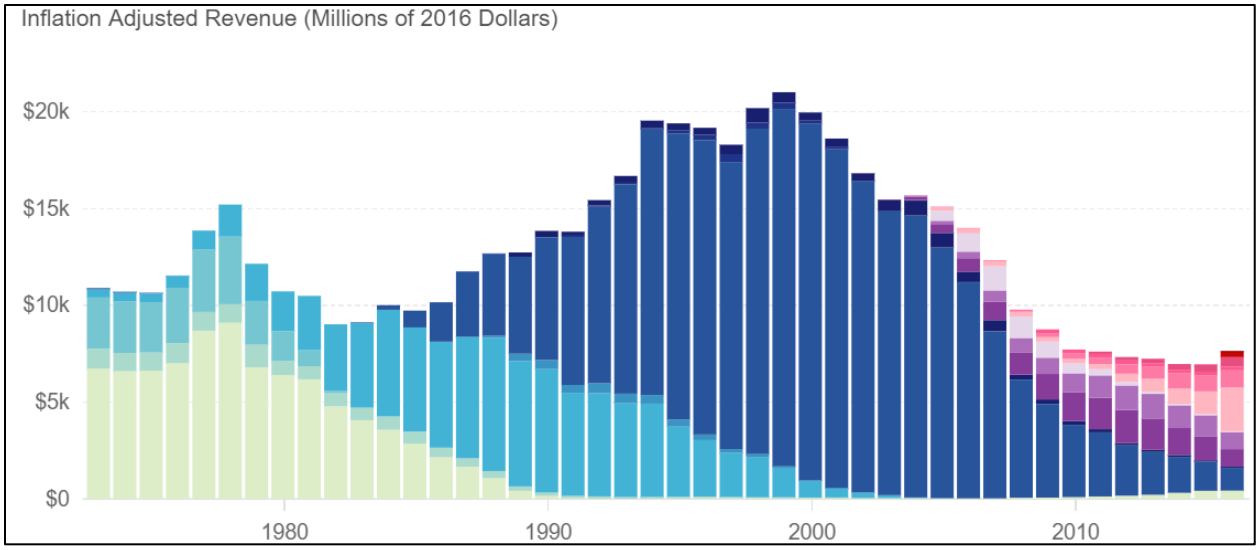
investigation also strives to establish potentially far-reaching connections between our esoteric field and other music disciplines, other academic disciplines, or even public discourses more generally.

Online platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Pandora, Bandcamp, and SoundCloud embody the new modes of musical engagement, giving relatively unfettered access to essentially infinite (kinds of) music while stripping away investments conventionally required of the consumer, be they financial, temporal, or cultural. With many services and apps providing a free option (that includes advertising), they open the potential for an integrative utopia of universal musical categorization in which every musical object or actor might be accessed, distributed, listened to, and appreciated equally.[115] A similar possibility was opened by the advent of recording technologies. Attali explains how in the early twentieth century, "the phonograph [was] part of a radically new social and cultural space demolishing the earlier economic constructions of representation. … The gramophone seemed powerful and original because it *plugged into a stockpile playing on time and space*, it seemed to be a … a symbol for the internationalization of social relations" (1985, 95). An optimistic view of the access granted by streaming services would read similarly, with music acting as this temporal and spatial stockpile. Despite a dramatic increase of music consumption (**EXAMPLE 3.1A**) during the digital era, music industry revenue has declined (**EXAMPLE 3.1B**), representing the decreased monetary investment of consumers. Such a decline, though, most directly affects those making the music.

[115] A similar perspective underlies the amicus brief provided by a collection of musicologists and theorists in a Ninth Circuit appeals case between Pharrell Williams et. al. v. Frankie Christian Gaye et. al., no. 15-56880 (2016). In their conclusion, these scholars contend that legal action involving similar musical works "will have a deleterious effect on composers who will have the spectre of frivolous lawsuits hanging over them as they create new musical works tapping into the rich commonality of musical ideas that musicians have relied upon since time immemorial." I agree with this sentiment in general, especially since the "rich commonality of musical ideas" comports with my topic-theory approach. Yet it seems prudent to point out the statuses of those arguing for a loosening of copyright laws or strictures here. Robin James summarizes that, "as many [critical and cultural] theorists have noted, traditional concepts and practices of 'resistance' [like those of plunderphonics and the amicus brief] have been so successfully co-opted by neoliberal hegemonies that they no longer have any counter-hegemonic punch." In other words, these refutations of the legal system might eventually have deleterious effects on those who are "plundered" or those whose agency might be lost during their incorporation into an anonymous stockpile of musical ideas and meanings. Her main arguments concerning the cooptation of traditionally resistive acts (like plundering) are laid out most clearly in James 2015, 8–18.



EXAMPLE 3.1A. Recorded music sales volume as tracked by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).[116] Yellow refers to LP/EPs, light-blue to cassettes, dark blue to CDs, purple to .mp3 sales, and pink-red to streaming. The graph fails to account for total consumption via streaming, though, which far outweighs digital downloads and sales (in purple).



EXAMPLE 3.1B. Inflation-adjusted revenue of recorded music from the RIAA.[117] Colors match **EX. 3.1A.** Comparing to **EXAMPLE 3.1A** above reveals the falling monetary investment during an increase in consumption.

[116] "U.S. Recorded Music Sales Volumes by Format RIAA Year-End Revenue and Shipment Reports." Accessed 5/16/17. https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/.

[117] "RIAA: U.S. Recorded Music Revenues by Format (Inflation Adjusted)" (accessed 5/16/2017) https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/

As I will explain in this chapter and the following, the idealistic understanding of a borderless stockpile of musical artifacts cannot possibly obtain in a capitalistically driven popular-music-industrial machine.[118] Classifications and kinds of music necessarily persist alongside an unequal distribution of (cultural) capital; not all *kinds* of music can "matter" the same amount even though genre is not zero-sum.[119]

To begin unpacking our current generic constellation, I employ a two-fold strategy. In this chapter, I first undertake a brief musicological survey of current popular discourses on the state of genre in 2010s popular music. This will entail the review of critic-fan and musician-created writings

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[118] Though a colloquial sense of the term "machine"—as a simple or complex mechanical apparatus used to accomplish some task(s)—certainly applies in this chapter, I mobilize it with a broader and farther-reaching genealogy in mind. As formulated by Deleuze and Guattari (both together and separately), "machine" essentially applies to any sort of networked set of relations and processes that cuts between or connects objects or collections, which can be either concrete or abstract. They contrast this with their notion of assemblage—which is itself a dynamic collection of things—by explaining that "a machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it" (1987, 333). And later, they explain that "*machines are always singular keys that open or close an assemblage, a territory*" (334). Genre is a kind of territoriality, and the music industrial machine enforces or creates generic boundaries, either opening genres and formats onto others or shutting them off from potential connections. These machines make their cuts across different levels of specificity.

Though the concept is diffuse and frustratingly difficult to define, examples of machines abound in their writings. In the introduction to *ATP*, they write that "a book itself is a little machine; what is the relation (also measurable) of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine, etc.—and an *abstract machine* that sweeps them along?" (1987, 4). When writing about the ambulatory acts of a schizophrenic patient, they suggest that, in this and other situations, "everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines—all of them connected to those of his body. The continual whirr of machines" (2004, 9). The generality of "machine" is important for my project in that it allows me to approach some agents of territorialization in the complex, rhizomatic entanglement of genre components in our current era of big data and streaming services. For this reason, I borrow from Guattari, treating genres as active, constantly iterated and constituted "*machinic territorialities*," opposed to "territories and lands"—the latter term falling flat in its description of and reliance on static boundaries and set topologies. Guattari goes on to explain that "by distinguishing them from set logic, a 'machinism' of the assemblage will only recognize relative identities and trajectories" (2011, 11). This is how I understand genremes as well; as relative and dynamic machines that generate genres as "machinic territorialities."

The music industrial machine must be understood as similarly active. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "finding the machine in operation in a given territorial assemblage is not enough; it is already in operation in the emergence of matters of expression, in other words, in the constitution of the assemblage and in the vectors of deterritorialization that ply it from the start" (1987, 334). I try to adopt an integrated approach to the intertwined nature of machines and assemblages in this chapter, and in the following chapter, I explore how Spotify functions as a machine, creating machinic territorialities of musical engagement and distribution. So, in these twinned chapters on #genre, I approach the machine from two perspectives, since as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "the same machine can be both technical and social, but only when viewed from different perspectives" (2004, 141).

[119] This argument holds not only for popular music, but for art music as well. Recent work on "indie classical" and mid-twentieth-century classical music both reveal similar genre-definitional issues. See, for example, Robin 2016 and Drott 2013.

including a small collection of magazine and newspaper articles, blog posts, forum posts, and tweets as evidence for bifurcating discursive practices, with one side projecting the demise of genre while a separate strand of discourse employs genre labels as adjectival descriptors on an unprecedented level of sophistication and numerousness. I then place these competing discourses in dialogue with some sociological work on taste and omnivorousness. Second, after providing an aerial view of both the critic-fan and musician landscapes of genre, I dive into the tumultuous current of streaming-service metadata in Chapter 4. Specifically, I investigate some ways that Spotify indexes its musicians in order to place these perspectives alongside a quantitative assessment of industry-based techniques of categorization. My methodology reveals the novel topology of our current genre landscape, which I conceptualize with the term, #genre.[120] This new concept will reveal itself in the following pages, but it is worth briefly outlining at the outset to provide a bit of scaffolding for the reader. Essentially, #genre is constituted by three main components:

1) algorithmically derived relationships between musical objects (e.g., artists and/or tracks);
2) strings of genre labels/tags as adjectival descriptors;
3) presence of objects in playlists.

All three overlap quite significantly, of course, but separating them out reveals some intriguing trends within the "always on" genre-machine of 2010s popular music. The concept also attempts to capture the experience of what Robin James (2017b) finds in the recent shift from "demographic" to "psychographic" modes of genre and format determination, abetted by the rise of big data and the prevalence of statistical forecasting. She explains that "demographics divide populations by conceptual structures that treat perceivable outward appearance (like phenotype, secondary sex characteristics,

[120] I.e., "hash-tag" genre. With the prevalence of hashtags through both online and offline vernaculars, the symbol functions as a unique interpretant, in Peirce's formulation, with the ability to literally index any icon (e.g., emojis) or symbol. Its ubiquity across personal, business, and political speech genres led at least one author to suggest the hashtag was the "Word of the Year" for 2017, explaining that, "like most major shifts in communicative modes, # democratizes, while freaking out traditionalists, who worry, not wrongly, about the loss of ambiguity and complexity" (Menand 2018). I'd disagree with the latter aspect since the hashtag is necessarily contextualized and socialized, evading a simple Saussurean semiotic binary while highlighting the inherently active role of the both the signifier and the addressee.

vocal timbre, or accent) as representations of inner character and capacity. [On the other hand,] psychographics cut out the middleman of social identity and purport to study inner character and capacity themselves." In the following chapter I will show that demographics still play an important role in contemporary categorization—especially as they affect how musicians themselves are taxonomized and understood to participate in various stylistic categories—but #genre embodies the neoliberal, twenty-first-century focus on individual taste and eminently networked musical objects while opening a new path for analysis.

II. Popular Discourses, Genre Tags, and Spaces

Perhaps the most prevalent trope concerning genre in current pop and rock criticism is summarized neatly in a tweet by Mike Shinoda, member of the band Linkin Park. "Genre is dead," he declared in mid-February of 2017, just before the release of his band's new single.[121] Helpful followers chimed in to clarify the aphorism. "He means you can make whatever kind of music you want," they tweeted.[122] "It doesn't matter as long as it sounds good," they chirped.[123] Whatever Shinoda meant, the maelstrom of confirmatory replies clearly indicates the resonance of this mindset for his fans.

A whole host of amateur bloggers and professional critics express this common strain of popular thought on the decreasing utility of musical labels and categories.[124] In one such entry, Claudia Perry (2014) suggests that "genres are a crutch for incompetent music writers," before asking if "such

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[121] https://twitter.com/mikeshinoda/status/830118867561115648 (10 Feb 2017, accessed 2/21/17).

[122] Some examples of this mindset can be found in the following replies (all tweets in this and the following footnote are from 2/10/2017 and were accessed 2/21/2017):
https://twitter.com/cornflowersoul/status/830119686192955393: "What Mike means with that is: sticking to a specific type of music is "dead"."";
https://twitter.com/SakuraCS/status/830129885955899393: "no, that means they can do am album with lots of different Styles :)"

[123] https://twitter.com/kaziredoan/status/830119434006122496: "IDC as long as it sounds good im with ya"; https://twitter.com/SoldierLP13/status/830119861690982400: "The point of making music is to make sounds you love and people will love it too."

[124] Of course, the concept of homogenization and decrease of artistic value can be found throughout twentieth-century academic writings on popular culture. Attali, for instance, writes that "today, universalizing, despecifying degradation is one of the conditions for the success of repetition" (1985, 109).

vague terms as Americana, metal (which has more subgenres than most of us have had hot dinners) or country … convey anything about how the music sounds?" Her answer, "not really," mirrors Shinoda's statement. Or, as a *Lexington Herald-Leader* critic asked, "do genres matter, particularly in these days when music is so accessible and sampling is so easy?" After all, "fans really don't care if you are country, folk, classical, soul, hip-hop or rock 'n' roll enough if they like your music" (Copley 2014). These critic-fan esthesic conceptions of genre perfectly align with the poietic, musician-driven sentiment embodied in Shinoda's tweet.

Going a step farther, critic Steven Hyden (2013) argues that soon "all pop music genre classifications will be obsolete. … The only reason I'm reluctant to state this belief publicly is that it almost seems self-evident. … Let me be clear: I'm sure there will still be 'rock' music and 'country' music and 'rap' music in 2023. I just don't think there will be discernible musical differences between them (at least when it comes to the most commercial versions of those genres). The only way people will be able to distinguish between different kinds of artists is by the types of hats and pants they wear."[125] For Hyden, like Perry, Shinoda, and the rest above, the genre contract of contemporary popular music—its conventions of stylistic circumscription, its terms of agreement, its obligatory conditions of creative and perceptual behavior—seems to have been severed; its good-faith commitments to genre uniqueness seem to be attenuating.

[125] This assertion resembles an attitude that goes back at least to Adorno. Discussing popular music around 1940, Adorno questions the unique stylistic labels applied to "actually undifferentiated" music. I quote him at length: "There is another type of individualization claimed in terms of kinds of popular music and differences in name bands. The types of popular music are carefully differentiated in production. The listener is presumed to be able to choose between them. The most widely recognized differentiations are those between swing and sweet and such name bands as Benny Goodman and Guy Lombardo. The listener is quickly able to distinguish the types of music and even the performing band, this in spite of the fundamental identity of the material and the great similarity of the presentations apart from their emphasized distinguishing trademarks. This labeling technique, as regards type of music and band, is pseudo-individualization, but of a sociological kind outside the realm of strict musical technology. It provides trademarks of identification for differentiating between the actually undifferentiated" (1941, 26). The difference, of course, is that Adorno hears and conceptualizes surface differences as masking underlying similitudes of substance, while Hyden hears similarity directly on the surface.

A teleological narrative lies at the heart of this common understanding of the decline and atrophy of genres. In such a view, popular music categories used to be well-ordered in a time of record shops, which acted as tidy containers that neatly sorted the music by how it sounded. This classical-category conception of genre constituted a striated, sedentary space, in Deleuzian and Guattarian terms—a gridded State structure opposed to a more fluid nomadic structure. As Brian Massumi explains, "movement in [a striated space] is confined as by gravity to a horizontal plane, and limited by the order of that plane to preset paths between fixed and identifiable points" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xiii). In a striated space, "definitional" elements of genres, like certain timbres, topics, or conventions, might be woven together into a genre-fabric, intertwining and overlapping while remaining distinct.[126] Hierarchical arborescent constructions of the relationships between genres inevitably arise in this static and structured space which, metaphorically represented by a record shop, "is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures" (1987, 381). Of course, these boundaries were frequently porous and traversed, but as organizing principles of the post-War music-industrial machine—via marketing labels and strategies across a wide variety of media from physical recordings to radio stations and jukeboxes—they created an important structuring principle for the experience of a striated genre space.[127]

Continuing along this teleological narrative we find a rise of portable media like cassettes and CDs, followed by file-sharing and a culmination in the unprecedented level of access granted by streaming services; these have all blurred sonic lines, rendering a striated genre-fabric of stylistic labels ineffectual. A more easily traversed, apparently unstructured *smooth* space seems to have spread out,

[126] Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 475) suggest fabric and *weaving* as a technological embodiment of striated space, which I find applicable to the classical category theory of genres.

[127] The move away from sheet music as the main distributed musical object towards recordings enacted an ontological shift of what counts as "the text," from the "song" to a specific recording. This aligns pretty directly with the evolution of strategies employed by the music industry for tracking and charting success of tracks, which Elijah Wald neatly summarizes (2009, 88–89). Such a view comports rather closely with David Brackett's "sonic aesthetic," as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

with generic components decreasingly style-determinant.[128] Contrasting with the woven textiles of striated space, Deleuze and Guattari propose the material, felt, as an example of a smooth space, which "implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the blocks of fibers back and forth)" (1987, 475). The dimensions of a striated space collapse as previously segregable genres rub against and into each other; the decreasing distance between fibers becomes the substance of smooth space rather than the territorialized plane of points in the sedentary record-store space. Eytal Weizman cogently summarizes these two spaces: "Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between two kinds of territoriality: a hierarchical, Cartesian, geometrical, solid, hegemonic and spatially rigid state system; and the other, flexible, shifting, smooth, matrix-like 'nomadic' spaces" (2007, 200).[129] As a metaphor for musical ordering, this latter territoriality seems especially apt for views like Shinoda's, Perry's, and Hyden's in which genre-labels have lost their ordering-functionality. The felt-like smooth space of twenty-first-century popular music genres appears to be open and unlimited.

Tremors from this tectonic, flattening shift in the popular musical landscape have registered occasionally in the music academic discourse as well. Perhaps most directly related to this dissertation and to music theory is the continuing difficulty in defining the kinds of music we study. For most of the 1990s, "pop" and "rock" remained separate entities in much music theoretical discourse. Mark Spicer outlines the conventional distinctions between the two as ultimately—and problematically—a difference in authenticity. Pop music tends to be described as "willfully derivative and carefully calculated to have mass commercial appeal, while rock music is grounded in 'authenticity' and therefore carries with it a seriousness of artistic intent that pop somehow does not" (2011a, xiii).[130]

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[128] "It is as though a smooth space emanated, sprang from a striated space" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 477).
[129] Weizman's account of the Israeli Defense Forces' understanding and deployment of Deleuze and Guattari's notions of striated versus smooth spaces bears some rather uncomfortable resemblances to Spotify's smoothing out of the generic field, which I discuss in Chapter 4.
[130] Note the scare quotes in this excerpt.

Spicer rightfully questions these notions, but the characterization of pop as derivative and rock as serious rings throughout music theoretical discourse on the issue.[131] However, with the rise of poptimism (discussed in the following section on omnivorousness) and the increased attention to non-rock popular musics, theorists have seen inklings of the attenuation of generic boundaries, moving towards a smoother repertoire space. Albin Zak happens upon this same "death-of-genre" narrative as he wrestles with the signifying capability of the word, "rock," lamenting that "as a marker of stylistic distinction, 'rock' threatens to become a meaningless designation." He then lists genres or scenes that fit his understanding of "rock," including rap and doo wop (2001, 16). These musical kinds have become harder to disentangle in the musical world of the twenty-first century.

A history of a teleological trajectory from the highly striated to the eminently smooth ignores the inherently mixed nature of any space, especially when diachrony is accounted for. Different genres shift, grow, or pass away at different rates for different reasons due to different forces. Brackett's (2016) amusing and telling reprinting of a comic at the very opening of his book on popular music in the twentieth century captures this sentiment; a couple walks through a landscape marked with three distinct genre fields: rock, pop, and easy listening. The caption, "they never even knew," represents both the subtle diachronic changes and the nuanced synchronic boundaries at play in any stylistic space. Georgina Born addresses such a mixed topography while problematizing the foregoing linear teleology in which genres have gone from neat containers in a striated space to open-ended connections in a smooth space, driven by a sort of Moore's law of technological progress of music consumption. Drawing on the work of Franco Moretti, she suggests that "genre participates in the mobile organization of a whole population of texts that 'continually deviate, innovate, branch out,

[131] The 2014 annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory, for instance, had sessions entitled "Rocky Relationships" and "Timbre Rocks!", both puns on their genre of interest. The insistent analysis of rock music alongside traditional corpuses—along with the conspicuous absence of genres like Top 40 or hip hop—embodies the authentic seriousness that Spicer problematizes.

flourish for a while, fail and are eclipsed.' This is particularly apt for periods like the present in which every musical assemblage protends a slightly different future, a minor variation—adding up to mobile congeries, fields in flux" (Born 2014). It is hardly surprising that popular musicians and listeners would view this heterogeneous milieu of differential mobilities and fluxes through a lens of genre-decline; untangling the smooth felt of genre seems an impossible task.

Both the musician and critic-fan discourses—operating at the level of Born's (2011) intimate socialities of genre—have become equally enveloped by another conception of musical ordering that undercuts the "death-of-genre" narrative. An anecdote provides entry into this conception: in January of 2017, I opened a local newspaper in eastern Washington State while visiting my partner's family and read a concert announcement on the front page of the arts section. The description of the band used a string of hyphenated genre labels to orient the reader unfamiliar with the musicians: The Pearls are a "Vancouver-based country-rock-Americana-Western swing band" (Schilling 2017). I nearly spit out my coffee, exclaiming, "but genre is dead!"

The myriad tags granted to this locally touring band of mostly bearded, greying, flannel-wearing men are typical of genre descriptions for many artists throughout popular media discourses. On the poietic and musician-focused side, a brief survey of artists' and bands' websites suffices to display this prevalence. Brooklyn band Arc Waves, for example, describe themselves as a "new wave, psych rock, dream pop and shoegaze … with nods to early 4AD sound and Factory Records."[132] French artist, Onra, describes himself as a producer "who has released records inspired by 80's Funk, 90's Hip-Hop and R'n'B, Electronic and even a Spiritual Jazz project," while incorporating influences from "Hip-Hop (from different eras), to Bossa to Indian Music to Psych Rock, Soul."[133]

[132] https://www.facebook.com/pg/ArcWaves/about/ accessed May 28, 2017.
[133] https://onra.bandcamp.com/ Accessed May 28, 2017.

The popular music sharing platform SoundCloud encourages this tagging behavior by soliciting users to attach #genre labels to their uploads, ostensibly providing both a classificatory mechanism and a unit of similarity measure for automated playlists.[134] For instance, the most popular track indexed by the "Synth Wave" hashtag, "Good Together" by The Runaway Club, has labels of #Pop, #80's, #Synth Wave, #Indie Pop, #Alternative, and #Synthesizers.[135] In one sense, this democratization of stylistic self-identification dissolves the hierarchical, arborescent signifying regime of classical genre models into a rhizomatic multiplicity. But as I show later in this chapter, the pseudo-individuation of self-tagging can also reinforce striations or else create detrimental machinic cuts.

Esthesic discourses reflect the same interest in genre labels, as lists of style tags manifest en masse in critic reviews, blogs, and more neutral databases. Wikipedia tags Linkin Park, Mike Shinoda's band, with "alternative rock, nu metal, alternative metal, rap rock, and electronic rock."[136] A review of Leela James's 2014 album, *Fall for You*, finds "'70s funk stomp, '80s Quiet Storm precision, and '90s hip-hop soul all within the same song."[137] For *New Yorker* reviewer, Carrie Battan, Sampha's album *Process* (2017) is "a bit gospel, a bit R. & B. There's some classic soul, made to feel modern with synthesizers; there's experimental electronica, made to feel classic through the use of analog instruments and quiet piano interludes" (Battan 2017). It would seem that genre is not so dead after all; it still retains enough descriptive value to power critical commentary and to guide musicians' creative acts.

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[134] Robin James rightly points out that "with platforms like SoundCloud encouraging artists to use as many hyperspecific genre and subgenre tags as possible, genre functions explicitly as metadata" (James 2017b). I would add that the user-defined tags also present free labor for SoundCloud, placing categorizational work onto the artists. As such, SoundCloud represents the latest iteration of a practice with notable predecessors such as Myspace and Last.fm, the former of which will be discussed a bit in the next chapter of this dissertation. In particular, I will explore how the kinds of tags Myspace users employed in the first decade of the 2000s compare to the industry-based strategies deployed by Spotify.

[135] The Runaway Club, "Good Together," accessed February 29, 2016, https://soundcloud.com/therunawayclub/good-together. Confusingly enough, the #80's label contrasts with an embedded sample in the song from the famous 1990s-2000s sitcom, "Friends," blurring lines of chronology and historical strata in a general affirmation of nostalgia.

[136] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linkin_Park (accessed May 27, 2017).

[137] http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7633323/rb-hip-hop-artists-to-watch-in-2017 (accessed May 28, 2017).

Of course, the use of multiple style labels and a plethora of descriptors in critical reviews or articles is nothing new. These musical adjectives have long been deployed as a way of asserting an authoritative voice, displaying a variegated and profound knowledge to establish expertise for music critics, especially since the rise of rock journalism in the 1960s. Implicitly latching onto genres' role as topics—as shown in my discussion of mashups outlined in the preceding chapter—critics and fans thumb through and utilize a "thesaurus of characteristic figures" (Ratner 1980, 9) to show their mastery over a "universe made up of commonplaces of style known to [contemporary artists] and their audiences"(Agawu 2009, 43). As these commonplaces of style have become increasingly nuanced, eccentric, and loaded with semiotic baggage—as the above examples with their abundance of tags indicates—style-specific adjectival descriptors garner more and more importance for establishing control. And, as I will show in the following chapter, some of Spotify's approaches towards musical categorization follow this same critical imperative, showing ways of navigating the overwhelming nature of an "age of musical plenty" (Ratliff 2016).

There is at least *one* important part of the genre-decline narrative that is worth chewing on slightly longer before moving onto a discussion of connections between critic-fan discourses and notions of taste. One merit to this narrative is that it accounts for the storage and information retrieval afforded by various technologies along its timeline. Not only are record shops striated and gridded territorialities, but records are physical objects which can only be stored in a single place at a time. Different stores might slot, say, Tina Turner's *Private Dancer* (1984) into bins titled pop, R&B, soul, rock, or even "Black," reflecting *Billboard*'s shift away from "soul" as its name for their African American popular music chart in mid-1982 (cf. Brackett 2016, 293).[138] But the point is that record

[138] Brackett (2005, 74) recalls an anecdotal realization of this hypothetical storage issue when he searches for an album by The Drifters in a large music store, HMV. After searching through the "oldies" section, he is directed towards "R&B," despite the vast interval of both time and stylistic difference between his desired Drifters record and what would be understood as R&B in the first decade of the 2000s. At some point, the record store must place the recording somewhere, crystalizing its stylistic identity.

shops would have to choose a single bin to physically place the LP, cassette, or CD. Digital files, on the other hand, may participate rather freely in many generic categorizations since the structural architecture and access routines of file storage allow tracks or albums to embody a space more akin to that of Schrödinger's cat; they exist in limbo between multiple stylistic potentialities until they are localized by observation, collapsing their signifying wave form when labeled and placed into specific intertextual contexts.

Regardless, both the super abundance of genre labels in critical writings and the "death-of-genre" perspective permeate musical discourses and present a somewhat paradoxical state in the twenty-first-century *genreme*. To place these competing views in perspective, I turn to a bit of sociological research on taste to help contextualize the quantitative analysis that follows in Chapter 4.

III. Omnivorousness

Both the "death-of-genre" narrative and the proliferation of genre tags can be productively understood as an intensification or maximalization of a more general trend from musical snobbery towards omnivorousness suggested by sociologists over the past 25 or so years.[139] Since the early 1990s, scholars have interrogated Bourdieu's (1984) famous treatise on aesthetic taste in which—among many things—he essentially outlines isographic connections between various kinds of capital, class, and aesthetic taste or distinction. I'd like to just summarize a few key relevant concepts and findings of this massively influential text. First, as García-Alvarez et al. explain:

[139] The "death-of-genre" mindset could be linked to part of Attali's historical understanding of music's role in the late-20th century. "Fetishized as a commodity, music is illustrative of the evolution of our entire society: deritualize a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialize its practice, sell it as spectacle, *generalize its consumption*, then see to it that *it is stockpiled until it loses its meaning*" (Attali 1985, 5). Emphasis is mine. Attali's main argument points more directly towards the literal stockpiling of musical objects, along with the cheapening of experiential or ritualistic engagements with music and others. This has recently accelerated with streaming services attempting to provide a soundtrack to all activity. But Attali's point could also be read as the concomitant accumulation and flattening of various stylistic elements into a broad and undifferentiated morass of popular music. Both my case study on mashups and my following analysis of Spotify metadata argue against such a view in more detail.

> Bourdieu suggested that consumers' actions are the result of the dialectical relationship between the way they construct reality and the social conditions that "constrain" them. Therefore, cultural tastes and preferences serve to unify consumers with a similar symbolic construction of reality and to differentiate them from the rest. The process by which people classify cultural preferences, hence themselves, implies that the world of cultural preferences must be related to the hierarchical world of social class (Bourdieu's homology thesis), since it is both hierarchical and hierarchizing (García-Alvarez, Katz-Gerro, and López-Sintas 2007, 419).

In other words, Bourdieu found a general stratification of taste that largely mapped onto groups defined by class, from lowbrow to highbrow; snobbery and exclusion were bound up in the latter, helping to enact a striated hierarchical array of categories. These cultural categories (such as musical genres, cuisines, film genres, architecture, sartorial choices, etc.) and activities (museum and concert attendance, TV watching, cooking, etc.) often homologically represent their contemporaneous cultural, social, and economic hierarchies (though there are occasional frictions between the value of these different identities and groups.) Bourdieu maps cultural categories onto a multidimensional correlational space of class, social standing, and various kinds of capital—namely social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital. Doing so reveals how cultural taste and broader categories relate.

But taste is not simply a matter of a direct homological relation between consumer and category; *why* different socio-economic classes choose certain kinds of art matters. To crudely summarize, Bourdieu found that working-class folks in 1970s France tended to prefer art that subordinated form to function (like circus, melodrama, the music-hall, and big feature-films), while "high art" that elevated form over function (like the literature of Rousseau or Woolf, or the *Well-Tempered Clavier*) was preferred by those with more capital, i.e., the (petit) bourgeois.[140] A distanced Kantian aesthetic reigns for the bourgeois with "the absolute primacy of form over function"; art "categorically demands a purely aesthetic disposition" (Bourdieu 1984, 28).

[140] Especially relevant for my project are his Figure 1 and the discussion from pp. 1–41.

This split in aesthetic preferences and goals corresponds not just directly to a class hierarchy, but also to a split in the kinds of capital involved in these aesthetic distinctions and their social ties. Extrapolating from survey results that tie profession and class to musical genre preferences, Bourdieu explains how different intertwined kinds of capital—chiefly inherited cultural capital and academic capital, the latter of which correlates with the former—forge homologous relationships between aesthetics and class, with parameters like age playing a lesser, though not insignificant, role. In other words, genres or activities rich in cultural capital may be sought and valued more highly by certain groups than those musical categories steeped in economic capital—say, the cultural value imbued in hipster artpop vs. the economic capital that continues to guide classical genres like the symphony or opera. So taste, for Bourdieu, plays within a multidimensional matrix of values, goals, and aesthetics, but there remains a hierarchy from highbrow to lowbrow, with the highbrow fitting the taste of a dominant bourgeoisie.

Mirroring the somewhat more recent debates between "rockism" and "poptimism," this dominant bourgeois aesthetic has potentially undergone a significant revision, at least in the United States though likely more broadly.[141] In their 1996 summary of recent sociological work on musical taste, Peterson and Kern find a trend towards "omnivorousness" and eclecticism—which can be usefully compared to poptimism—and away from a musical snobbery that mirrors rockism (Peterson and Kern 1996). More recent studies have returned somewhat mixed results in terms of this trend towards aesthetic diffusion.[142] Rossman and Peterson (2015) actually found a decrease in omnivorousness from 1992 to 2008, which they admit could perhaps be explained by methodological issues.[143] Lizardo and Skiles, on the other hand, recreated the 1992 survey that Peterson and Kern

[141] For some relatively recent incarnations of the rockism/poptimism divide, see Sanneh 2004, Austerlitz 2014, and Lobenfeld 2016.

[142] A summary of the first decade and a half of research on omnivorousness may be found in Peterson 2005.

[143] Rossman and Peterson suggest that "it is either the case that omnivorousness was a fad peaking some time around 1992 or we simply cannot know the changing popularity of omnivorousness over time as changes in survey methodology render direct comparisons unreliable." I am more inclined to believe the latter, partially because what counts as a genre in popular

mined for their data supporting a rise in musical omnivorousness, and found a "continuing march toward a 'refusal to refuse' (which implies a putative 'openness to diversity') as an increasingly institutionalized manner of taste expression" (2015, 19). This openness suggests something similar to eclectic tendencies, but it remains somewhat distinct. Rather than actively liking or listening to many diverse kinds of music, omnivorous audiences merely allow them.

A collection of issues emerges from the scholarship on omnivorousness that I will address in the following quantitative analysis and the explication of #genre. First, Lizardo and Skiles suggest that "researchers will need to begin to look for more covert (and in certain ways more valid since more clearly tied to practice) indices of symbolic exclusion" as "individuals … become less likely to express (in the survey interview situation) dislikes for any musical style" (2015, 20). My interrogation of Spotify's metadata is one important way around this issue, skirting survey data to access the kinds of "covert" results Lizardo and Skiles desire. In particular, since Spotify's categorizational methods are partially based on the activities of their users' actual listening habits, I will "covertly" assess the "indices of symbolic exclusion" that emerge from listeners' categorizational impulses.

Second, as noted most forcefully by Will Atkinson, tastes and respondents in sociological studies are often "forced into the inadequate pre-defined genres and class categories of much survey research," which he believes "erroneously indicates omnivorousness" (2011, 185). Indeed, the genre labels used in many sociological surveys are far too broad. In a recent study (Rossman and Peterson 2015, 149–50), oldies, classic rock, and contemporary rock are all lumped together in a single category, while R&B is tethered to blues. The lack of sub-genre differentiation leaves little doubt that these quantitative, survey-based methods—while appropriate for generating large-scale correlations between broad categories of class or capital and genre—miss much of what matters to an experience

discourses and imagination change relatively rapidly. One need only survey the rise of "oldies" or "classic rock" to understand this phenomenon.

of our current variegated tumult of genres. Lizardo and Skiles acknowledge this possibility, but I think it needs direct investigation to accurately capture the smoother space of the genre landscape in the 2010s, acknowledging that both genres and genre-thinking have likely shifted since sociologists' initial research into omnivorousness over 25 years ago.

Finally, in public music discourses, there seems to be an overall general positive valence attached to omnivorousness as a flattening of genre boundaries. This is not unique to the musical world. Buamann and Johnston capture this view in their study on diverse culinary tastes, where they suggest that omnivorous choices are, on the one hand, "inclusive, multicultural, and broad; in other words, they are more democratic than the traditional [musical] hierarchy where only [classical music] was highly valorized and legitimated, and where knowledge of elite [music] was relatively restricted."[144] But on the other hand, "omnivorous [music] choices require large volumes of cultural and economic capital to be practiced fully and extensively" (Baumann and Johnston 2012, 2). In other words, omnivorousness, despite its utopian values of cross-cultural egalitarianism, ends up reenacting the cultural hierarchy of the "brow" system. Michèle Ollivier argues that "openness to cultural diversity … represents a new aesthetics and a new ethos, but it builds upon, rather than displaces, the older categories of high and mass culture in which it remains thoroughly embedded. Far from being dismantled, social and artistic hierarchies are being reconfigured in more individualized ways" (2008, 120).[145] In my following chapter, I will show how Spotify re-erects hierarchies, even while class distinctions and generic boundaries become somewhat attenuated.[146]

[144] The original study quoted here is about omnivorousness and a culinary hierarchy; I've replaced food-related words in the brackets to fit my point.

[145] Ollivier essentially posits four different modes of omnivorousness, challenging the possibility that all forms of eclectic taste might be equal; striations run through even the smoothed spaces of increasing openness.

[146] Of course, the troublesome high-brow/low-brow distinction endemic to snobbery has been a common target of much musicological and social critique, especially in the realm of popular music, and it would seem wise to take more seriously a general omnivorous collection of tastes. Two relatively early examples of musicologists confronting hierarchical distinctions in the study of popular music in particular are McClary and Walser (1990) and Fink (1998).

Supporting Ollivier's point, Peterson and Kern suggest that, despite the more eclectic tastes of musical omnivores, modern listeners still *distinguish* between types of music: "While by definition hostile to snobbish closure, omnivorousness does not imply an indifference to distinctions. Rather its emergence may suggest the formulation of new rules governing symbolic boundaries" (1996, 904). In this way, an increased openness or access to many kinds of music (the fundamental component of current listening and consumption models) fails to totally erode the edifice of categorization; it rather seeks to flatten and smooth out the generic space while creating more supple barriers.[147] Genre isn't dead, but it perhaps means and functions in novel ways.

Whatever the final consensus on omnivorousness will be for the sociological community, this chapter points towards a shift in genre from a particular esthesic perspective. What counts as a popular music category and how people directly experience and engage with genre need direct confrontation. In the next chapter, I interrogate these fluid lines of classification while quantitatively assessing how "genre and mood are treated as mathematical relationships among metadata," in James's terms (2017b), while qualitatively theorizing the resultant milieu which contains both "death-of-genre" perspectives and activities of overabundant tagging.

[147] I address the differential suppleness or rigidity of generic borders in current popular music later in the following chapter while confronting some pitfalls of the snobbery-to-omnivorousness narrative.

Chapter 4: #GENRE AND CATEGORIZATION MACHINES

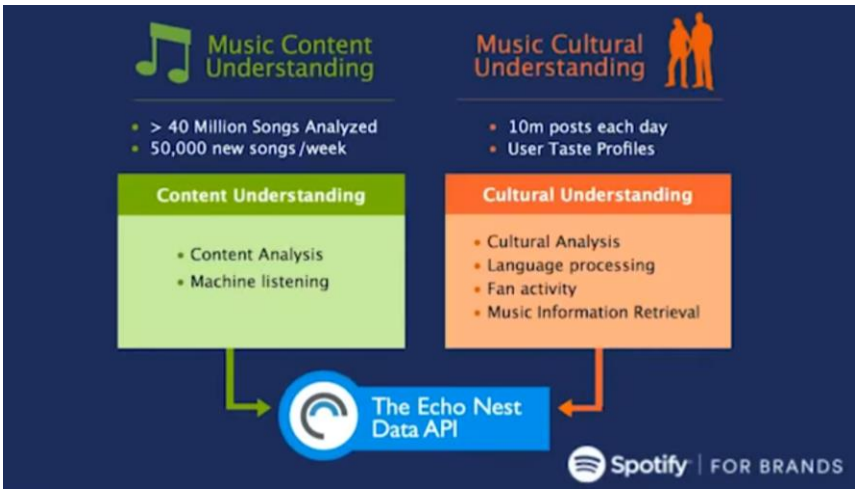
I. Spotify and Python Methodology

As one way of exploring the imbrication of omnivorousness, snobbery, and categorization immanent within #genre, this chapter interrogates some music-industrial machinations that form a feedback loop between mediated structures and guided experiences of genre. Recall that #genre consists of three main parts: algorithmically derived relationships, genre tags, and playlist constituency. This chapter lays out my method for quantifying the first two of these aspects of #genre, helping me grapple with the paradoxical notion that genre matters enough to provide a string of descriptors which guide living expectations, while it is simultaneously seen as dead.[148] I will tackle algorithmically derived similarity measures and genre tags in this chapter by investigating how artists cluster together in Spotify. Comparing these clusters with the top-down, music-industry genre labels that Spotify applies to artists opens a window into the entanglement of industry and consumer. Even though the metrics I formulate remain inaccessible to most users, their consequences largely capture the complex *experience* of current popular music categorization by tying together the interrelated generators of classifications and groupings that guide current consumption. As I explain below, artist clusters and their genre labels form the two main metrics for investigating #genre in this chapter: cluster size and cluster diffusion.

I focus on Spotify metadata for a number of interrelated reasons. First, it is relatively easily accessible. Though the proprietary algorithms and musical objects behind the data are shrouded in mystery, Spotify has made lots of information about those algorithms' results accessible for potential app developers, which allows me to quickly get information about related artists, genre tags, popularity,

[148] As a cynical retort to the "genre-is-dead" mentality, a line from Nietzsche comes to mind: "How can anything dead 'be'?" (1968, 312). At the very least, it should be enough to suggest that genre is really a *becoming* and not so much a *being*,. David Brackett's notion of genre-as-citationality similarly highlights genre's active, becoming, dynamic, and emergent quality (2016, 11–13). Placing this into an explicit Deleuzian frame, Chris Stover summarizes that "for Deleuze, being and becoming are not ontological categories paired against one another—there is only one kind of being, and that being is becoming" (Stover 2017, fn 3). So, since genre *is*, then it cannot be dead, and it must be a process of *becoming*.

and followers for artists. Second, the "related artists" lists of Spotify allow me a unique view into listening habits not available to survey methods like those of the sociologists investigating omnivorousness. This is perhaps the most attractive aspect of combing through Spotify's metadata; the results are fundamentally shaped by the feedback loops of listening trends and algorithmic predictions that have created a *new* type of musical ordering of popular music genres without having to rely on potentially biased responses to impersonal and tedious surveys. Third, Spotify is both extremely popular and financially motivated to either reflect or shape current categorizational impulses, so in short and at least, it embodies one important genre-machine.[149]



EXAMPLE 4.1. Spotify's advertising-directed summary of their approach to musical categorization and understanding, split neatly into the "music" and the "cultural," mirroring music theory's and musicology's long-standing bifurcation into "style" and "genre."

[149] According to a first-quarter report by Nielsen Music, "on-demand streaming climbed 35.2 percent in Q1 to 133.9 billion streams, up from 99.1 billion in the corresponding first three months of 2016. …This explosive growth in streaming comes after 2016's overall increase of 39.2 percent to 432 billion on-demand streams from 2015's 310 billion, as recorded by Nielsen Music." In other words, in just the two-year period from 2015 to 2017, streaming will have grown by nearly 88 percent. Spotify, which has roughly 160 million users divided about equally between paying subscribers and active free users, presents an obviously large portion of this increase, and thus it necessarily shapes consumption. This is why I believe it is so important to analyze the ways Spotify categorizes music since it has an outsized impact on an exponentially increasing mode of popular music distribution. For the 2017 growth stats, see Christman 2017. Spotify's user numbers have been gleaned from their own source: https://press.spotify.com/us/about/ accessed May 12, 2017. Future work will investigate other streaming services in more depth since they have recently gained in popularity. Apple Music, for example, has recently claimed more paying customers than Spotify (Turner 2018), and Tidal, despite its recent legal issues (Park 2018), continues to claim exclusive releases by major artists. These services' means of categorization should be placed into context of their listening audiences to understand connections between identity, taste, and genre.

Spotify also provides a unique and explicit test-case for the feasibility of the style-genre binary, as the company consciously strives to understand both "music content" and "music culture." **EXAMPLE 4.1** above is a screenshot from a talk given by Brian Benedik, Spotify's VP and Global Head of Ad Monetization (as of 2015), which summarizes their two-pronged approach towards data collection, musical categorization, and identity.[150] As I'll show, these ostensibly separate approaches—to content and to culture—belie the Janus-faced nature of each, resulting from the rather complicated state of our current genreme.

Though I cannot possibly know exactly how Spotify derives its related artists, it's worth briefly outlining the process from information they've made public.[151] Unlike Pandora's Music Genome Project—which attempts to systematically and taxonomically "capture the musical identity of a song" by having real people working in tandem with algorithms to analyze "up to 400 distinct musical characteristics"—the Spotify's related artists section has little to no reliance on analysis of audio or musical features.[152] Instead, users are pointed towards similar musical acts through increasingly opaque machine-learning algorithms based on users' listening habits and social media interactions. As of June 2016, related artists were determined based on co-existence on playlists and on general listening trends: "Spotify's related artists and radio are determined by algorithms which look at what people listen to

[150] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ej9Ggd0Jbo. The odd beaming on the musical notes serves as a useful metaphor for part of my critique, embodying, perhaps, a disjunction between "musical content" and corporate "understandings" of music.

[151] Though I will partially examine the machinations behind some of Spotify's similarity measures, I am happy to leave secret the so-called "black box" of the proprietary algorithms I discuss, following the attitudes outlined in Nick Seaver's (2016) recent work. By "de-emphasizing secrecy," he suggests an emphasis on "identifying common sensibilities across the network—cultural ideas about music, listeners, and listening that are not secret and that shape the production of algorithmic systems." In other words, analyzing a combination of the *results* of these algorithms and the cultural exigencies that surround them provides sufficient information for a productive engagement. I should also note that Spotify has used multiple strategies—often in tandem—from different teams to determine both recommendations and related artists. As explained by Andy Sloane, an engineer at the company, four main models are used to determine related artists: implicit matrix factorization, "vector-exp," Google's word2vec, and a "cultural similarity" measure based on scraping web pages and social media. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX_ARH-KoDg beginning at 56:20. Basically, the first three of these create a multi-dimensional vector space in which artists, songs, or users are mapped based on different parameters or on shared spaces. The "distance" between these artist- or song-vectors then represents their similarity. See my brief explanation of collaborative filtering in Chapter 1 for a bit more context on these ideas.

[152] http://www.pandora.com/corporate/mgp.shtml accessed 3/29/17.

alongside your music. So, if I put your music in a playlist alongside artist X & artist Y then artists X & Y are more likely to be shown as related to you or played on radio."[153] But by February 2017, Spotify began sifting through social media data with wider ranging searching methods, adding a wrinkle to the listening data. Now social-media mentions partially determine links between artists. As Spotify explains, "[Related artists are] determined automatically by combining music discussions and trends happening around the internet with Spotify user listening data. They'll update as your fans listen to more music on Spotify, and as more people around the web start talking about your music."[154]

Whatever the method, Spotify's related artists consciously model a microcosm of current folk taxonomies of artists worthy of direct investigation.[155] David Brackett explains:

> In industry-based practice, Glenn McDonald's work with EchoNest and Spotify illustrates some of the difficulties already discussed in connection to MIR [music information retrieval] work in general in its tension between trait-based reification and discourse-based folk taxonomies that guide quotidian use of genre labels. McDonald has explained that EchoNest's response has been to rely on *connections between artists* rather than individual songs or albums as a way of organizing the similarity relations on which the company's taxonomies are based (2016, 325). Emphasis is mine.

As one might suspect, and as I'll eventually show in this chapter, an emphasis on *artists* foregrounds the deep interconnection between supposedly discrete objective elements of "style" and subjective "extramusical" elements of "genre." I have already argued in this dissertation for the attenuation of the "style"/"genre" binary, and this chapter throws the distinction under additional investigative light. Furthermore, the focus on artists also means that Spotify's taxonomies of music necessarily enact taxonomies of identity, inevitably segregating musicians by demographics.

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[153] These descriptions come from Spotify itself, as documented by (Fowler 2016).

[154] https://artists.spotify.com/faq/music#can-i-update-my-related-artists (accessed 2/22/17). As of January 2018, Spotify has removed all questions concerning related artists on their FAQ and websites.

[155] I use the term "folk taxonomy" deliberately *contra* George Lakoff's definition. Lakoff connects "our everyday folk theory of what a category is" to classical category theory, which suggests that "categories are based on shared properties" (1987, 5). As mentioned throughout the dissertation and specifically in the introduction, I agree with his assertion that classical category theory simply cannot accurately or entirely describe how categories work; but his introductory, and seemingly innocuous, suggestion that it is bound up in the same processes as "folk theories" of taxonomies is either outmoded or myopic.

To quantify these issues, I posit two metrics: cluster size (S) and cluster diffusion (D), which directly confront the impetus to classify artists. Put simply, S measures how many unique related artists an input artist has at different levels of closeness, and D measures how stylistically wide or narrow Spotify considers a cluster to be. In essence, these metrics address the genre conception from the anecdote mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3, that a single artist might be understood as a popular music category unto themselves, creating a direct dialogue with prototype category theory (Rosch 1978).

II. S (Cluster Size) methodology

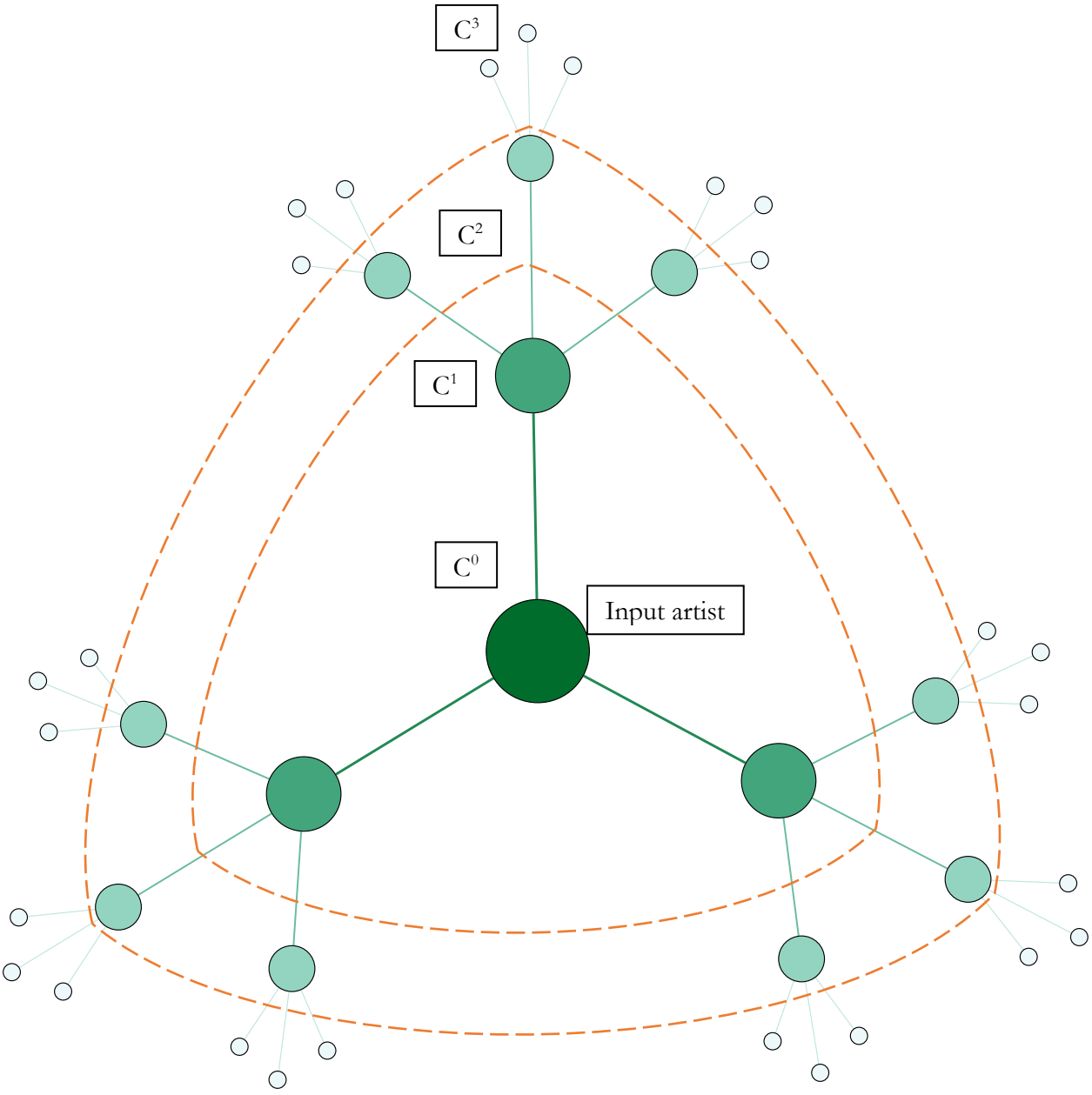
I show a graphic visualization of my Python code to determine cluster members and cluster size in **EXAMPLE 4.2**.[156] The first part of the process is to select an artist (C^0, the prime "cluster" of cardinality 1), represented by the top-most circle. The artist, along with its *n* number of related artists constitutes its first cluster (C^1).[157] For the purposes of these figures, *n* is 3 for ease of visual reference, but in my later examples and graphs, *n* is 10. So, my Python script finds $S^1 = n + 1$ artists for C^1.

The script then iterates over each of the members of (C^1), resulting in a second cluster (C^2) that's exponentially larger, with $S^2_{max} = n^2 + n + 1$ total possible related artists. I iterate the script again for each of these artists to get a total of $S^3_{max} = n^3 + n^2 + n + 1$ total possible artists in the third cluster (C^3). For $n = 3, S^3_{max} = 40$. For $n = 10, S^3_{max} = 1111$. More generally:

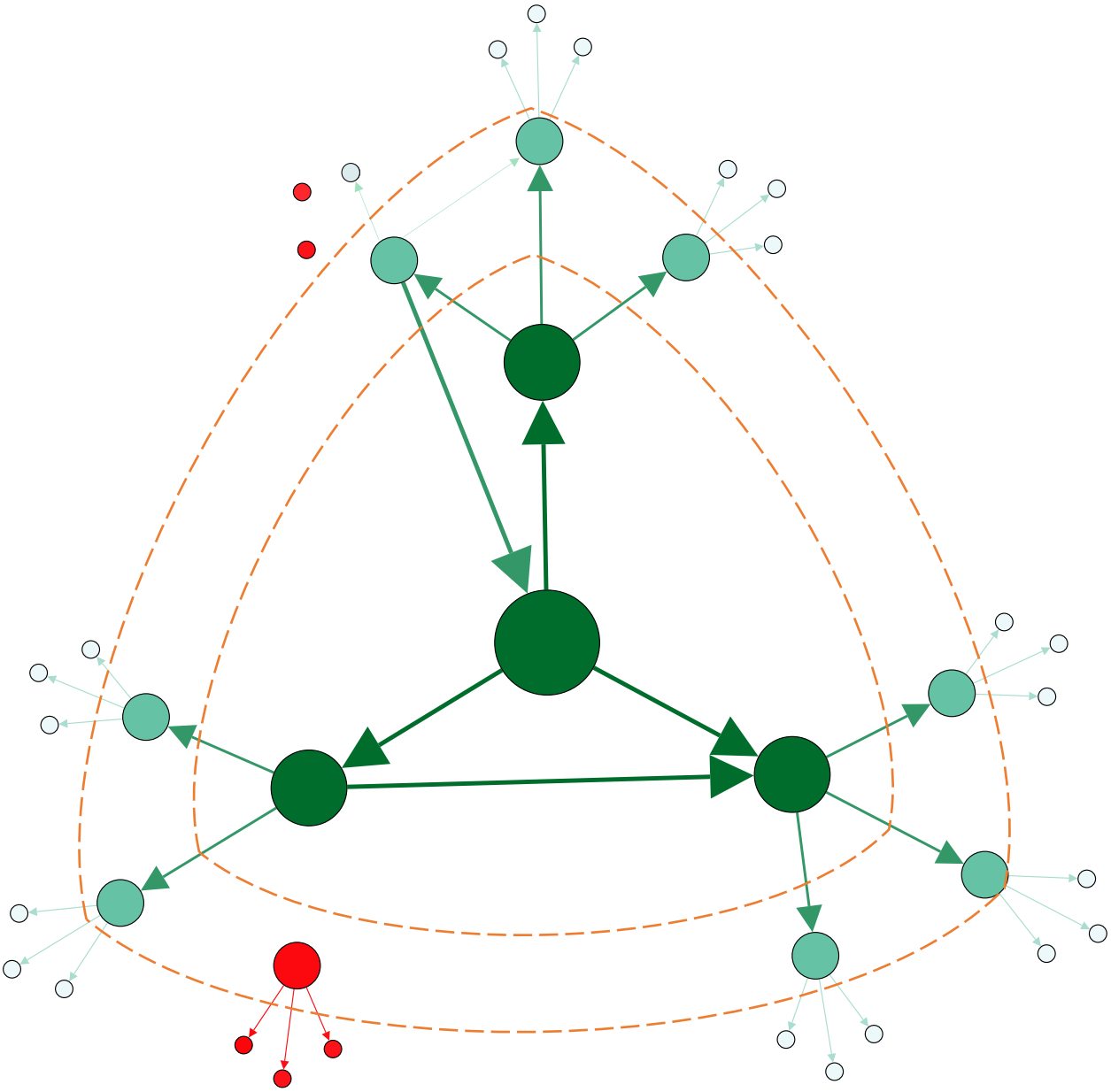
$$S^c = \sum_{c=0}^{m} n^c$$

[156] I have made this code publicly available on GitHub: https://github.com/tgj505/Spotify-clusters.
[157] Every lower-level cluster is a subset of all larger clusters: $C^0 \subset C^1 \subset C^2 \subset C^3$.

where n is the number of related artists to search, c is the level of the cluster, and m is the largest cluster to find. Spotify holds at most 20 related artists, or $n_{max} = 20$. $c = 0$ indicates the simple zeroth order cluster with the initial artist (C^0). For my later graphs, this will be specifically: $S^c = \sum_{c=0}^{3} 10^c$.



EXAMPLE 4.2. A generalized representation of my cluster methodology, which each successive layer moving down the chart containing clusters more distantly related to the original artist. Each concentric rounded-triangle presents an additional layer of related-artist clusters more distantly related to the original. The inner triangle presents the first-related cluster; the next rounded triangle contains the second cluster; the third cluster includes all the nodes in the graph.

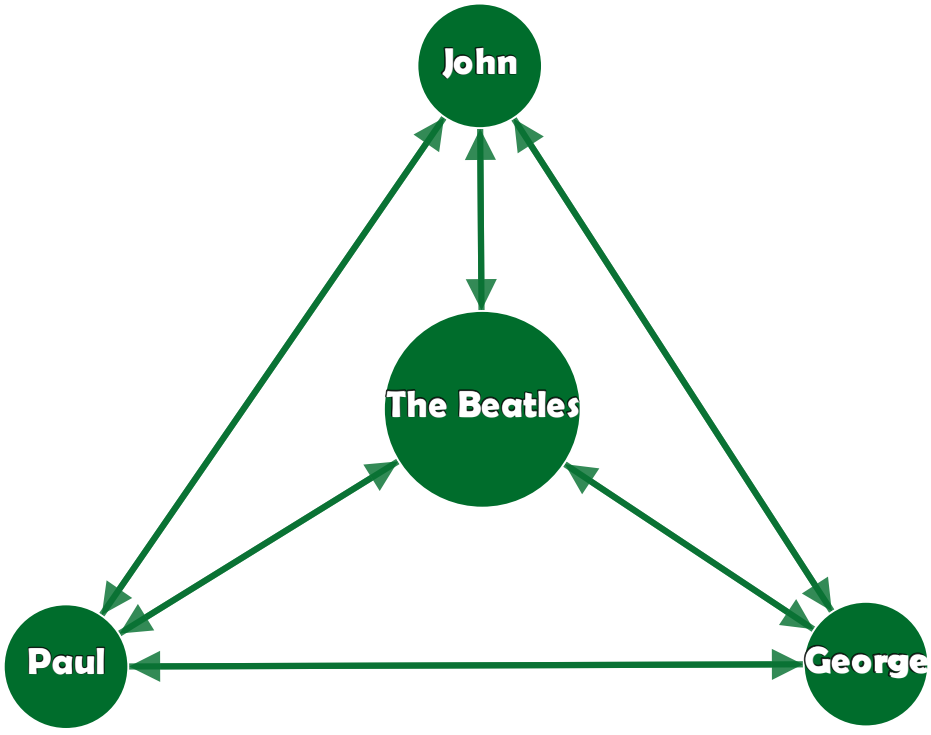


EXAMPLE 4.3. An abstract instance showing how cluster sizes tend to be much smaller than the total possible maximum. In this case, the red circles represent connections lost to incestuous links between related artists in closer, earlier levels of clustering.

However, as might be expected, there are often far fewer than the total possible number of related artists in a cluster, meaning S^2 and S^3 usually fall short of S^2_{max} and S^3_{max}, respectively. **EXAMPLE 4.3** provides one such abstract instance of cluster-node overlap that reduces both S^2 and S^3. One member of C^1 has as one of its related artists another member of C^1, reducing S^3 by $n + 1$.

A member of C^2 has another member of C^2 as a related artist, in addition to the original artist. All told, S^3 in this instance is $2n$ smaller than S^3_{max}. In general, S^3 is frequently much smaller than S^3_{max} since elements of C^n are likely to be related to other members in C^n.

Such likelihood, measured by the difference between S^c_{max} and S^c, represents a sort of density of a given artist's cluster. The larger the difference—equivalent to saying the smallness of S^n—the tighter the cluster. For example, in an $n = 3$ analysis of The Beatles, shown in **EXAMPLE 4.4**, $S^3 = S^1 = 4$ where $S^3_{max} = 40$. The Beatles' three most closely related artists, according to Spotify's algorithms, are the solo acts of George Harrison, John Lennon, and Paul McCartney. These three in turn are most closely related to each other and their parent band, resulting in an extremely small, completely degenerate cluster. Increasing the *n* index lessens the chance of these sorts of cyclical iterative limits. When $n = 10$, for instance, the Beatles rocket out of this gravitational well of relations, finding a robust 229 unique artists in C^3 out of a S^3max of 1111.



EXAMPLE 4.4. An example of maximum incestuousness of relations in the Beatles related artist cluster.

In sum, those artists with higher S^n numbers connect to more artists and thus have larger clusters. After a discussion of my other metric, cluster diffusion (D), I will show how these measures correlate both with each other and with larger sociocultural parameters, necessitating the novel frame for popular music categorization that #genre provides.

III. D (Cluster Diffusion) methodology

My methodology for determining cluster diffusion is straightforward. Spotify provides each artist with a number of genre tags as part of its metadata. My cluster diffusion metric simply counts the number of *unique* genre tags given to all members of a given cluster level. How these are applied, however, depends on rather obscure procedures.[158]

Compared to the S measures, which are determined chiefly by esthesic, real-world habits of listening (mediated by industry-driven algorithms), genre tags for Spotify involve both automatic, MIR-style analysis as well as a bit of direct curatorial intervention. There seem to be two basic processes for determining genre tags. First, songs are automatically analyzed for a variety of factors (similar to but distinct from Pandora's parameters in their Music Genome Project).[159] Glenn McDonald explains in an interview that, "there's no emotion involved. The machines are not pretending to be people. They're just trying to find mathematical ways of approximating the effect that humans get from music so the scores can be intelligible and reliable" (Patch 2016). And, as McDonald's interviewer explains, "once the machines have identified sonic similarities, a human touch

[158] Glenn McDonald's list of all genre tags currently employed by Spotify can be found at: http://everynoise.com/everynoise1d.cgi?scope=all. As of March 29, 2017, the list had 1505 genre tags. By July 27, 2018, this had blossomed to 1898 tags. Many of these new genres are tied to specific places, matching Spotify's increasingly global reach.

[159] There are 13 measures, or "audio features," made available to the public for every track on Spotify. These are: danceability, energy, key, loudness, mode, speechiness, acousticness, instrumentalness, liveness, valence, tempo, time signature, and duration. A brief description of each can be found here: https://developer.spotify.com/web-api/get-audio-features/ (accessed 3/30/17).

is required to research the sub-genres or create new ones, a task that often falls to McDonald himself." This process, then, is that algorithms find songs that sound alike, then they feed their artists to people like McDonald who will label them with genres. But these algorithims are of course created by and tested by human agents, so their results will still involve some aspects of professional curation.

However, there's another much more esthesic mode of genre labeling at play for Spotify. Whereas the above method apparently relies on sonic similarities, McDonald has elsewhere explained that genre titles are also determined by user activity. As a particular example, the genre "escape room" was generated "from collective listening patterns," which McDonald attempted to capture through a neologism. Since similar Spotify users apparently listened to a loose collection of artists that sound somewhat similar, a genre label emerged that refers to what McDonald described as "kind of an underground-trap/PC-music/indietronic/activist-hip-hop kind of thing" (Hu 2016). McDonald deploys an abundance of stylistic descriptors to justify the new label, clearly engaging that strain of omnivorous popular discourse.

Tags are thus determined with a heterogeneous ensemble of strategies, including machine learning, audio analysis, web scraping, listener activity, and human curatorial intervention.[160] And although these tags are available in the metadata (and Spotify's API), the genres remain largely hidden to most users. Whatever method is used to apply the tags, they provide a useful measure of how one part of the music-industrial machine categorizes music. A few examples of musicians and their tags, chosen *ad hoc*, can be found in **TABLE 4.1**, showing a glimpse of this portion of my metadata methodology.

[160] Goldschmitt and Seaver (Forthcoming) describe the complexity of how different technologies of recommendation and categorization blend together in streaming services: "A service like Spotify, then, is essentially heterogeneous, offering a variety of recommendation products that depend on a variety of techniques; those techniques are heterogeneous, too, composed out of human and algorithmic parts that are constantly reconfigured into arrangements that make it difficult to distinguish between the human and the algorithmic at any level." This is, again, why I choose to leave the actual processes of algorithmic recommendation and similarity measures within their enclosed black boxes.

NAME	# OF GENRES	GENRE LIST
2Pac	6	g funk, gangster rap, hip hop, pop rap, rap, west coast rap
The Beatles	6	british invasion, classic rock, merseybeat, protopunk, psychedelic rock, rock
Beyoncé	4	dance pop, pop, pop rap, r&b
Dirty Projectors	26	alternative dance, alternative rock, anti-folk, brooklyn indie, chamber pop, chamber psych, chillwave, dance-punk, dream pop, escape room, folk-pop, freak folk, indie folk, indie pop, indie r&b, indie rock, indietronica, lo-fi, neo-psychedelic, new rave, noise pop, noise rock, shimmer pop, singer-songwriter, stomp and holler, synthpop
Garth Brooks	3	contemporary country, country, country road
Feist	13	canadian indie, canadian pop, chamber pop, folk-pop, freak folk, indie folk, indie pop, indie r&b, indie rock, indietronica, pop rock, slow core, soul
Future	5	dwn trap, pop rap, rap, southern hip hop, trap music
J Dilla	6	alternative hip hop, detroit hip hop, hip hop, indie r&b, neo soul, underground hip hop
Kendrick Lamar	4	hip hop, pop rap, rap, west coast rap
Migos	4	dwn trap, pop rap, rap, trap music
Miranda Lambert	4	contemporary country, country, country dawn, country road
Nirvana	7	alternative metal, alternative rock, classic rock, grunge, permanent wave, post-grunge, rock
Patti LaBelle	18	chicago soul, classic funk rock, dance pop, disco, funk, hip pop, memphis soul, motown, neo soul, new jack swing, pop, post-disco, quiet storm, r&b, soul, soul blues, southern soul, urban contemporary

TABLE 4.1. A few exemplary cases of genres tagged to artists in Spotify (or D^0). The two outliers in this subset, Feist and Patti LaBelle, are well known for their long and varied careers. Later in this chapter I will discuss why a band like Dirty Projectors has more genre tags than the five hip-hop musicians on this list combined. This table is simply meant to show some of the kinds of tags Spotify applies to artists.

IV. Some Artist-Level Results (C^0)

Before diving into how S and D interact in clusters, I want to pause to look at how labels get applied to single artists. My main argument for the D numbers of higher-order clusters is that the larger the number of unique genres, the more stylistically diffuse Spotify believes the cluster to be, which is likely tied to a higher cultural capital given the value placed in musical omnivorousness discussed in the previous chapter. But, this kind of correlation is rather unstable at lower cluster levels, especially when looking at single artists. For example, Migos's small number of genre tags ($D^0 = 4$: "dwn trap", "pop rap", "rap", and "trap music") accurately predicts the narrower range of musical styles that they perform, while Beyoncé's identical genre tag cardinality ($D^0 = 4$: "dance pop", "pop", "pop rap", and "r&b") fails to capture the diversity of her output.[161] Huron's concept of a firewall seems appropriate here. "The capacity for brains to protect schemas from overgeneralized learning" applies as *certain* genre tags can be more limiting than others in terms of anticipated perceptual results (Huron 2006, 414). "dwn trap" and "trap music" both have more relative specificity than "pop" or "r&b" and act as stronger firewalls.

But sometimes the asymmetry between these specificities reveal serious categorical biases and impulses. The band Tame Impala, for instance, gets the tags "australian alternative rock, indie pop, indie rock, indietronica, neo-psychedelic, and psychedelic rock." Replete with genre signifiers, Tame Impala's website similarly describes their 2015 album, *Currents*:

> Again operating as a one man studio band, Parker's resultant record calls to mind contemporary **hip hop** production, Thriller, **fried 70s funk**, the irreverent playground Daft Punk presented on *Discovery*, swathes of **future pop** and **emotional 80s balladry**, all filtered through a thoroughly **modern psychedelic** third eye.[162]

[161] As of this writing, Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, an album drawing upon a wide variety of styles including rock, remains off Spotify, though her country-rock collaboration with the Dixie Chicks, "Daddy Lessons," can be found on the service. The conclusion of this chapter will directly confront this issue through Robin James's recent work on "post-genre" and "post-identity."

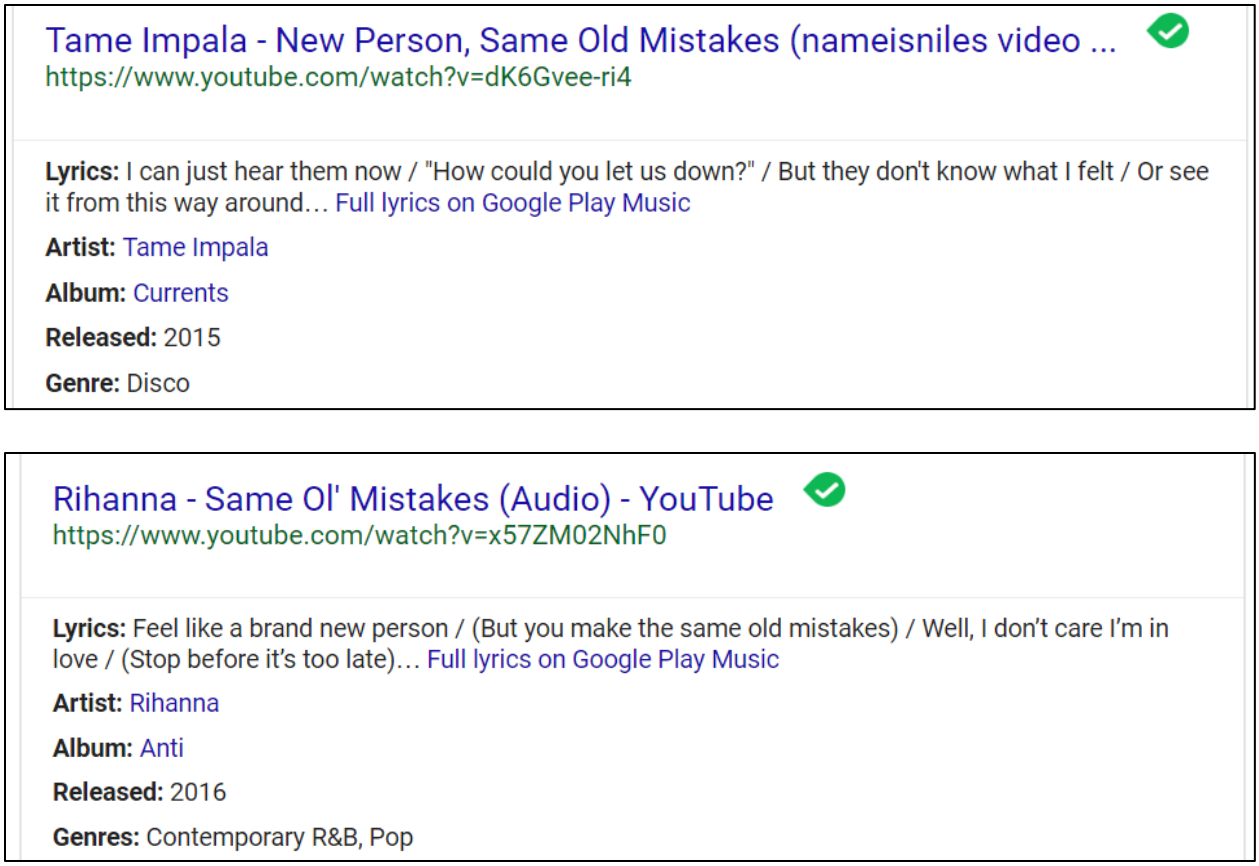
[162] http://www.tameimpala.com/biography/ (accessed 4/8/17.) Emphasis is mine.

Seeing these kinds of tags—which are one part of #genre—creates a set of expectations for knowledgeable listeners that might include some assemblage of timbres associated with rock, electronic or synthesized sounds, careful production, and an experimental structure. A song from that album, like "New Person, Same Old Mistakes," certainly captures these elements of semiosis, with its "sitar-like frill," "hints of shimmering Philly soul," and an "engagement with the dubby textures and repetitive melodies of purple R&B," according to *Pitchfork*'s Ian Cohen (2015).[163] Eclectic generic signifiers float throughout the track.

Conversely, what might we expect from an artist, like Rihanna, that Spotify tags as "dance pop," "pop," "r&b," and "urban contemporary"? Perhaps a track with upbeat, slickly produced combination of synth, drums, and bass with a certain mode of melismatic singing. These are somewhat vague, high-level meta-generic labels, without the relative specificity of tags like "neo-psychedelic" that Tame Impala gets, but they should still provide our listening some guidance. But when Rihanna covers Tame Impala with her song, "Same Ol' Mistakes," the disparity in genre tags is striking—nearly identical sonic manifestations (or "musical content") get described differently based on the artist's identity.[164] The argument, then, is that Spotify's genre tags for an artist don't necessarily match up to how many different styles they actually engage with; they're basically first approximations which are more accurate for some musicians than others. Rihanna plays more kinds of music than just "dance pop," "pop," "r&b," and "urban contemporary" even if she—and thus her music—is categorized with these labels. This issue far outstrips just Spotify; as I show in **EXAMPLE 4.5** below, Google/YouTube similarly tags Rihanna's version as "Contemporary R&B," and "Pop," but calls the Tame Impala original "Disco." Something besides "the music itself" is at play in these genre labels.

[163] The whole review is chock full of stylistic descriptors, indicating the continuing value of genre for esthesic critical reception.

[164] Rihanna's cover is almost identical to the original, representing what Evan Ware (2015) would call an "isomorphic" cover rather than a "metaphoric" cover.



EXAMPLE 4.5. Google's/YouTube's boxed search results for the songs, "New Person, Same Old Mistakes" and "Same Ol' Mistakes" respectively, highlighting the difference in generic categorization.[165]

Derrida's (1980) distinction between genre as *participation* and genre as *belonging* is important here. Responding to the classical category conception of genre, Derrida problematizes the idea that genres are sets connected by essential traits, instead suggesting that genre functions more as a mark or trait itself. In other words, a text roams among and between genres without being confined, yet the mark of genre(s) is inevitable. I quote him at length:

> Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic, and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the trait of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself. If remarks of

[165] Accessed April 8, 2017. I follow Noble 2018 in using screenshots as an mechanism of archiving.

> belonging belong without belonging, participate without belonging, then genre-designations cannot be simply part of the corpus (Derrida 1980, 65).

Spotify's genre tags function rather like these "marks," though they demarcate artists rather than their texts. However, as I will show below, the role of belonging or participating is not evenly distributed among different kinds of artists. "In the code of set theories," Derrida further explains, "if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" (1980, 59). As an indication of omnivorousness, a higher cardinality of genre tags indexes a wider range of participation, matching the "abundant overflowing" that was shown to be highly valued in the sociological literature cited in the previous chapter. But some artists, like Rihanna, *participate* in many more genres than they are commonly understood as *belonging* to, and Spotify's genre labels do the same work as the arborescent taxonomies outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, limiting her potential participation. The discrepancy in genre cardinalities shows how participation and belonging are unequally afforded for different kinds of artists.

How typical are these sorts of discrepancies? **EXAMPLE 4.6A** compares how many genre tags Spotify grants to artists associated with different large-scale categories. The x-axis measures the number of genre tags and the Y-axis measures their popularity. The graph contains a collection of 200 artists from rock, rap, and pop which I chose in a somewhat *ad hoc* though non-random manner.[166] The list contains a broad selection of popular groups from *Billboard* charts and Spotify top 10 lists as of Spring 2017, chronologically and demographically diverse hip hop acts, common bands from music theory articles, and some current and recent indie rock artists from Pitchfork's "best of 2016" list. [167] Though small in comparison to the number of artists a typical listener might encounter (and certainly

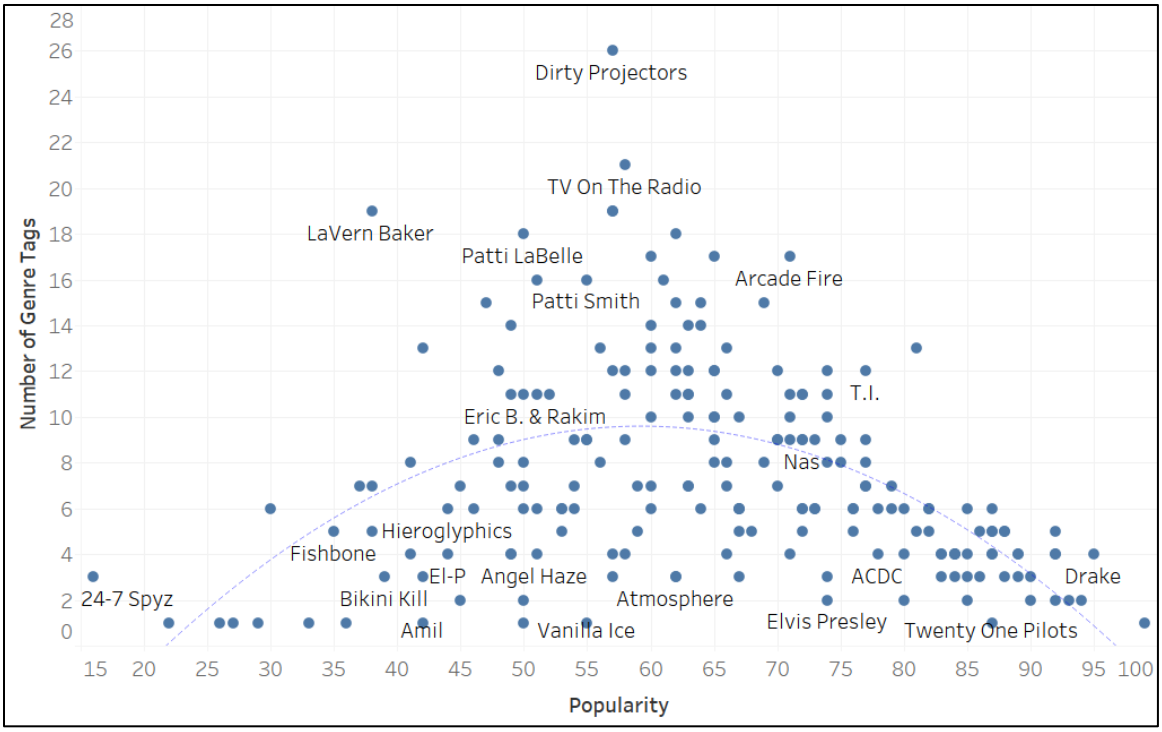
[166] Of course, 200 artists is a relatively small sample size, but the results can likely be replicated at higher cardinalities, as I display with a hip hop corpus later in this chapter. I will also suggest additional techniques on a corpus of over 11,000 artists towards the end of this chapter that will serve as the basis for future research.
[167] Find my full datasets of artists, tags, and clusters for all examples in this chapter at: https://goo.gl/Sr3kon.

miniscule compared to the hundreds of thousands of artists in Spotify's catalog), the list is meant to touch on a variety of styles while paying deference to currently popular groups as well. The inclusion of a large hip-hop sample will become clearer in the next section, but I am interested in how categorizations of this large-scale genre compare with canonical bands and artists of academic music theory literature.[168] Having been hugely influential on the popular music scene more recently than rock, I think the way hip hop gets structured by the music-industrial machine provides key insights into our current genreme.

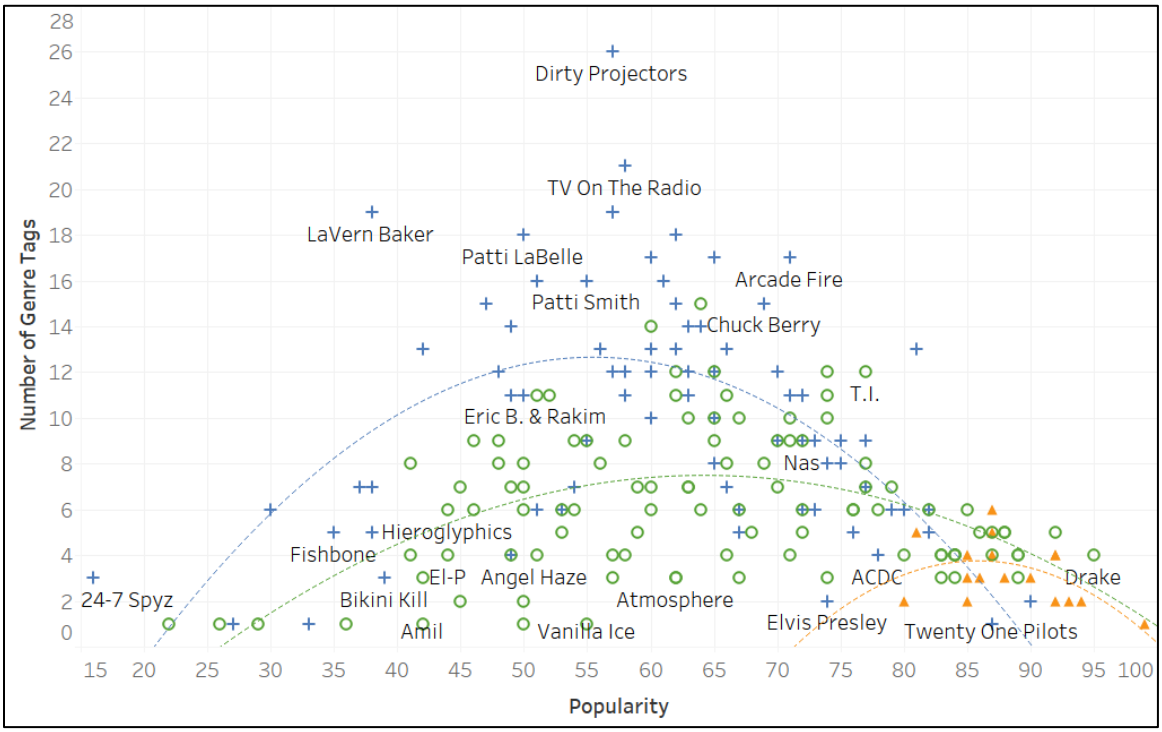
In **EXAMPLE 4.6A**, notice that the most popular acts, like Rihanna, and the least popular acts have relatively few genre tags; musicians with the most genre tags tend to be moderately popular. This Gaussian distribution aligns with some of Spotify's goals; they want you to "discover" new artists, and they help themselves by providing lots of genre-tag info for the artists that are not so well-known in hopes that they'll be able to accurately predict if you'd like the music in this liminal range. But it also necessarily means an unequal distribution of stylistic capital between different kinds of musicians.

Indeed, **EXAMPLE 4.6B** illuminates how large-scale categories of rock, hip hop, and pop artists are treated differently. Regardless of popularity, rock has the widest range and largest average number of genre tags. One might argue that this is simply a result of rock's longer chronological pedigree—having been around longer than hip hop, rock has had time to accumulate more tags, "agglomerating very diverse acts" like a sort of long stylistic tuber (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). While this could be true, it does not invalidate the disparity between the number of genre tags applied to *each artist*. In other words, rock artists get more tags than rap artists partially because they have more tags available, but also at least partially because Spotify believes them to engage with more *kinds* of music.

[168] In their quantitative study of popular music evolution, Mauch et al. suggest that "the rise of RAP and related genres [around 1991] appears, then, to be the single most important event that has shaped the musical structure of the American charts in the period that we studied" (2015, 7–8). Though the proliferation of alternative and grunge certainly affected the popular music scene during the same period, the explosion in variety of styles of hip hop during the late '80s and early '90s profoundly shook the core of the popular music world with reverberations that still resonate today.



EXAMPLE 4.6A. Distribution of genre tags compared to popularity in Spotify's metadata for the 199 artists and bands of my corpus.



EXAMPLE 4.6B. The same distribution as **EXAMPLE 4.6A** but with the large-scale generic categories of rock (blue pluses), pop (orange triangles), and hip-hop (green circles) separated. Note the higher number of tags (D^0) for rock than for either of the other basic-level generic categories. ($median\ D^0_{rock} = 10; med\ D^0_{hip\ hop} = 6;\ med\ D^0_{pop} = 3$).

Spotify's continual investment of genre-capital into less-popular rock and indie artists updates Will Straw's analysis of gender and music collection from the end of the twentieth century, which traces "the successful adaptation of rock music's masculinist impulses to an era of sampling or niche market obscurantism" (Straw 1997, 15). Making this explicit, an app called "Obscurify," lauded by some members of Spotify's development team, "quantifies the uniqueness of your music taste," directly embodying the interpenetration of capital and masculinist valorization of the hunt for the obscure.[169] These sorts of values implicitly direct movements of the music industrial machine as it expends more energy classifying lesser known rock, metal, alternative, and indie bands while drawing from the bank of more popular music. Attention and capital flow towards artists like Dirty Projectors or TV On The Radio, goading esthesic use-value to follow.

As another clear example, Chance the Rapper gets tagged with "dwn trap," "pop rap," and "rap" despite near universal praise for the stylistic flexibility of his recent album, *Coloring Book* (2016). Reviews often focused directly on the genre-b(l)ending aspect of his work, with gospel taking center stage. "If you're expecting a straightforward hip-hop album with seething, pop-off verses," reviewer Alejandra Ramirez (2016) suggested, "you may be disappointed. *Coloring Book* is a gospel album that coalesces hip-hop, spoken word, soul, jazz, and funk". *The Guardian* critic, Dave Simpson (2016), lauds the album's genre-inventiveness, writing that "[Chance] has the tunes to pull it off, and a terrific band, the Social Experiment (including that not-exactly hip-hop staple, a trumpet), who deliver songs which are both boundary-pushing hip-hop and audibly steeped in black music history, from doo wop to soul to funk to exuberant electro…and especially gospel." By ignoring these clearly important genres when tagging Chance—not to mention his 2017 Grammy performance which featured a full gospel choir—Spotify implicitly enacts a classical categorization theory for rap based on a reductivist, essentialized notion of hip hop in which the presence or absence of basic signifiers or elements are apparently

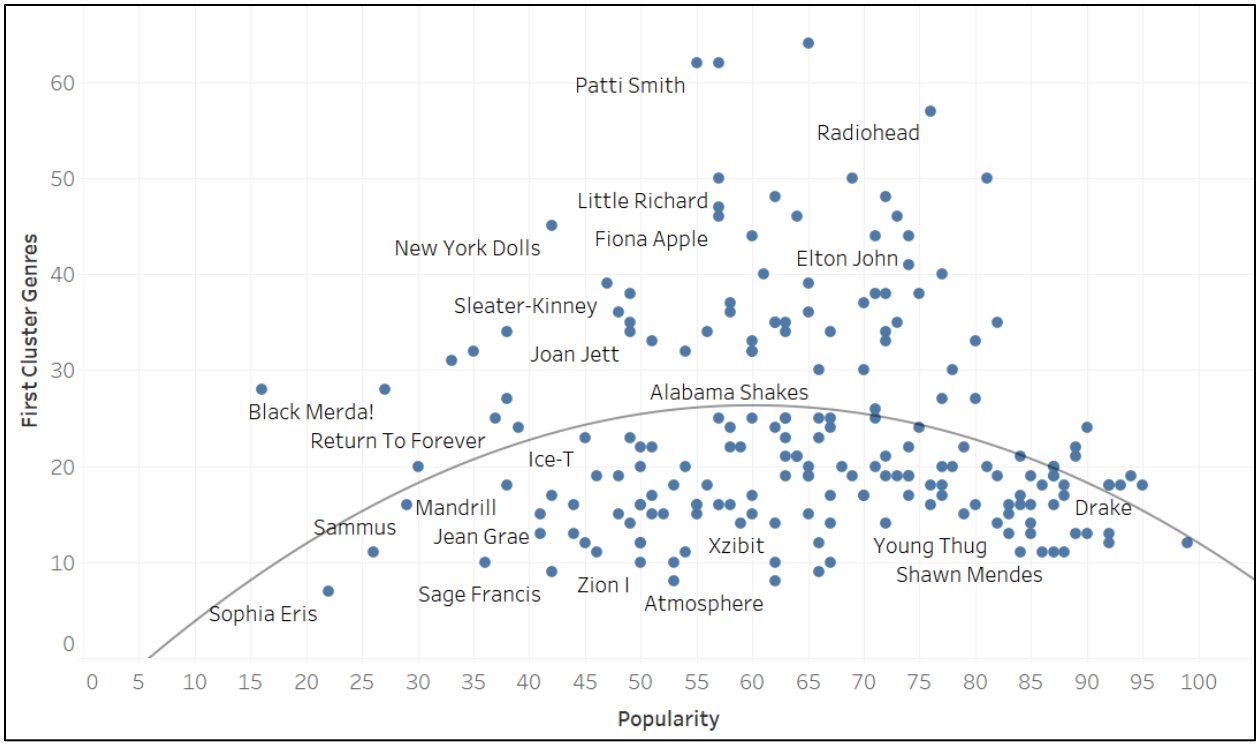
[169] http://obscurifymusic.com (accessed June 5, 2017).

enough to define the genre. Hip hop will be discussed in more detail (in terms of a general *undercoding*) after some broader results of my clustering methodology, where higher orders of D^n more accurately reflect Spotify's understanding of a cluster's generic diffusion or stylistic breadth (but which compounds the issues underlying the discrepancies just examined).

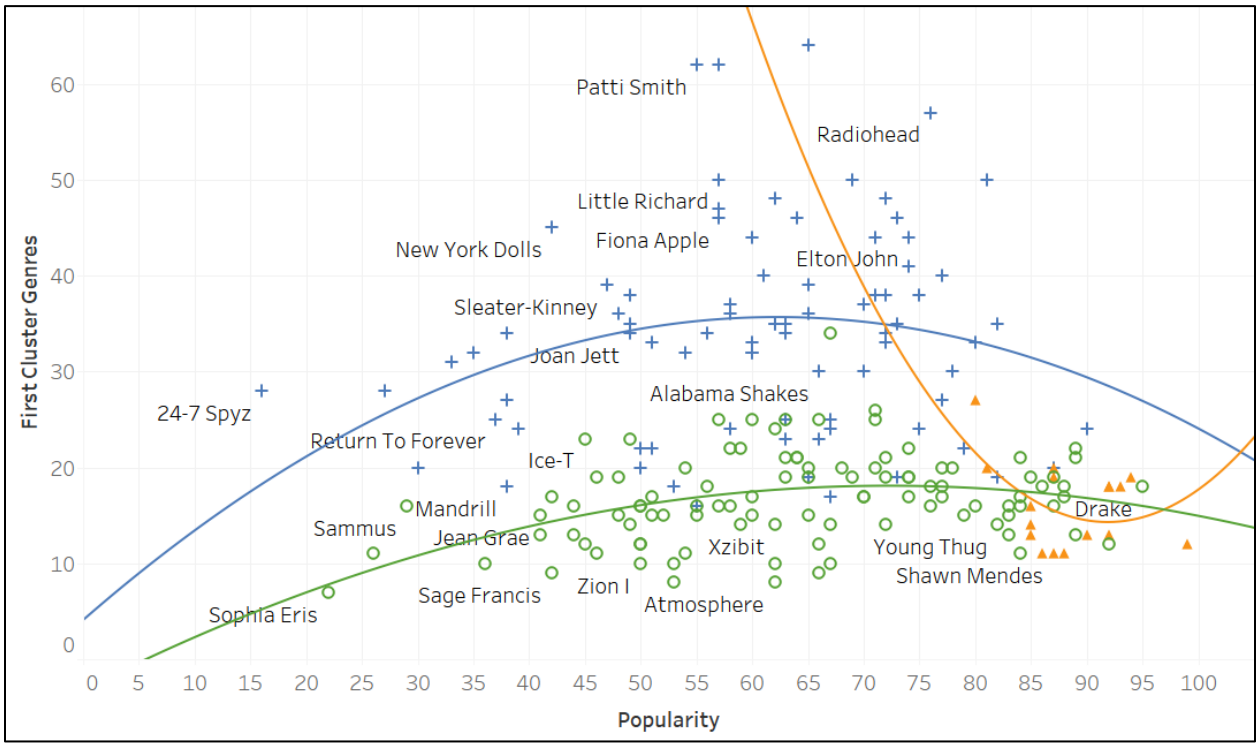
V. Cluster Results ($C^{1\ to\ 3}$)

Having laid out the methodological preliminaries and having explored relevant background and single-artist information, I turn in this section to some cluster results for first, second, and third-level clusters. What I am most interested in is the interactions between cluster size (S^n) and stylistic diffusion (D^n) since these directly address how the competing notions of genre-as-dead and genre-as-adjective play out in a structure generated by relations between artists. The larger the cluster is, the more promiscuous an artist's set of relations is; the smaller, the more incestuous. The more genre tags that get applied to a cluster, the more stylistically diffuse that cluster is according to Spotify, the smoother is the cluster's heterogeneous space, and the more classificatory capital has been invested.

In **EXAMPLE 4.7A**, I've graphed the first cluster (C^1) for our collection of 199 rock, hip hop, and pop acts, which are separated out by large-scale genre in **EXAMPLE 4.7B**. Each dot represents an artist and their first cluster. Since the first cluster size ($S^1 = 11$) remains constant for each artist—recall I've taken the first 10 related artists for each input ($n = 10$)—I have held popularity as the measure for the x-axis to judge its effects on the cluster. The y-axis presents the number of *unique* genre tags within the cluster, meaning that, for example, if two or more artists are labeled as "mellow gold," that genre only gets counted once. So, the higher we move along the y-axis, the more stylistically diverse the clusters become.



EXAMPLE 4.7A. Total unique genres (D^1) for each artist's first cluster (C^1), distributed by popularity.



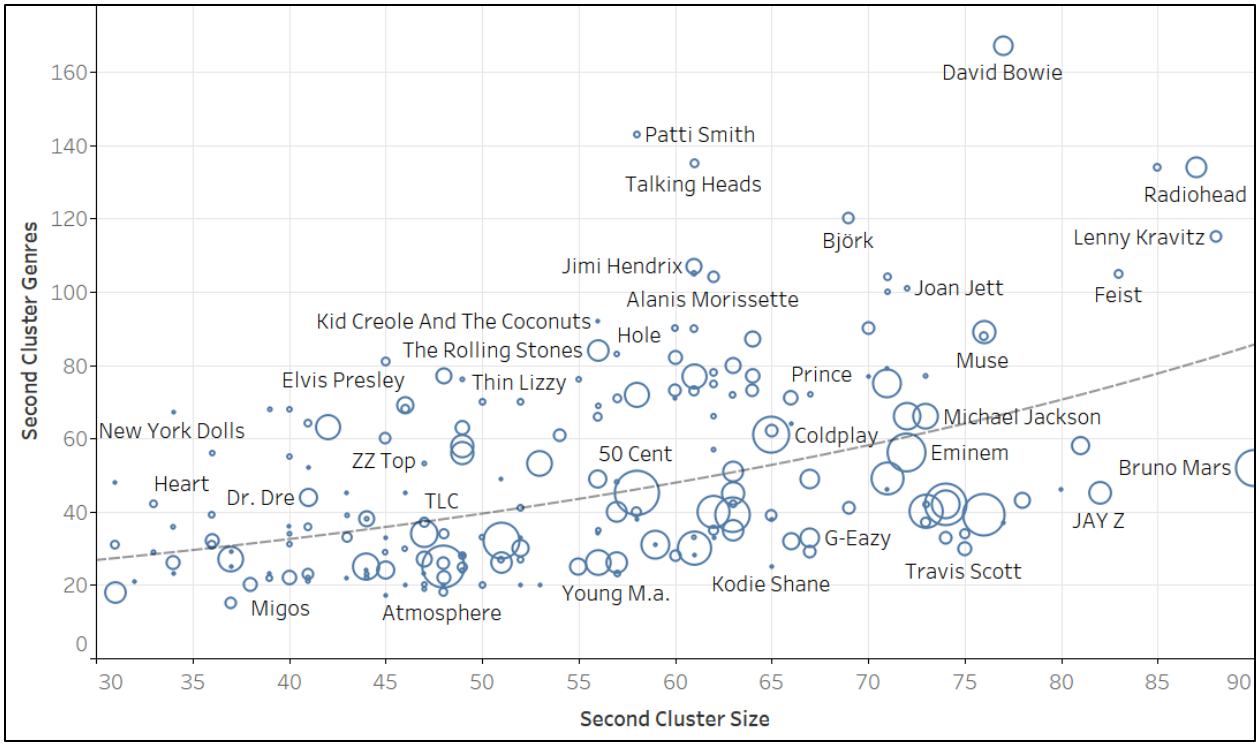
EXAMPLE 4.7B. The smoother stylistic space for rock artists (blue pluses) in C^1, foretold in Ex. 4.6, becomes more apparent. The inverted fit line for pop (orange) is simply an artifact of the congruence of a small sample size and the tautology of pop music being popular.

To interrogate **EXAMPLE 4.7B** in slightly more detail, **EXAMPLE 4.8** compares the total unique genre tags within an artist's cluster (D^1 left) to the average number of genre tags applied to each artist (D^0) for every member of a given cluster (right). For example, Lauryn Hill's first related cluster (C^1) has a total of 25 unique genres ($D^1 = 25$). The 10 artists in her first related cluster (C^1) average 11.5 genre tags each. This means that, of a total of 115 total genre tags within her first cluster, she accesses just 25 of Spotify's categories through her first set of artist relations; her cluster is stylistically tight despite a plethora of tags. Compare this to, for example, Coldplay whose cluster is nearly as diverse as Lauryn Hill's despite having far fewer average genres tagged to each artist in C^1.

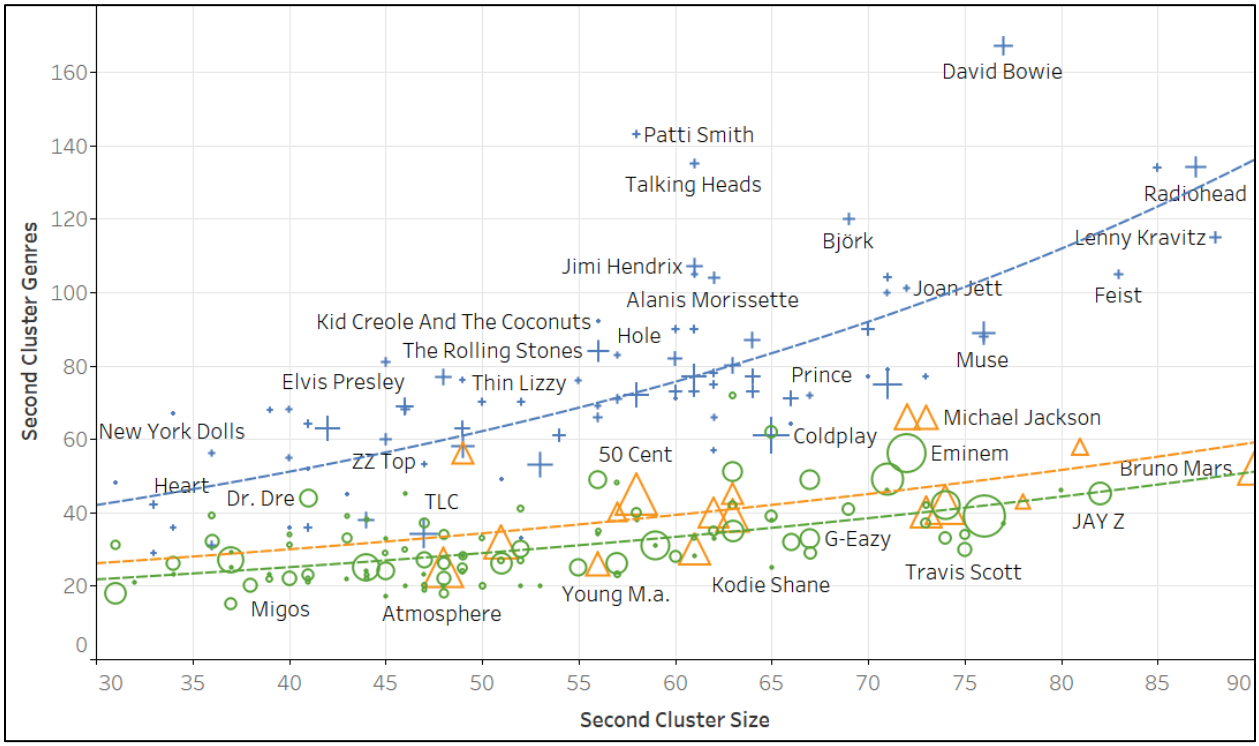
Extrapolating further, the mobility of hip hop congeries, to borrow Born's phrase, is limited compared to rock's; the difference between total genre tags per cluster and average genre tags widens for hip hop while narrowing for rock (and pop to a lesser degree). In other words, it's not just that artists in hip hop clusters are tagged with fewer genres in general, but that the *kinds* of genres they're tagged with draw from a smaller pool of generic signifiers. Within this cluster, we can easily trace genre's animating forces as they guide listening experiences for artists associated with specific categories. If I click around the "related artists" of Nicki Minaj, striations function centripetally by directing listening back towards a center of pop rap. The related artists of the Rolling Stones, Talking Heads, Tame Impala, etc. send a listener on an omnivorous journey, tracing much farther reaching lines-of-flight.

The second cluster reveals an expansion of cluster space in **EXAMPLE 4.9**, accelerating rock into the farther reaches of an unencumbered sea of generic eclecticism and stylistic breadth. The x-axis now represents the size of the cluster (S^2). The y-axis again represents the total number of unique genre tags in the entire cluster (C^2). Cluster size gets bigger towards the right, and clusters become more stylistically diffuse towards the top. Those near the top-right inhabit the smoothest possible space, embodying omnivorous eclecticism, while those in the lower left have smaller, limited clusters.

EXAMPLE 4.8. The top graph is essentially the same information as Example 4.7b, with popularity now determining the size of each data point. The bottom graph indicates average number of genres tagged to each artist in a cluster. Both include medians. The wider gap between medians of hip hop and rock in the top graph compared to the gap on the bottom suggests both a smaller pool of total hip hop genre tags and a more highly striated space of hip hop stylistic variety.

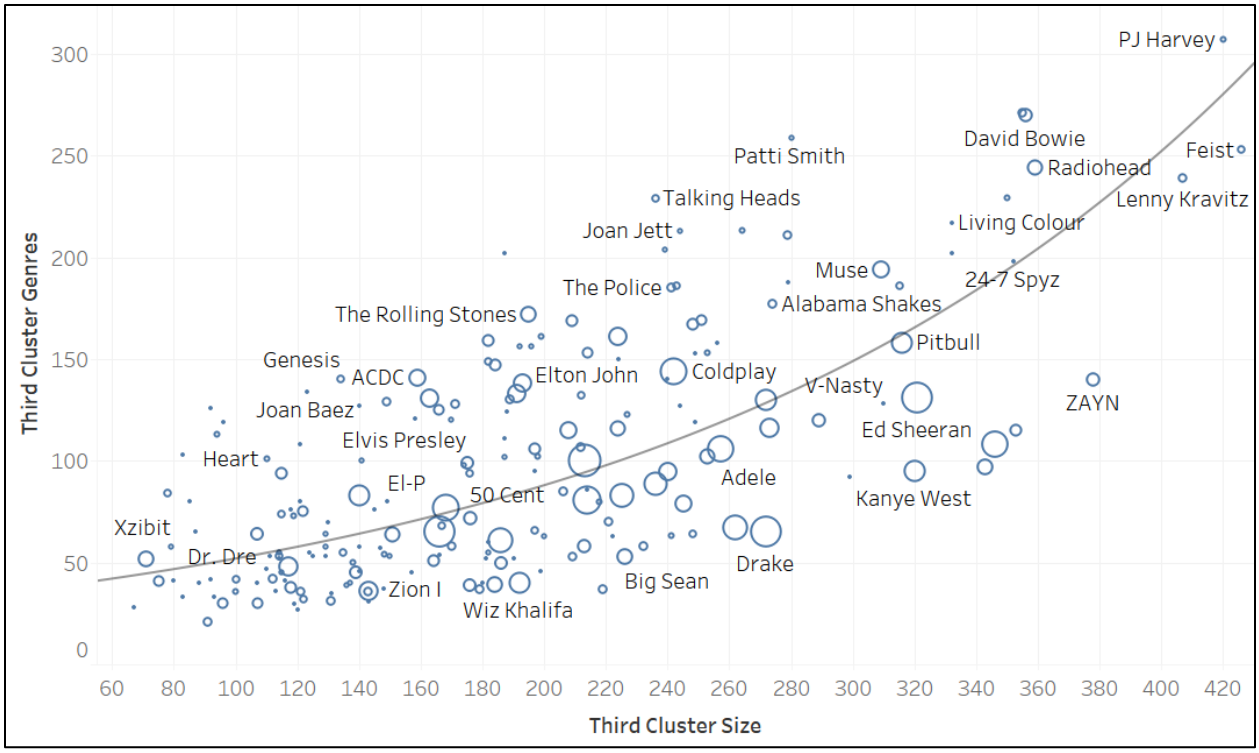


EXAMPLE 4.9A. Metrics for second clusters (C^2)of our corpus. ($R^2 = .24$) For this graph and the following, popularity—measured by number of Spotify followers—determines size of the data points.

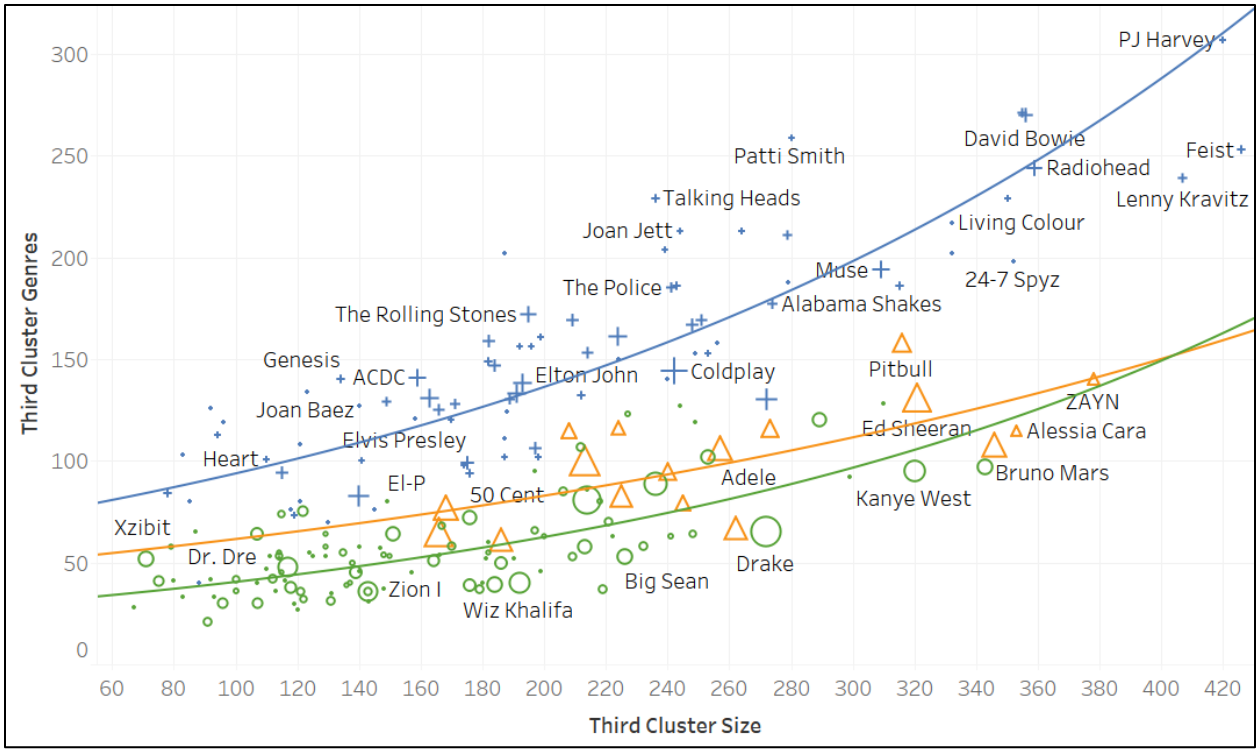


EXAMPLE 4.9B. Separating three metagenres in C^2. ($R^2 = .54;\ .31;\ .34$ for rock, pop, and hip hop, respectively.)

I've once again included trendlines, but they provide additional meaning at these higher levels of clustering. If the distribution of genre tags were random (indicating that genre doesn't matter and that this space is completely smooth), we would expect a linear correlation between the two metrics—as cluster sizes get bigger they have more genre tags. Any deformation of this proportionality would indicate some asymmetry in the activity and types of clustering. Essentially, all clusters above the trendlines are relatively stylistically mobile (with many genre tags compared to their size), while those below are more static. In **EX. 4.9A**, it already becomes clear that rock tends upward, rap towards the bottom, and pop sort of in the middle. Again, as I separate out this collection by these large, meta-genres (in **EX. 4.9B**), rock artists typically access smoother spaces, imbued by Spotify's algorithms' and listeners' habits with a higher mobility and more diverse clusters regardless of size.



EXAMPLE 4.10A. Metrics for the third clusters (C^3)of our corpus. ($R^2 = .46$).



EXAMPLE 4.10B. Separating three metagenres in C^2. ($R^2 = .69; .48; .47$ for rock, pop, and hip hop, respectively.)

EXAMPLE 4.10 indicates the continuation of trends in the third level clusters (C^3) that we saw in the last few examples (essentially that stylistic diffusion ($D^{1\ and\ 2}$) rose more rapidly and tended to be higher for rock or indie bands.) Indeed, our trendlines have become increasingly better fit in these higher-order clusters, reifying the differential and asymmetrical structures for the large-scale genres. New in the third cluster, we see that cluster *sizes* (S^3) have begun to separate as well, with hip hop clusters unable to grow at the same rate as rock or pop. The median cluster sizes for each meta-genre are 147 for hip hop, 193 for rock, and 245 for pop, with the total median of the corpus at 182.

VI. Discussion

In the foregoing section, I explored how artists, functioning as originary nodes in networks of relations, generate clusters that vary in size and stylistic tightness in Spotify's metadata. The asymmetry

of genre labels reveals a power dynamic of sorts.[170] The metric variability within large-scale metadata suggests that certain *types* of artists and styles are perhaps less mobile in Spotify's genre-space than others; some access smoother terrains while others encounter additional blockages and striations. Genre still matters despite the boundary-questioning made possible by essentially unlimited access.

Recall that Spotify suggests related artists based largely on both user activity and general internet scouring algorithms, ostensibly supplying an esthesic, critic-fan driven mode of connection. Through this lens, the tightness and smallness of hip hop clusters, for example, simply reflects listening habits; hip hop fans listen to hip hop music while rock fans are more omnivorous. In Bourdieu's terms, hip hop heads might be understood to have a more restrictive and binding *habitus*. Sam Friedman summarizes the concept:

> Bourdieu argued that those located in neighboring positions in social space are socialized with similar "conditions of existence" (meaning stocks of capital and distance from material necessity), which in turn endow them with a similar habitus—that is, a complex set of durable dispositions and schemes of perceptions that guide social practice and shape cultural taste. However, and this is a crucial point, Bourdieu argued that the dispositions flowing from the habitus are so durable that, in the vast majority of the cases, they stay unified through time (Friedman 2012, 470).

Some relatively recent research on online music communities appears to support the idea of a more rigid and durable habitus for hip hop communities. Studying the self-identificatory genre tags of 3 million artists on the (now mostly defunct) social media site, MySpace, Silver et al. find "that Rock musicians categorize themselves in a *multi-centered way*, Hip Hop musicians in a *single-centered way*" (2016, 2). Building on the DiMaggio's (1987) influential work on classification of art, they create a four-fold taxonomy of genre complexes based on *boundary strength* and *differentiation* (recreated in **Table 4.2**.[171]

[170] The proliferation of genre labels essentially usurps and inverts the meaning of "subculture" as defined by Hebdige (1979). In that influential text, Hebdige defines subculture not so much as a subset of culture but as a *subordinated* culture, subversive, submerged, below, outside, or against a dominant culture. This superficially reflects the highbrow-lowbrow binary homology of Bourdieu (1984), but it makes apparent the underlying role of cultural capital, with subcultures and subgenres tending to attract larger investments.

[171] DiMaggio's original study made use of two "dimensions" in addition to boundary strength and differentiation: hierarchy and universality.

	High Differentiation	Low Differentiation
High Boundary Strength	*Multi-Centered*: bounded subcultural interpenetration	*Single-Centered*: bounded fluidity
Low Boundary Strength	*Uncentered*: unbound subcultural mixing	*Free interchangeability*: unbound fluidity

Table 4.2. Silver et al.'s "Typology of Musical Worlds" (2016, 6).

This differentiation between multi-centeredness and single-centeredness basically, if not literally, forms an isomorphism with the graphs above: rock's smoother space and myriad available genres embodies "bounded subcultural interpenetration." The boundedness reflects the multiple labels which serve to bind their musical worlds, even if they interpenetrate. Hip hop's striations, on the other hand, bind relatively few available genre tags, allowing it to flow within a relatively undifferentiated box. If genre were truly dead, then un-centeredness and free interchangeability would be expected.

Though the isomorphism between these studies remains somewhat tenuous since their objects of inquiry slightly misalign—theirs of MySpace's poietic labels and mine of the confluence of critic-fan and music-industrial esthesis—a fundamental bias remains in both cases.[172] In semiotic terms, rock is *overcoded*. Umberto Eco explains that, "given certain coded units, overcoding will analyze these units into more analytical entities, as when, given a word, paralinguistics establishes that different ways of pronouncing it (of a stressing on its various syllables, or of insisting on a particular kind of phonetic emission) correspond to different shades of meaning" (1976, 134). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the plethora of rock tags suggests a continuation of rockism's masculinist impulses of enlightened, rational categorization and neat, phylogenetic typologies. One need only glance at various taxonomies of metal to understand the results of overcoding; Eco again explains that "there also is overcoding when the minimal combinable units or the minimal analyzable clusters of a given code are

[172] The difference between poiesis and esthesis cuts deeper into the distinction between music-industrial and musician discourses than this simple assertion suggests.

submitted to a further analytical pertinentization" (1976, 235). Those performing the labor of pertinentization in the music industry clearly direct their activities and energies to those categories with which they are most familiar, which they themselves value most.[173]

Browsing genres of the MySpace study (which relied on data gathered 2007), the number of available tags possibly applicable to hip hop is far outstripped by those of pop and rock.[174] Thus, though it may be true that hip hop artists indeed rely on a single-centered generic world, this world—as determined by genre tag methodologies—is also at least *partially* mediated by a dearth of available institutional genre tags, rendering hip hop undercoded. Again, Eco explains that undercoding begets a rough, superficial code: "undercoding may be defined as the operation by means of which in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain macroscopic portions of certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation, even though the combinational rules governing the more basic compositional items of the expressions, along with the corresponding content-units, remain unknown"(1976, 135–36). Like an essentialist definition of categories, undercoding relies on reductivist classificatory mechanisms, placing a text within a code based on a small collection of

[173] Eco elaborates on the role of labor of both over and undercoding, which seems applicable here. "There is labor performed in order to interpret a text by means of a complex inferential process. This process is mainly based on abductions and produces forms of overcoding (on the basis of a first level of pre-established rules new rules are proposed which articulate more macroscopic portions of the text) and of undercoding (in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain macroscopic portions of the text are assumed to be the only pertinent units even though the more basic combinational rules and their corresponding units remain unknown)" (1976, 155).

[174] I provide the full list of 121 available MySpace genre tags here for the reader's perusal, separated by commas, in decreasing order of use as determined in Silver et al. (2016, 8). (Note they mistakenly count 122 tags.) The full (and ever changing) list of Spotify genre tags (currently at 1517) can be found at: http://everynoise.com/everynoise1d.cgi?scope=all. Accessed June 12, 2017.

MySpace tags: Hip Hop, Rap, R&B, Rock, Alternative, Experimental, Acoustic, Indie, Pop, Metal, Punk, Hardcore, Crunk, Electronica, Emo, Techno, Reggaeton, Christian, Reggae, Latin, Country, Soul, Club, Death Metal, Folk, Comedy, Blues, Jazz, Electro, Classic Rock, Afro-beat, Progressive, Freestyle, Funk, Folk Rock, A 'cappella, Ambient, Pop Punk, Psychedelic, Drum & Bass, Hyphy, Trance, Screamo, Classical & Opera, Dub, House, Garage, Christian Rap, Jam Band, Thrash, Black Metal, Breakbeat, Disco House, Big Beat, Powerpop, Grindcore, Ghettotech, Industrial, Trip Hop, Grunge, Turntablism, Ska, Gothic, Down-tempo, Bluegrass, Happy Hardcore, Southern Rock, Glam, Regional Mexican, Americana, New Wave, Neo-soul, Shoegaze, Lounge, Jungle, Surf, Hawaiian, Rockabilly, Nu-Jazz, Psychobilly, Western Swing, Hard House, IDM, Tropical, Roots Music, Healing & Easy Listening, Showtunes, Progressive House, Japanese Classic, Melodramatic Popular, Bossa Nova, Grime, Visual, J-POP, K-POP, Gospel, Zouk, Lyrical, Concrete, Celtic, Breakcore, Idol, Fusion, Acousmatic, Tape music, Religious, Electroacoustic, Dutch pop, Salsa, Minimalist, Post punk, Emotronic, German pop, Spanish pop, French pop, Flamenco, Live Electronics, Swing, Italian Pop, Tango, Samba.

macroscopic units or elements. For hip hop, these units might include simply the presence of rapping or geographical markers. (West Coast, East Coast, and Southern all immediately spring to mind as essential macro genre-defining elements.) Important stylistic markers, like flow and sampling typology, often get lost in the coding shuffle.[175]

Conceptions of over- and undercoding may initially seem somewhat paradoxical to map onto smooth and striated spaces, respectively; undercoding suggests a lack of definition and overcoding seems to revel in more finely grained distinctions. But, crucially, smooth space is eminently heterogeneous, despite the "fulling together" of various components into a felt-like material. As boundaries become suppler, generic outward-facing lines-of-flight multiply for both musicians and critic-fans. Omnivorousness revels in heterogeneity and acts of overcoding, directing flows across filed-down but acknowledged porous borders. Recall Peterson and Kern's suggestion that "omnivorousness does not imply an indifference to distinctions." Rather, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, "smooth space is precisely the space of the smallest deviation: therefore, it has no homogeneity, except between infinitely proximate points, and the linking of proximities is effected independently of any determined path. It is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact" (1987, 371). This contact—these infinitely proximate points and paths—allow mobility through generic space, but as displayed in the graphs above, only to musicians associated with certain kinds of genres. Genre and genres matter to the categorization of some artists more than others, since some *kinds* of genres get a tighter- or looser-knit understanding based on the interactions of their constitutive musical objects and agents.

[175] As I discuss in the following section, it also appears that artist identity, based on demographic markedness, might guide both genre tagging and related-artist clustering, revealing the supposedly coldly calculated similarity measures of Spotify's algorithms as machinations reinforcing outmoded racial hierarchies.

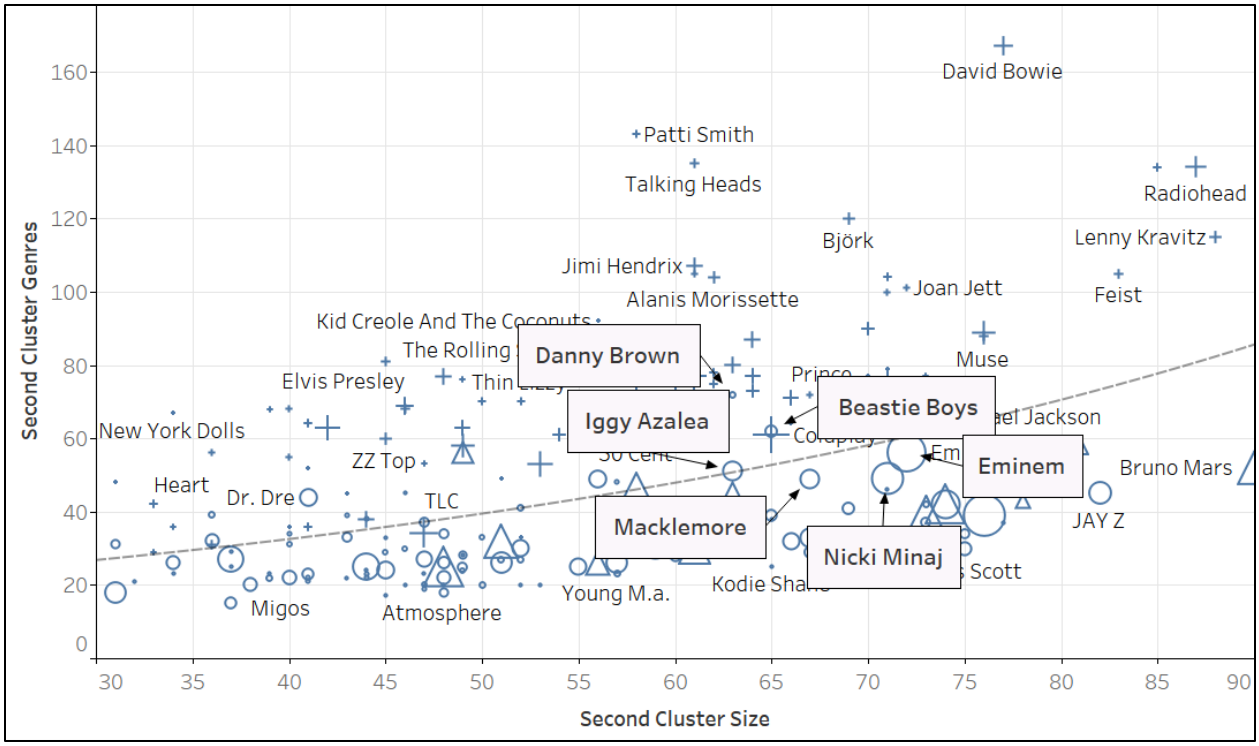
VII. Hip Hop and Demographic Distinction

Hip hop, on the other hand, has been rather directly subjected to general acts of undercoding. Originating out of the eminently smooth sea of dancing, collectivities, breaks, and samples, the large-scale genre succumbed to increasingly strict striations just as early hip-hop stars began deterritorializing mainstream popular music. Early DJs, digging through crates for unique samples, borrowed and repurposed music from a wide variety of sources. DJs deterritorialized the breaks they found, stripping away their connection to the surrounding music while reterritorializing them into new coherent tracks. Despite its heterogeneity, Joseph Schloss suggests that hip hop is ultimately built on "an aesthetic that is more concerned with a cohesive organizing principle than the diversity of individual elements that falls into its orbit…an approach that is more active than reactive" (2004, 66). It is not a mere pastiche of stolen samples; instead, early hip hop was a dynamic and innovative assemblage, heterogeneously smooth. Popular music's family tree and icons were decontextualized. Some DJs purposefully sampled from unlikely sources, exposing rhizomatic connections among breaks from different genres. Afrika Bambaataa, in an oft-told anecdote, took what Schloss describes as "special delight in getting audiences to dance to breaks that were taken from genres that they professed to hate" (32). By using samples from the Beatles or the Monkees, Afrika Bambaataa toyed with people's expectations of genre. "I'd like to catch people who categorize records," he claimed, swimming through a smooth sea of his own omnivorous capabilities (Schloss 2004, 22).

But, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, "this is where the very special problem of the sea enters in. For the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation. The problem did not arise in proximity to land. On the contrary, the striation of the sea was a result of navigation on the open water" (1987, 479). As hip hop entered

broader markets and the deeper ocean of commercially successful music, lawsuits began coalescing new limitations on samples, homogenizing hip hop's inherently heterogeneous sound ideal.[176]

Returning to the previous graphs, I should address *how* these limitations affect hip hop artists in particular. In **EXAMPLE 4.8**, one particular hip-hop act rises above the rest in terms of first cluster genre numbers as compared to the average number of tags per artist: the Beastie Boys. In **EXAMPLE 4.11** below, I recreate **EXAMPLE 4.9A**, this time highlighting those rap artists whose second clusters come closest to the smooth space of rock. Those that lie nearest or above the dashed fit-line have especially diffuse clusters for their size, as their lines of connection point outward to a wider variety of artists. Conspicuously, besides Danny Brown, these artists share *marked* demographics for hip hop.



EXAMPLE 4.11. A graph of the second cluster with those hip-hop acts with annotations for those large clusters that come close to or lie above the general trend line.

[176] Olly Wilson coined "heterogeneous sound ideal," defining it as: an "approach to music making in which a kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting qualities of sound (timbre) in both vocal and instrumental music" (1983, 3). The heterogeneous sound ideal, I believe, may encompass *genre* in addition to *timbre* in the world of hip hop. For an excellent discussion of the ramifications of the legally enforced striations of hip hop, see Sewell (2013, 189–225).

Markedness—a term that can be traced back to at least the 1930s, but usually associated by music scholars with the work of Robert Hatten (e.g., (1994, 34–36)—is a linguistic concept referring to asymmetrical meaning creation in binary pairs. Russian linguist Nikolai Trubetzkoy, for example, summed up the idea in a 1930 letter thus: "only one of the terms of the correlation is conceived of as actively modified and positively endowed with a certain mark, while the other is merely conceived of as non-endowed with this mark and thus passively modified" (Jakobson and Waugh 2002, 93). Typical exemplary binaries of markedness foreground gender, that pervasive cultural dynamic which stems etymologically from the same roots as genre. For instance, in English the term "pig" is unmarked; it can refer to both male and female animals. But "sow" only refers to female pigs; it is marked. The meaning of marked terms is *narrower* and more specific than unmarked terms—markedness, though often correlated to prevalence, can be independent of both statistical commonality or salience. Just because I notice an object does not make it marked in a linguistic sense, just as the more common term in a linguistic pair might be marked despite its prevalence. As a macabre example of statistical irrelevance to markedness, "people" is an unmarked term that typically refers to the living though it additionally captures the overwhelming preponderance of the dead (the marked term).

How does markedness apply in this case? As early as 1990, the press had already begun a canonization process of hip hop that remains largely intact to the present, pruning rap's eclectic past down to essentialized racial and gendered traits. It goes almost without saying that the unmarked hip hop artist is African American and male.[177] Tricia Rose—by taking critic Nelson George to task on his lamentations of the decline of the genre as it entered the mainstream—rightly problematizes the processes that birthed this gendered perspective. "For George," she writes, "corporate meddling not

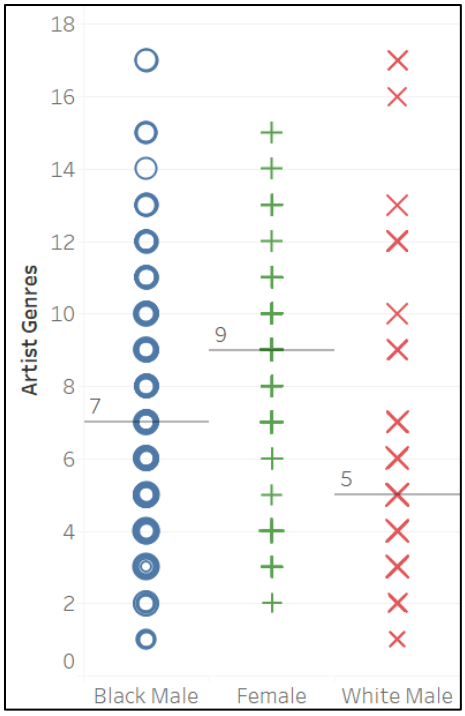
[177] Any number of cultural diagnostics will reveal this dynamic. Searching Google for "rap artists" brings up a list of 50 artists that includes two women (Nicki Minaj and Missy Elliot) and two white acts (Eminem and the Beastie Boys). Here, prevalence happens to embody an inverse relationship with markedness, but again, numerousness should not be conflated with unmarked terms. (https://www.google.com/search?q=rap+artists accessed June 9, 2017)

only dilutes cultural forms, it also reduces strapping testosterone-packed men into women! Could we imagine anything worse? Nelson George's analysis is not unusual; his is merely the latest example of media critics' consistent coding of rap music as male in the face of a significant and sustained female presence" (1990, 111). As Rose finds women rappers to be "consistently ignored or marginalized," their generic identity becomes necessarily *marked* in hip hop, specified with asymmetric meanings.[178] This bias often directly manifests in the genre tags afforded to rap artists, as is shown in the examples on the following pages. For example, Cardi B, a rapper who rose to fame with her massive 2017 hit, "Bodak Yellow," gets a single tag from Spotify: pop—this despite her being the first solo female rapper with a number one hit since Lauryn Hill in 1998 (St. Félix 2017).

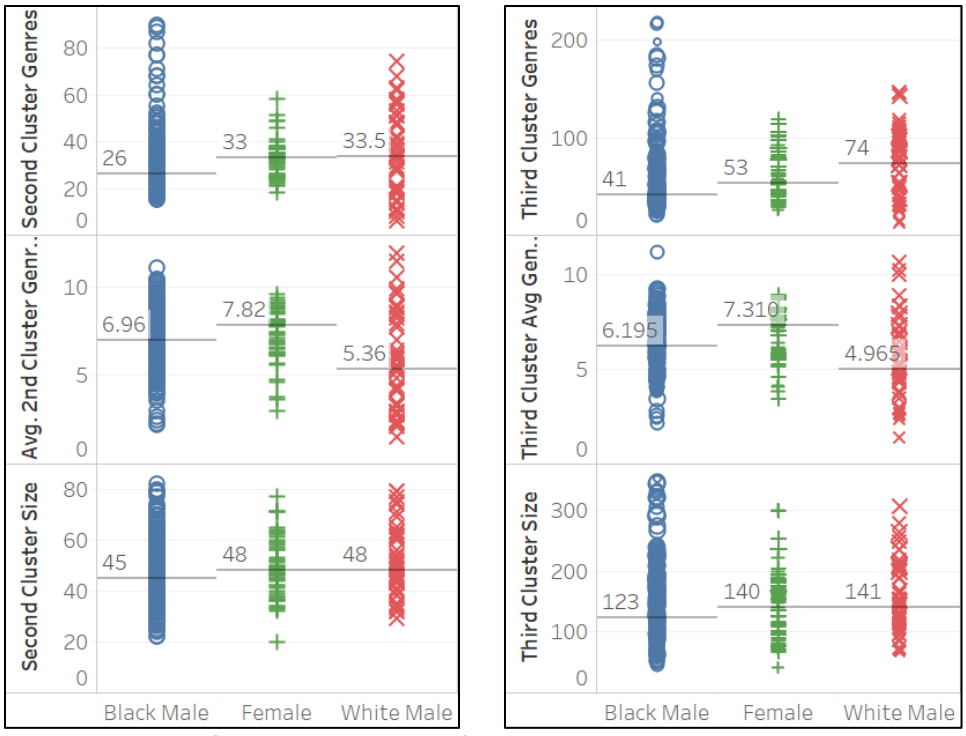
In **EXAMPLE 4.12** below, I compare the average number of genre tags that a collection of 310 hip-hop artists of three demographics—female (marked), white male (marked), and black male (unmarked)—receive, followed by two graphs of their larger order clusters.[179] One immediate result arises: despite receiving far fewer genre tags per artist, white male artists branch into more stylistically diverse clusters accessing smooth spaces. Female rappers, even with an initial starting condition containing *more* genre tags than white male artists, end up in narrower bands.

[178] A similar canonization process along lines of authenticity based on race and gender occurred rather conspicuously in rock as well. For two excellent summaries, see (Johnson-Grau 2002; McLeod 2002).

[179] The full list can be found **in** my appendices at: https://goo.gl/Sr3kon. Though some of these artists may appear as odd inclusions—e.g., Slayer, Justin Timberlake, or Fishbone—all are tagged with "hip hop," "rap," or some modified version of each by Spotify, bringing them under this section's purview. In fact, the strangeness involved in considering Slayer as rap (or rap rock) reinforces the argument for rock's overcoding, as Spotify tends to be more lenient in allowing generic participation for those involved with conventionally white, masculine genres.



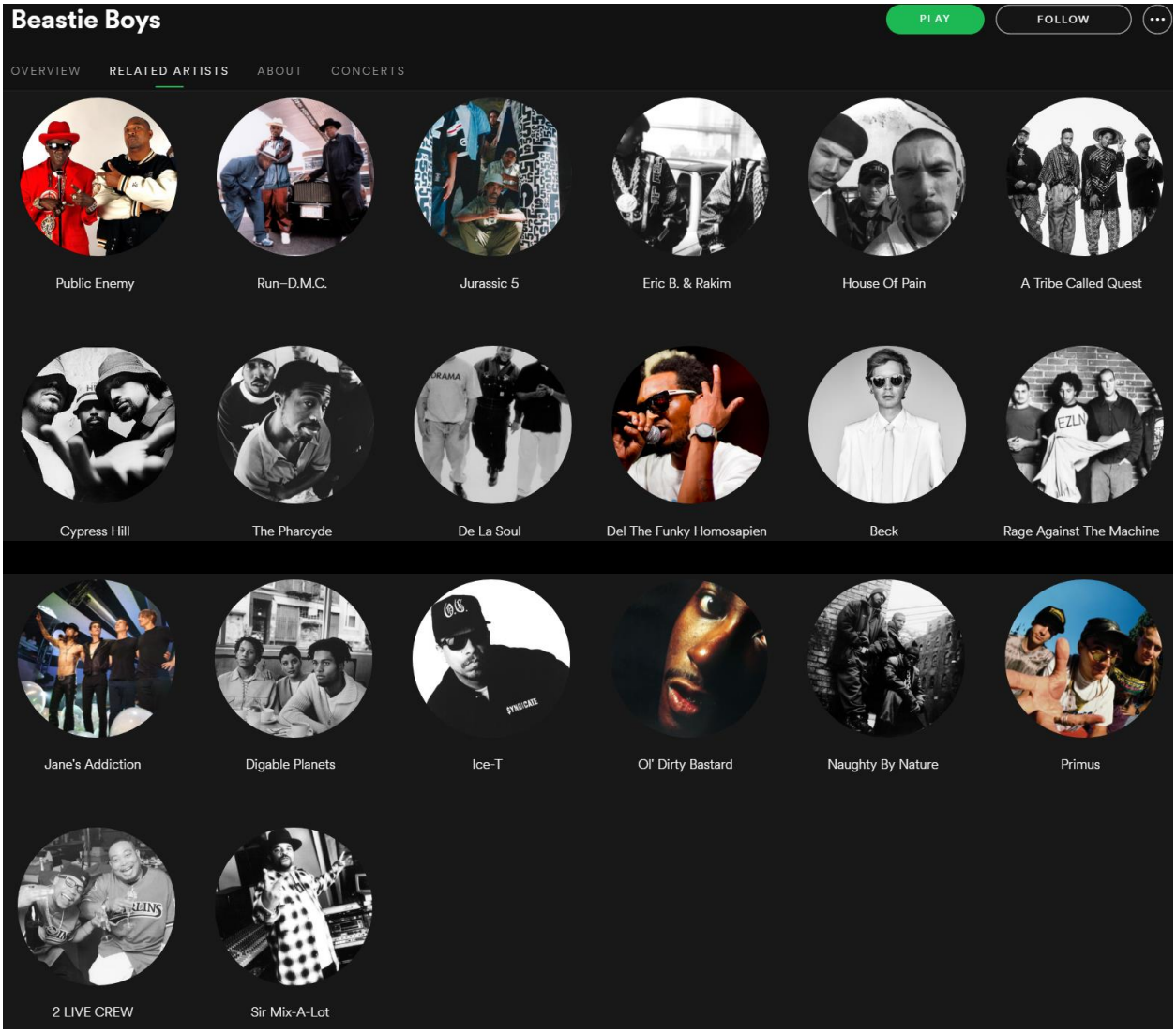
EXAMPLE 4.12A. Genre tags for our corpus of hip-hop artists, with medians marked per demographic.



EXAMPLE 4.12B. Second (C^2 - left) and third (C^3 - right) related artist cluster metrics for hip-hop artists, split by demographics. Despite similar cluster sizes and higher average genre tags (D^0)for black male and female artists in comparison to white male artists, the latter's higher order clusters become increasingly diverse at a faster rate than the former. This hints at a limited view of hip-hop stylistic variety, with fewer genre tags to available to the unmarked communities of artists.

Why might this be? Recall that the related artists are partially determined by user activity. The "related artists" selection screen on Spotify (seen below in **EXAMPLE 4.13**), created by algorithms that peruse social media mentions and listener activity, features pictures of similar artists. It would seem that listeners might tend to click on artists who *look* similar at least as much as they click on artists who potentially *sound* similar. Couple this with the undercoded nature of hip hop and the marked status of certain demographics, and the consequential sonic segregations—in terms of both genre and artist-identity—problematize any notions of truly smooth spaces and race or gender indiscriminate omnivorous tastes.

Overcoding of rock artists and undercoding of rap—in addition to the intertwined issues of race and gender—seems to relate rather directly to issues of an elevation (or at least plurality) of certain subjective perspectives and views, in terms of those working at Spotify, but also for the projected audience. The issue is less that rock bands get more tagged or that black male rap artists are more likely to be grouped together with limited clusters. Instead, problems lie in the fact that the former are *overrepresented* by Spotify through their distribution of cultural capital. With this overrepresentation in place, a truly smooth, equal, omnivorous space cannot exist. Tied to much broader post-colonial issues, Spotify's categorizations seem a small drop in the bucket. But as Sylvia Wynter has written, "the struggle of our times, one that has hitherto had no name, is the struggle against this overrepresentation" (2003, 262). And this is simply one more venue in which that struggle rages on.



EXAMPLE 4.13. Screenshot of the Related Artists tab for the Beastie Boys.[180] Bands like Primus, Rage Against the Machine, Jane's Addiction, provide lines-of-flight out of the territoriality of hip hop. These bands are related to the Beastie Boys through historical, generic, and demographic resonances. One might compare these results to the related artists of interracial hip-hop groups like 3rd Bass and funkdoobiest, which lack any white artists in their first clusters.

[180] Screenshot taken of the desktop app on June 9, 2017. In early 2018, Spotify changed the "Related Artists" tab to "Users Also Like," creating another layer of obfuscation while displacing accountability onto listeners for potentially problematic associations.

VIII. Genre-as-System: D^0, Spotify's Genre Universe, and Future Work

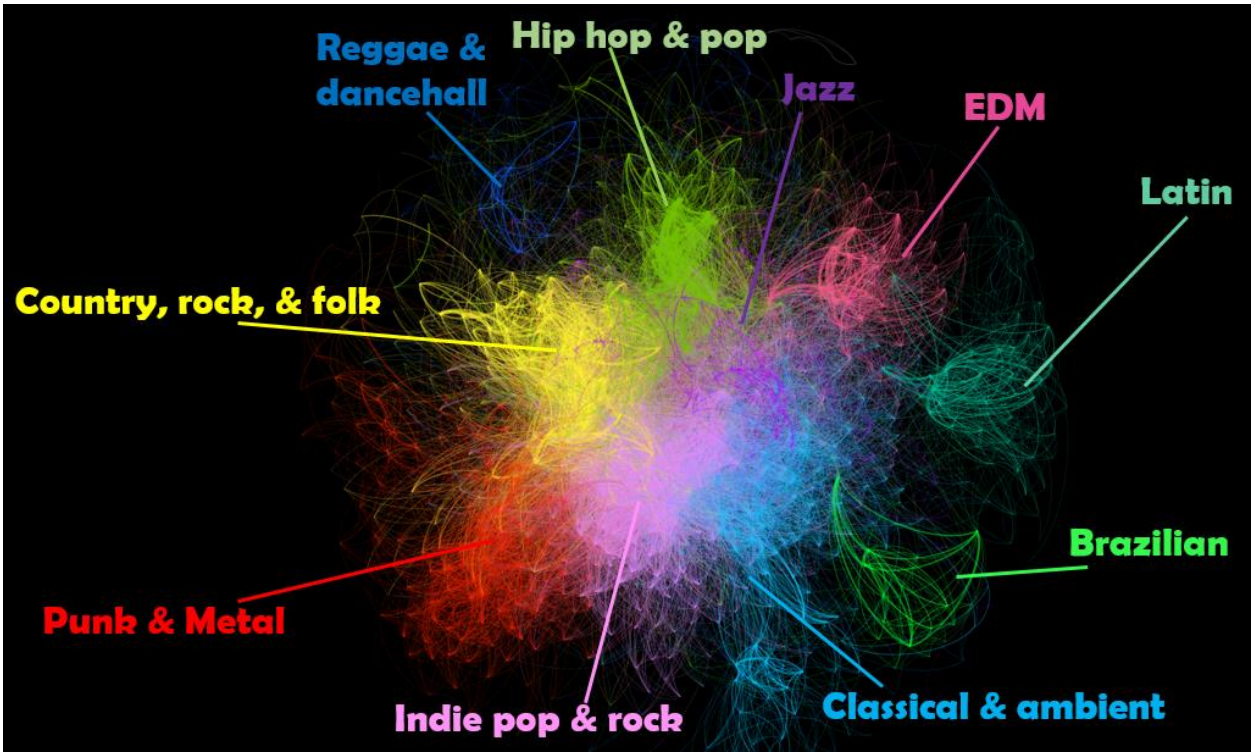
As a culmination of the metadata component of #genre, in this section I provide a mapping, visualization, and brief analysis of 1005 genre tags that Spotify applies to a corpus of 11,533 artists. My preceding analyses of clusters and interactions between individual artists captures, in my opinion, the interactions between Born's (2011) high-level planes of social mediation and more intimate socialities of musical experience, but this larger, rich collection of data suggests ways that these sorts of analyses might guide future approaches to genre. Recall the introductory chapter's critique of those definitions of genre which treat it as a synchronic Saussurean system of relations; these basically stultify genre's dynamic, active, and relational power. The mapping below (**EXAMPLE 4.14**) may initially seem to do the same. The main difference, however, is that the below mappings present an aggregation of individualized metadata, presenting links based on generic co-presence; whereas the hierarchies and family trees of the examples in Chapter 1 were determined by a single author's understanding of stylistic relations or lineages. In other words, the below examples take only inputs from an already adaptive, dynamic "ensemble model" of streaming service recommendation and categorization.

Each node in the network is a genre. If genre A and genre B are both used on a single artist, then they get connected. The more artists tagged with those two genres, the thicker that line will be. The graph emphasizes connections and communities rather than the genres themselves. Communities were determined by properties of the network alone, without recourse to any semantic data of the nodes themselves.[181] Ten main communities result, which I name and label on the graph. These communities look very similar to the old striated bins of record shops. Rather than go into a full listing

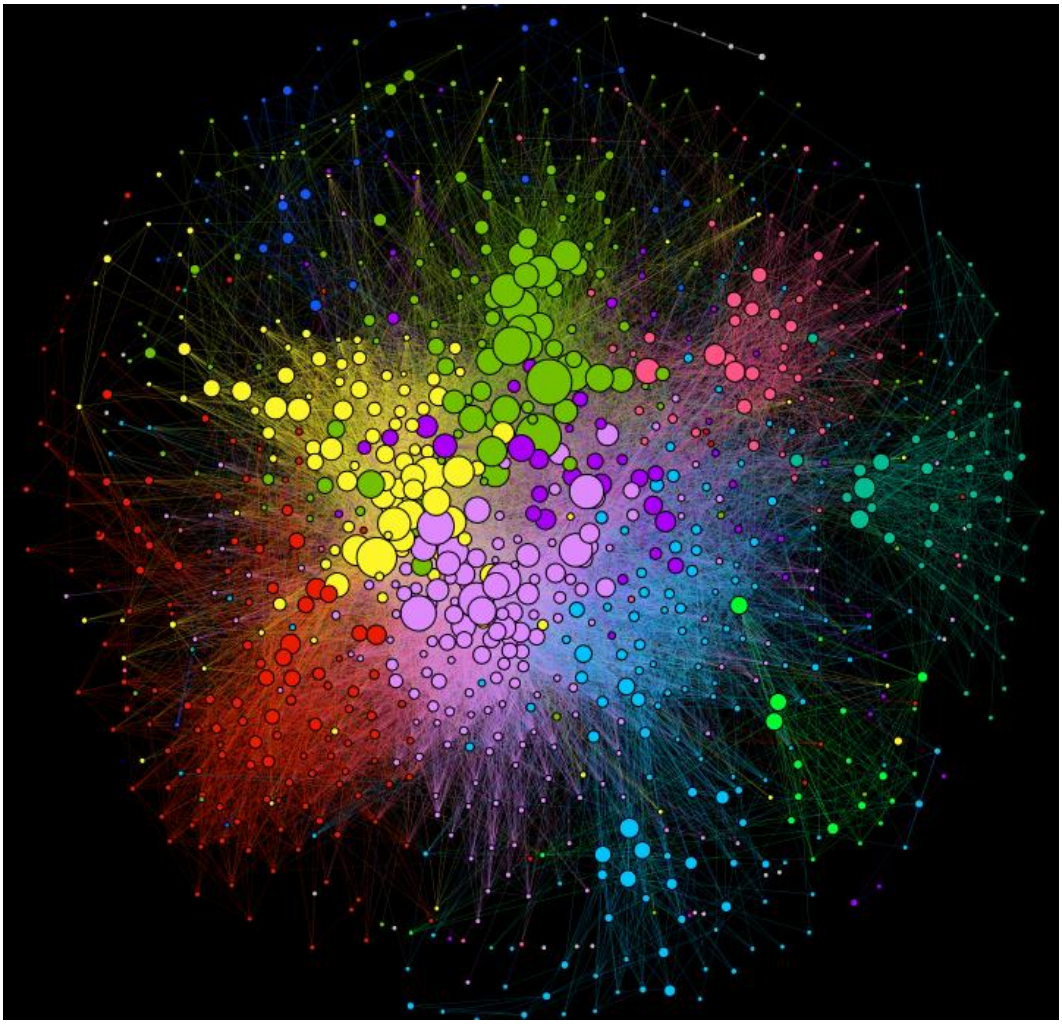
[181] A description of the methods behind this particular community-generating algorithm can be found in (Blondel et al. 2008), which is used by the open-source graphing program I employed for these examples, Gephi (Bastian, Heymann, and Jacomy 2009). Like the rest of the data in this dissertation, the full list of genre communities is given at: https://goo.gl/Sr3kon.

of these communities and the curious inclusions in each, I instead want to focus on one larger-scale question: which communities are most important to Spotify's genre universe?

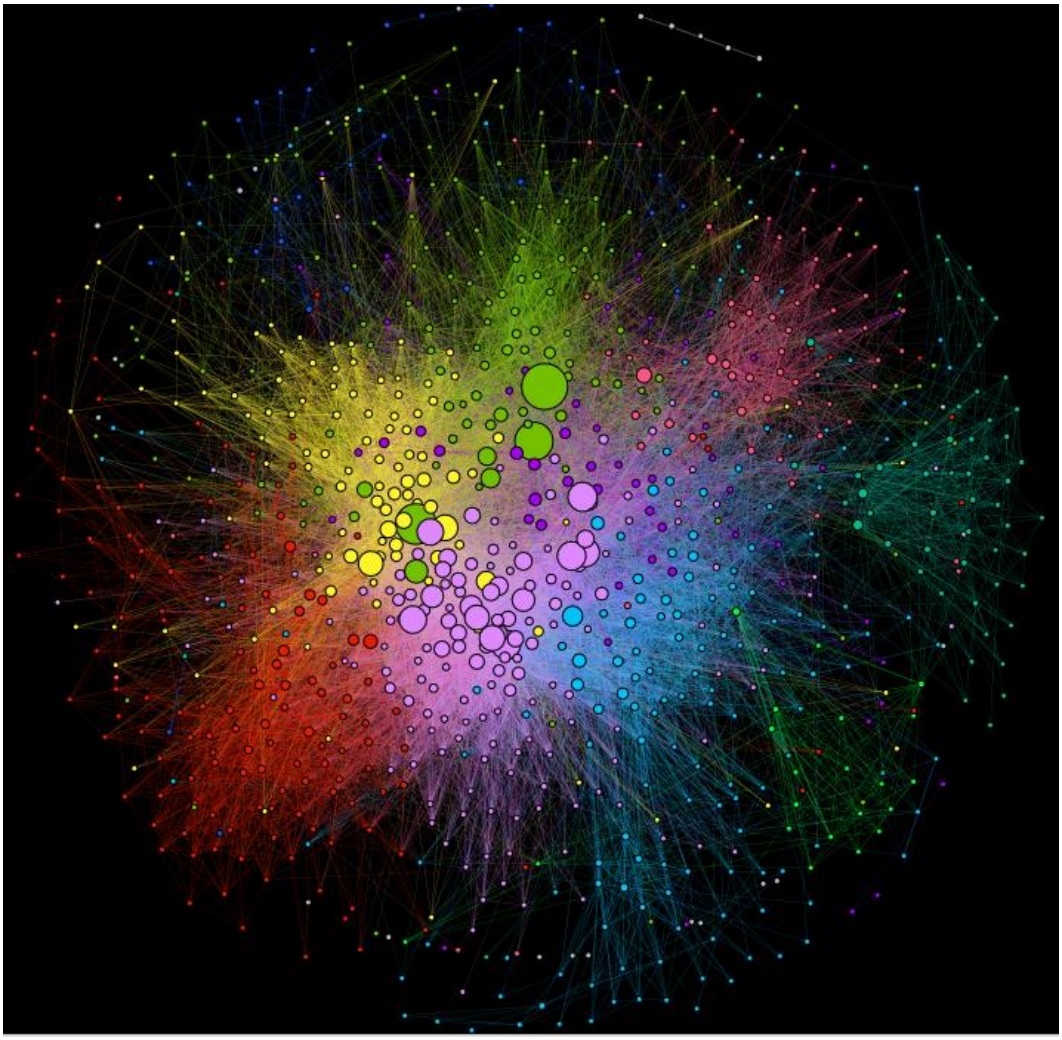
One way to measure the relative centrality of these communities is simply to count how often genres are used in this corpus. In **EXAMPLE 4.15** below, each node still represents a genre, but now the size of the node represents how many times that genre was used in my collection of artists. Many of the dark yellow-green hip hop and pop cluster nodes are the largest, meaning that many artists are tagged with genres like "dance pop," "r&b," or "hip hop." Yellow and lavender genres are next largest. By this measure, hip hop and pop are the most relevant genres for Spotify.



EXAMPLE 4.14. Cartographic representation of Spotify's genre network with ten large communities labeled.



EXAMPLE 4.15. Genre nodes with size determined by their frequency within my collection of musicians. Note the prevalence of large green nodes.



EXAMPLE 4.16. Genre nodes with size determined by their importance within the network. Green nodes have mostly shrunk away, while many large pink genres remain.

EXAMPLE 4.16 represents a bit more technical approach where node-size now represents a genre's importance within the network. This is determined by a centrality measure known as PageRank which essentially counts the links between nodes and weights them according to importance.[182] Without going into too much detail, this new graph basically holds a small handful of green nodes as large. In descending order of size, these are: dance pop, pop, pop rock, funk rock, classic funk rock, and soul. Lots of pink and yellow nodes now surpass the hip-hop nodes. Things like neo-psychedelic,

[182] A full description of PageRank can be found in Brin and Page 1998.

alternative rock, electronic, indie r&b, rock, and singer-songwriter are all "more important" to the network than pop rap, urban contemporary, r&b, and hip hop. Artists tagged with these latter labels get boxed into their Local Group of Spotify's genre universe; if an artist is hip hop, they're probably not much else to Spotify.

For indie-pop artists in the lavender range, the homogenization of their genres' network-centrality reinforces notions of musical omnivorousness, or the flattening of genre's importance. If I'm tagged with indie pop, I'll also likely participate in at least a dozen or two other genres, so each one doesn't do a ton of adjectival work by itself. These are the kinds of artists that can fairly claim that genre doesn't matter for them since they get an overabundance of stylistic labels that lessens the meaning of any single one of them. But for those artists working in the green hip hop and R&B realm, these labels mean more and restrict their mobility.

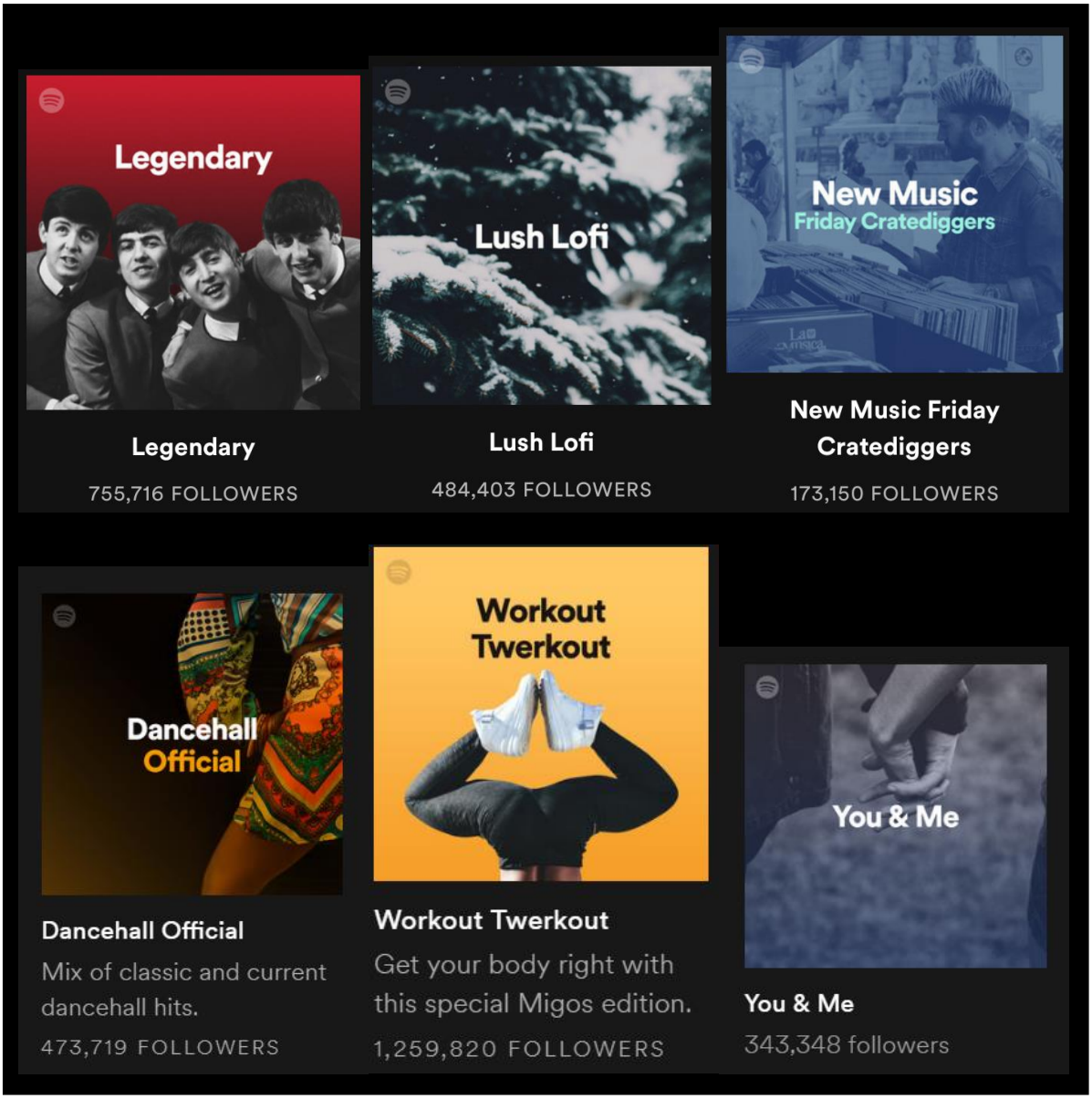
IX. Playlists

The third part of #genre, constituted by playlists and algorithmic recommendation, has become increasingly important and prevalent over the past couple of years, yet it has escaped my analytical purview for this project. Manifold reasons for leaving it aside for the present study might be posited: playlist constituency is constantly changing, making generic constellations harder to determine; their audiences and creators are largely unavailable to me or any public layperson; the imbrication of curator and algorithm makes them more difficult to quantify; the strategies for determining playlists are constantly shifting, etc. Genre tags and related artist clusters are slightly easier to pin down, more convenient to quantify, and more transparent in the categorizational work they do. Future work on "the playlist" as a mechanism for genre performativities will surely provide meaningful and likely surprising comparisons to the cluster metric methodologies outlined above.

Even a brief investigation reveals some useful connections to the results given in the above sections. The strategies for building these playlists seem to re-inscribe similar striations and issues as the cluster metrics indicate above. Take, for example, one of Spotify's most popular playlists: RapCaviar. A collection of current popular hip-hop hits, the playlist's semantic and signifying lines of flight are pretty apparent: this is for only those listeners who desire the decadent, socially prestigious, and superficially appealing selections of the hip-hop genre. It's rap for noshing, standing in a marked relationship to the generic, prototypical, unmarked rap you might hear on the radio or walking on the sidewalk. The second most popular rap playlist, "Most Necessary"—currently billed as the "official voice of generation next"—again points to the needs of a particular audience; those who perhaps only want the most culturally expedient hip hop. Spotify's audience tends to be white, young, and upwardly mobile, all characteristics that tend to be associated with omnivorous taste, reflecting, perhaps, the dilettantish nature of these most popular hip-hop playlists.[183] Spotify, like other streaming services, bills itself as a taste curator in a world of overwhelming choice, awash in inevitable swaths of mediocrity; it helps its users attain the diamonds in the rough, the overlooked hits, the caviar. But as Melvin B. Tolson (1982) would remind us, "Life consists of caviar and cabbage. Plenty of cabbage." And we should attempt to understand why the cabbage gets tossed aside in Spotify's playlists, why the multitude of stylistic diversity of hip hop remains undercoded and underrepresented.

More strikingly, Spotify's genre-based playlists are color-coded, with many clear correlations between semantic content and racial constituency of artists involved. A few examples are given below in **EXAMPLE 4.17**. As a quick legend, rock playlists are usually blue or red, hip hop is orange-yellow, and pop is teal. In the few examples given below: "Legends" are apparently only rock (red); both Lofi (which typically refers to ambient, soft, slow, smooth, mellow, underground, instrumental hip-hop

[183] The most convincing and direct argument for omnivorousness as indicative of upwardly-mobile demographics has been forwarded by Friedman (2012).



EXAMPLE 4.17. Some representative playlist icons in the Spotify app (screenshotted between March 10 and April 6, 2018).

tracks) and "Friday Cratediggers" fail to participate in the typical hip-hop color (orange-yellow); dancehall is lumped in with hip hop; "Workout Twerkout" stereotypically foregrounds blackness both in its figure of choice and in its playlist-color associations; "You & Me" must be referring to romantic partners who enjoy indie/rock/folk, not R&B or hip hop. These are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ways that visual, aural, and demographic connections play out in these playlists. One need

only look at the genre tags of the many dinner or kitchen-related playlists to understand the groups Spotify attends to when providing a soundtrack to these activities.[184]

The increasing prevalence of playlists, often based on mood or activity, seems to be a defining moment in the streaming era as the digital listening public moves away from blazing their own trails through the overwhelming musical thicket of (illegal) file sharing practices of the first decade of the 2000s, and instead allows professional curators and algorithms to create somewhat anonymized authoritative lists of tracks. Playlists, as an ever-expanding aspect of #genre, fit neatly into what Liam Cole Young calls "List Cultures," or the concomitant ubiquity of lists at times of technological and media revolutions.[185] Partially as a way to address information overload, partially as a technique to exert control, and partially as a mode of classification, "listing is a cultural technique that performs ontic operations that inscribe concepts and categories upon which technical systems and social institutions are built" (Young 2017, 18). When a listener can turn to "RapCaviar" to get their taste of important trends in hip hop, playlists fundamentally drive intimate socialities of generic possibilities, functioning as "epistemological operators in popular culture and mass media" (45). Following in the tradition of charts such as *Billboard*, playlists "continue to inscribe borders and draw distinctions that enact categorizations and modes of classification" (20).[186] Future work will need to contend with this important locus of musical taxonomization. RapCaviar, like the payola and radio hegemonies of the

[184] As of April 9, 2018, for example, the most used genre tags in Spotify's popular playlist, "Dinner with Friends," are pop, neo mellow, post-teen pop, dance pop, indie folk, viral pop, indie anthem-folk, folk-pop, and new americana.

[185] My "ever-expanding" refers both to increased prominence of playlists in music distribution mechanisms as well as to its growing role in music's profitability. According to a recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, appearing on a popular Spotify playlist like Today's Top Hits "raises streams by almost 20 million and is worth between $116,000 and $163,000" (Aguiar and Waldfogel 2018). Playlists have surged developed into a central portion of Spotify's economy, in terms of financial, cultural, and social capital. As one token of this newly important space, take Drake's recent album release, which Spotify marked by "by using his face as the cover of all the playlists featured on the streaming platform's landing page, including playlists like 'Tear Drop' and 'Soul Coffee' that do not actually feature any Drake songs" (Strauss, Wicks, and Minsker 2018).

[186] Playlist curation also often reflects fundamental gendered and racial biases. Liz Pelly (2018) has "found Spotify's most popular and visible playlists to be staggeringly male-dominated." For the "New Music Friday" playlist, Pelly found "248 of the 301 songs (82.4 percent) included men, while 112 (37.2 percent) of the songs included women." Only a single song "led by a woman artist" appeared on RapCaviar during a four-week stint. Future work will include a broader dataset and in-depth analysis on presence of different demographics on Spotify's playlists.

twentieth century, represents the music industrial machine's direct mediation and influence on listening patterns and cultural values, directed by profit. Born suggested 25 years ago that technological "mediations can be perceived, and embraced, as inherently part of the aesthetic" of music (1998, 217). To adequately embrace these technological mediations in our current genreme, playlists will need to be accounted for.

X. Conclusions

This chapter began with the possibility that entering the current centrifuge of public discourse on popular music categorization would fling currently held conceptions of "genre" into a smooth space of omnivorous eclecticism. But by formulating and then quantifying the role of #genre (of relations between artists and genre tags especially) as a constantly shifting landscape dependent on current listening habits and cultural exigencies, I have shown that fundamental generic categorizations hold relatively firm even during periods of increasingly supple boundaries.

Against the "genre-is-dead" perspective, it seems that streaming services construe genre as a living force, but a force that is best actualized in associations between kinds of music and kinds of artists, opening a space for genre tags to be used to describe people. Of course, such associations have a long history of flattening disparate realms onto essentialized traits. In his book, *Segregating Sound*, Karl Hagstrom Miller (2010) suggests that between the 1880s and 1920s, popular music got ghettoized into distinct genres with "particular racial and ethnic identities." Music developed, in Jennifer Lynn Stoever's (2016) words, a "sonic color line" at the same time that a color line was enshrined in U.S. law.[187] Couple legal segregation with a new technologically sophisticated commercial music industry and the expeditions of the American Folklore Society—whose blend of anthropological and literary search for authenticity necessarily enacted a homology of race and music—and, as Hagstrom Miller

[187] Stoever traces this sonic color line back earlier in the nineteenth century

argues, the inevitable result is that "black and white performers [who had] regularly *employed* racialized sounds" became expected "to *embody* them" (2010, 4). Genotype and phenotype became intimately intertwined, with inner constituency and outward appearance smashed together to such a degree as to become culturally and socially indistinguishable.

The re-introduction of visual cues in Spotify's related-artists section and playlists ironically and neatly reverses some processes that Stoever finds in the genesis of the sonic color line during the mid-nineteenth century:

> Developing a sonic color line—however uneven, ad hoc, and indeterminate—to verify race's increasingly unreliable visual cues allowed whites to extend both race and racism into the auditory unseen. The sonic color line turned the notion of race inside out; blackness and whiteness could now be lived and experienced from within rather than just externally classified. … However, listening's enabling invisibility also marked the sonic color line's potential undoing. The singularity of the term "listening" assigns a false simplicity and unity to an act that is not singular but rather represents a potentially vast set of simultaneous and interconnected practices, actions, poses, thoughts, interpretations, and filters (2016, 36).

As omnivorous tendencies rise in ubiquity and in cultural valuation, and as access increases, the color line again partially manifests visually through artist selection by browsers and aurally through the filters embedded within #genre. One tangible result is that this cuts black male hip-hop artists and their listeners off from other genres.[188] The active and dynamic connective tissues of genre do not allow equal mobility to all clustered congeries.

So, genre and demographics apparently still live as they structure paths through clusters of recommended related artists, a key component in the experience of categorization during our age of streaming. The combination of algorithmically derived connections and genre tags curated by computer scientists interested in metal and obscurantism have some far-reaching results. Searching

[188] By focusing on hip hop in particular, I tangentially (and incompletely) address Lizardo and Skiles's assertion that "a move toward studies emphasizing differential deployment of embodied cultural capital within the 'same' style category labels may reveal that symbolic exclusion processes may be operating at the artist or fine-grained category level rather than at the level of the broad style category" (2015, 20). Artist identity, based on demographics, at least partially inflects these processes of symbolic exclusion.

for "90s most popular musicians" on Google gives a list of mostly alternative rock bands.[189] Comparing to *Billboard* charts, we see little overlap, which forces the question, "most popular with whom?"[190] It seems that the issues of curatorial canon formation discussed above remain relatively intact, even when ostensibly objective algorithms take the categorizational reins.

Quite practically, as algorithms tailor musical suggestions to extremely niche audiences, Spotify garners demographic data to an unprecedented degree of specificity, allowing them to attract increasingly specific advertising revenues.[191] It's important to keep in mind that Spotify is a profit-seeking business, and, as might be expected, there is likely more financial profitability in directing advertisers towards the kinds of bands that are associated with omnivorous listening tendencies. Indeed, omnivorousness has been argued to exist chiefly in the tastes of the upwardly mobile, perhaps the most important target of marketing for any brand or company. As seen in **EXAMPLE 4.18** below, Spotify advertises their unique demographic data as *targeting* tools for potential brands. They proudly proclaim that they can deliver your message to the "audiences that matter most." As the pictures indicate, the audiences that matter most tend to be white, young, and upwardly mobile. Given that Spotify consciously and explicitly taxonomizes *artists*, segregating clusters by embodied traits, it becomes apparent that certain artists and certain listeners certainly matter less.

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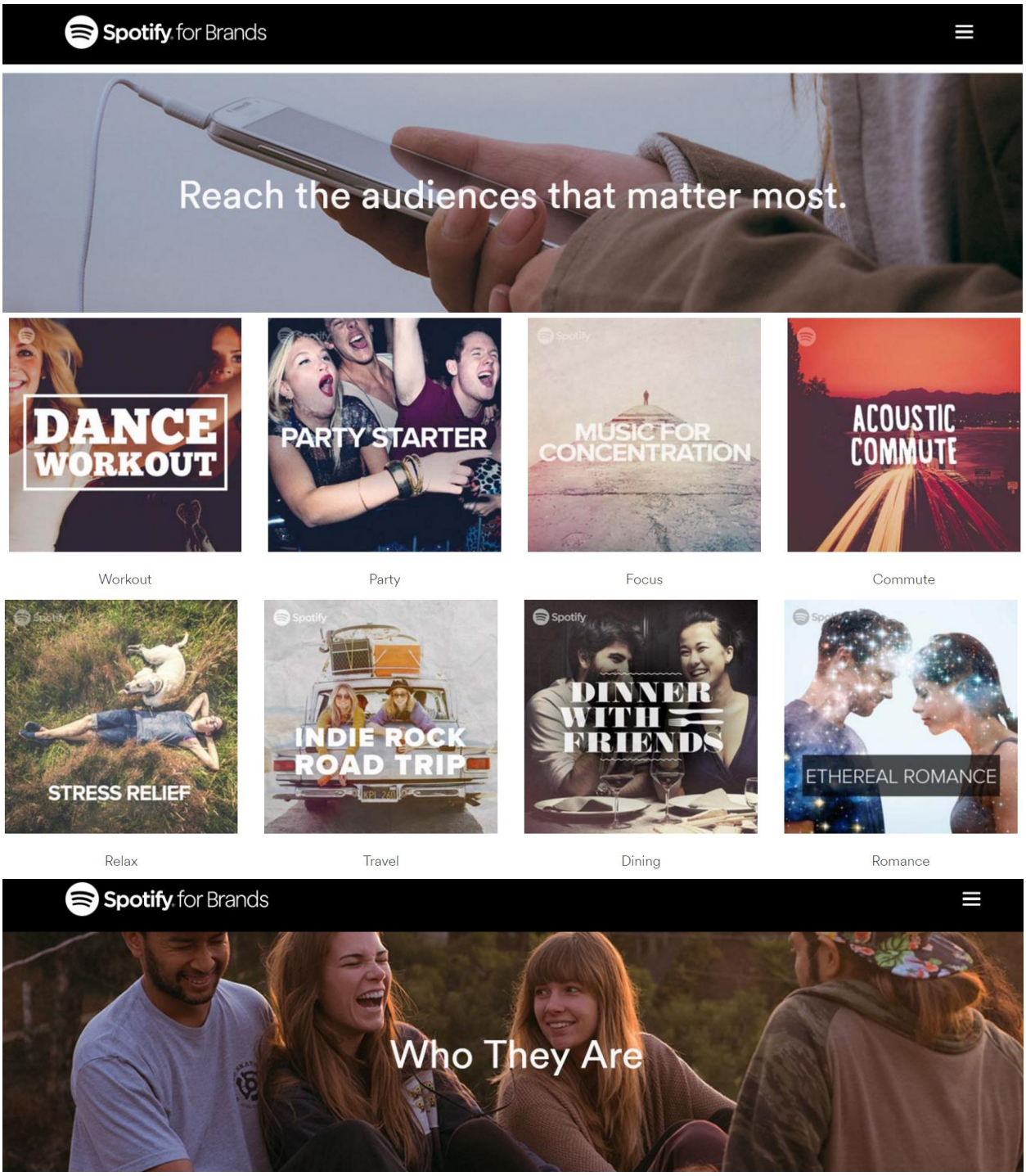
[189] Though *Billboard* is no perfect measure of popularity, it clearly demonstrates the difference between popular *qua* idealized *post hoc* biases and in-time figures. Compare, for instance, the list found in *Billboard*'s charts (http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6297023/billboard-hot-100-1990) with the Google list mentioned above, which, as of May 4, 2017, contained the following: Nirvana, Oasis, Alice in Chains, Stone Temple Pilots, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead, Soundgarden, The Cranberries, Matchbox Twenty, Goo Goo Dolls, Madonna, Foo Fighters, Depeche Mode, Aerosmith, The Pixies, Bush, Blur, Tupac Shakur, Green Day, Metallica, Rage Against the Machine, Guns 'n ' Roses, Michael Jackson, Marilyn Manson, Alanis Morissette, Dave Matthews Band, Outkast, Weezer, Nine Inch Nails, Beastie Boys, Korn, and No Doubt. Many of these bands and artists were extremely successful and popular, but it takes a certain bias to categorize Blur as more popular and culturally relevant than, say, Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Brandy, or TLC.

[190] For an excellent, concise, and accessible look at the role of race in structuring of popularity, charts, and curation, see McKinney (2017).

[191] Robin James (2017b) has convincingly argued that this represents a move towards *psychographics* and away from demographics. Though I agree to an extent on the esthesic, critic-fan side of the coin, this chapter has demonstrated that markedness in demographics still holds some sway for how musicians get categorized.



EXAMPLE 4.18. Spotify's display of its demographic "targeting," making clear which kinds of identities most directly guide their algorithmic predictions and machine learning.[192]

[192] Screenshots taken from https://spotifyforbrands.com/us/targeting/ April 9, 2017. Spotify's audience is made up of between two-thirds and three-quarters millennial listeners (Cummings 2016).

At the very end of February 2018, Spotify officially filed for public offering on the New York Stock Exchange, a move hinted at for more than a year. The company, valued around $20 billion (Spangler 2018), is at the very least an important cog in the media industry. In this filing, Spotify's co-founder and public face laid out the company's ideological position: "With access to unprecedented amounts of data and insights, we're building audiences for every kind of artist at every level of fame and exposing fans to a universe of songs. In this new world, music has no borders. Spotify enables someone in Miami to discover sounds from Madrid. It links immigrants in Boston to songs back home in Bangkok. We're working to democratize the industry and connect all of us, across the world, in a shared culture that expands our horizons."[193] Imperial and colonial resonances aside, Ek champions a utopian vision of a globalized musical culture, with boundaries to access crumbling under the might of data-driven algorithmic recommendations.

One might hope that the death of genre could bring a sonic utopia of popular music devoid of boundaries or high-brow/low-brow binaries, but unfortunately, this reterritorialization has been to an unevenly smooth space, essentially rendering incomplete the potential totalizing deterritorialization of genre made possible by a drive towards universal access. As I've shown, the ostensibly decreasing utility of genre might actually bolster the differential and asymmetric experiences and opportunities of already marginalized artists and styles, reframing a tautology between industrial profits and listening habits.[194] Through both the delimitation of genre tags available to hip hop artists and the specificity of

[193] https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1639920/000119312518063434/d494294df1.htm#rom494294_14 (accessed 09/09/18). Though Ek occasionally refers to musicians as "artists," he also tellingly refers to them as "professional creators," lumping musicians in with multiple other types of labor involved in the popular music machine. Besides the obvious irony of classing musicians as laborers during a time when their labor and work have been decreasingly profitable, this notion is refracting back onto the listener as well, where musical discovery has been framed similarly as labor. Rather than an experience of leisure, discovery of new music undergoes a becoming-work, a problem to be solved by the industry. Ben Ratilff's book, *Every Song Ever: Twenty Ways to Listen in an Age of Musical Plenty*—mentioned in this dissertation's opening chapter—embodies this newfound notion that we need new guides to help us wade through ever widening musical waters.

[194] Echonest's main developers, for instance, have professed proclivities towards obscurity, omnivorousness, and rock, which necessarily shape their machine learning. Glenn McDonald, for instance, shares some relevant anecdotes on his blog. "I have a coworker named Matt who basically only listens to skate-punk music, ever, and we test all personalization things on him first, because you can tell immediately if it's wrong" (McDonald 2016b). And in his search for a politically

demographic targeting, Spotify enacts what Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) calls "technological redlining," erecting boundaries and striations that circumscribe certain experiences for certain types of artists and listeners. Noble's research concentrates "on unveiling the many ways that African American people have been contained and constrained in classification systems, from Google's commercial search engine to library databases" (2018, 5), and my study would hint at yet another classification system that constrains and contains.

Returning again to Deleuze and Guattari, I argue that within streaming services' increasingly opaque machinations, "a dimensionality that subordinates directionality, or superimposes itself upon it, [has become] increasingly entrenched" (1987, 480). Opposing the exploratory multi-directional paths evoked by the anecdotal experience of my partner's students that opened this chapter, the accelerating drive towards machine learning removes the semiotic and connective potential of genre, mapping increasing dimensions and metrics onto a reconfiguration of stylistic strata. In much the same way that search engines like Google have reoriented most users' experience of the internet through "market-driven information portals" (Noble 2018, 179), Spotify and other streaming services have reconfigured musical distribution by coercing lines-of-flight down specific paths, geared towards specific highly-valuable listeners whose data is coveted by all sorts of actors. Bourdieu's homologies between capital and distinction resurface anew in a time of omnivorous, eclectic tastes. We have not moved past genres or hierarchies; instead the smooth becomes re-striated.[195]

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neutral genre, McDonald writes (a bit tongue-in-cheek): "to me as a metal fan, this naturally felt like it was probably mathematical proof of the moral and intellectual superiority of metal." And later, "if we go all the way down to the 1094 genres for which we have at least 100 fans with supposedly-known political affiliations, then there, finally, #1 is in fact melodic power metal. … Having successfully proven my point…." Though this comes through as self-deprecating in a way, many a truth is said in jest. For full context, see McDonald (2017). For some explicit examples of underlying biases in machine learning, see Edionwe (2017).

[195] Again, Deleuze and Guattari anticipate this situation: "All of this serves as a reminder that the smooth itself can be drawn and occupied by diabolical powers of organization; value judgments aside, this demonstrates above all that there exist two nonsymmetrical movements, one of which striates the smooth, and one which reimports smooth space on the basis of the striated" (1987, 480).

Robin James's study on the relationship between concepts of "post-identity" and "post-genre" provides similar conclusions. As James explains, "claims to genre transcendence are credible when they are made by artists who … appear free of any particular social identity. In order to sound post-genre, one has to seem post-identity. Beyoncé [or Rihanna] works all sorts of genres … but when the idea of her genre-transcendence is floated … most people still interpret her as operating somewhere within R&B. … Only artists who inhabit the 'non-black' side of the post-identity color line … are legible as post-genre practitioners" (2017a, 31). My study supplies some quantitative support for her convincing arguments.[196] A certain type of removed, Kantian aesthetics inherent in discourses of omnivorousness apparently require a certain mobility and level of capital.

Ultimately, even though #genre ends up re-instituting boundaries based on generic and demographic lines, I think the concept represents an important and monumental shift from earlier genremes wherein adjectives like "jazz" or "soul" and verbs like "rock 'n' roll" or "rap" became nominalized. Now, these terms (along with many others) have become (re)adjectivized, and have become weapons in the battle for artistic value, legitimacy, and commercial viability in a space riddled with new and old striations. #genre captures this mixed and very much alive space while opening a new realm of musicological and music theoretical exploration.

[196] Jessica Bissett Perea finds a similar result of the violence of "post-identity" in discourses surrounding Native and Aboriginal cultures. "Of the many issues Alaska Native leaders grapple with, none are more pressing than the very real and dangerous double-erasure of Native agency: first, by historical colonial powers, and second, by contemporary 'post-racial' discourse. Such systemic erasures continue to threaten an ongoing Alaska Native self-determination movement by sanctifying the problematic 'present absence' of diverse Native voices and perspectives" (2011, 105).

Epilogue

On April 16, 2018, the Pulitzer Prize committee sent shockwaves through the foundations of various musical edifices when they announced that Kendrick Lamar had been awarded its prize in music for his 2017 album *DAMN*. The committee's announcement described the album as "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life."[197] Like Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize, Lamar's Pulitzer generated a wealth of discourse concerned with understanding how *this kind* of artist making *this kind* of music could win *this kind* of award. The Associated Press's initial blurb was representative, noting that Lamar's album was the "first non-classical or jazz work to win the award," while lauding "his profound mix of hip-hop, spoken word, jazz, soul, funk, poetry and African sounds."[198] His ability to tease and ultimately transcend these stylistic and categorical borders allowed him to "cross over to audiences outside of rap, from rock to pop to jazz." Issues of genre fundamentally structured *DAMN.*'s ensuing contentious reception and metatexts.

A year prior, the Grammys gave their Album of the Year award to Adele for her *25*. The English pop/soul singer was stunned, along with many in the music industry. In her acceptance speech, Adele went so far as to suggest that she didn't deserve the award, wondering aloud how she won over Beyoncé, whose audio-visual mega-hit *Lemonade* generated a year-high nine nominations. That album and its constituent songs were nominated in pop, rock, and "urban contemporary" categories, and Beyoncé had performed the song "Daddy Lessons" at the Country Music Awards the year prior. *Lemonade* is defined largely by this stylistic plurality, with the multiple genres functioning as more than ironic pastiche or bricolage. Kariann Goldschmitt (2016) argues that, in this album,

[197] http://www.pulitzer.org/news/announcement-2018-pulitzer-prize-winners, accessed April 16, 2018. One might note the thinly veiled demographic connotations of the descriptive terms "vernacular," "authenticity," and "rhythmic dynamism." These are essentially inseparable from a prototypical semiotic construction of Lamar's identity and higher-order genre participation.
[198] https://apnews.com/e58f08c752454842967821ab8e0c4c53 accessed April 16, 2018.

Beyoncé performs "a kind of recuperative historiography of the African American role in many genres of music, not just those labeled pop, R&B, or urban." Like Lamar's album, *Lemonade* champions an aesthetic of genre mastery, exploring the semiotic traces and historical residues of multiple styles, treating genre as a signifyin' parameter just like melody, timbre, harmony, rhythm, or meter. Both of these albums embody #genre's densely networked nature while exploring various stylistic lines-of-flight that radiate away from their musicians' supposed governing genre. For these stylistic explorations, *DAMN.* won a prestigious, groundbreaking award; *Lemonade* couldn't win Album of the Year. Why?

Issues of genre, identity, and technology fundamentally shape music's reception, meaning, and value, and as I've shown throughout this dissertation, both the music industry (via Spotify's related artists and genre tags) and academic music scholarship (with its analytical focus on $\alpha\chi$ and $\beta\psi$ planes) render certain meaningful, structural stylistic filaments undercoded. By engaging these issues in the direct analysis of musical works, in the sociological survey of popular discourses, and in the analysis of metadata, I hope to have shown how music theorists can (and should) incorporate genre into their work not only as an augmentation to traditional analysis, but also as a subject of inquiry itself. Analyzing genremes and their musical artifacts would help music theory leverage its disciplinary expertise to tackle important contemporary issues—like why Lamar's hip hop and Beyonce's R&B were treated so differently by industry powers. In Jennifer C. Lena's words, "the study of classification systems reveals the link between our values and how we assign value, as a function of our participation in (musical) communities" (2012, 135). I urge music theorists to engage in a study of music's classification systems in order to understand the connection between musical parameters and musical values.

This dissertation has provided a few main approaches to genre. In the first chapter, I laid out a brief summary of the work done by pop music theorists (and others) on the topic of genre, arguing

for a renewed engagement that brings the term and concept into our current world. Doing so entailed an argument for understanding current popular music in its own genreme, defined generally as the combination of experiential potential and structuring power that genre generates at a specific time and in a specific cultural milieu. To show why this might be valuable, I explicated genre's congruence with topic theory, showing through analyses of mashups how a genre-based methodology can produce meaningful interpretive possibilities that surpass a focus on autosonic allusions and intra-musical features. The ramifications for non-mashup, non-sample-based popular musics are manifold, as shown by the work of Leydon (2010), Spicer (2010), and Echard (2017) who have all successfully applied topic theory to a variety of popular musics, including late '90s polystylistic pop, "white reggae," and psychedelia respectively.

The following chapters took a slightly broader perspective on genre's role within the streaming age. Doing so revealed a general tension about genre's utility for musicians, audiences, and the industry. Despite utopian visions of a borderless musical world, it appears that novel technological mechanisms for musical distribution continue to reproduce troubling taxonomies of musicians based partially on demographics.[199] I laid out a small set of quantitative metrics for evaluating clusters of artists, using some techniques that should be approachable to those already engaged in corpus studies and computational analyses. Further work deploying machine learning and robust group theory, along with much larger datasets, will provide plenty of opportunity for music theorists to engage with real time machinations of the music industry. These could also place our field into closer contact with quantitative fields like Music Information Retrieval and the social sciences.

This dissertation has also opened a few avenues for future work. I didn't completely or adequately theorize my overarching notion of the "genreme," since doing so would require a broad

[199] For a collection of earlier research on the troubling relationships between digital technologies, the internet, and inequality see Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansbury 2003 and their chapters on inequality of access, skills, economic opportunity, and democracy (e.g., the ability to vote).

chronological survey that would compare our current collection of genre cultures with both historical and contemporary contextualizations. This was well outside the scope of the current project, but I hope to define genremes in more detail by undertaking future studies across two timescales. First, I will survey the way that historical music theorists (broadly construed) understood musical categories. From Boethius's ontological divisions (between *musicae mundana*, *humana* and *instrumentalis*) and Bernhard's classifications of dissonance treatment, to Fetis's orders of tonality and Schenker's naturalistic hierarchies, categorization has always been an important part of technical music theorization. A survey of these modes of categorization—rather than, for instance, a history of various definitions of consonances or functional status of chromaticism—could provide a valuable genealogical project for music theorists. Unique and historically contingent genremes may emerge.

Second, and more directly related to this dissertation, future work on genremes will investigate a series of case studies focused on times of categorizational change in U.S. popular music since the 1950s. Such a study would attempt to show the various genre-thinkings that have governed the popular music machine during the past 60 or so years and how these connect and mediate various planes of sociality. This would allow a much more nuanced approach to the issues of homology that I opened throughout the dissertation, since a cross-cultural, chronologically diverse study would place causal relations between various agents into sharper contrast. For example, the much-analyzed, revolutionary spirit of the 1960s coincided with the intrusion of a variety of subgenres into broad musical categories, from Indian and Baroque influences on rock and pop to the rise of funk, soul, and country rock.[200] The uptick in stylistic diversity matched the upward mobility afforded by the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, and the burgeoning LGBTQ+ community. Racial and sexual minorities gained a new voice both in society and in popular music, simultaneously deterritorializing socio-

[200] Recall, for instance, my discussion of the R&B charts in the 1960s from Chapter 1, which briefly explored the shifting categorizational conventions of black popular music during this era.

cultural and musical planes, with many activists aiming for a general liberal universalist *telos* that was embodied by Johnson's Great Society social programs.

But every deterritorialization must be accompanied by a reterritorialization, and I would suggest that the concomitant failure of U.S. society to satisfactorily liberate and unite its people, along with the traumas involved in the escalation of the Vietnam War, the assassination of MLK, the heightened tensions of the Cold War, technological changes, etc.—these all abetted a *deferment* of the inevitable reterritorialization until the 1970s when, like the current political climate, U.S. society became increasingly fragmented. The utopian ideals of the 1960s liberal universalists gave way to cultural nationalisms: a nation of plural and connected entities, a salad bowl rather than the metaphorical melting pot. The rise of neoliberalism during this time helped foster a *center-schism* genreme in which two main mechanisms drove musical categorization: record labels became larger and concentrated their corporate power, while many specialized musical communities of narrow genres grew in the peripheral fractures.[201] At the center, huge hit records from bands like The Eagles and Fleetwood Mac set new marks for sales and cultural ubiquity while concretizing an easy-listening rock aesthetic. Meanwhile, schisms opened spaces for disco, punk, metal, afro-futurist funk, glam rock, reggae, free jazz, glam, fusion, hip hop, and many others to proliferate during this time, depending initially on underground scenes of various racial, gendered, and sexual minority groupings. This genreme reached its final apotheosis, I believe, in Michael Jackson's *Thriller,* which synthesized a wide variety of styles, riding both corporate backing (the center) and diverse audiences (schism) to a mega-success.[202] This brief excursus on a potential genreme should indicate that relationships between

[201] Without going on too wide a digression, neoliberalism can be defined as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade"(Harvey 2005, 2). The focus on individualism and the free market partially explains and coincides with the 1970s center-schism genreme I suggest here.

[202] Contemporary reviews noted *Thriller*'s stylistic "range" (Palmer 1984) and suggested the album "can't be categorized as rock or funk or disco" (Pareles 1984).

genres, broad social planes, and musical experiences are well within the reach of music theorists, and they provide a fertile ground for future work.

All musical analysis depends necessarily on the generic environment of both its subject and object. As Aaron Harcus has recently argued, even the seemingly simple identification of a single pitch interval requires a dialogical approach that recognizes tones as "*aspects* of the involved situations they participate in," including "the totality of involvements that organize these situational characteristics" (2016, 77). Like Harcus, I think theorists of all stripes could benefit from attending to music's elastic environments and their dialogic orientations. In this country's current political and social climate, it seems irresponsible *not* to directly engage with the categories and structures that shape the methods and objects of our discipline's inquiries. By doing so, music theorists might more reliably realize the inevitable political implications of the music we study and of the disciplinary work we do. Genre provides an obvious concept by which music theorists can responsibly engage the world outside the ivory tower while still deploying their unique skills and sensitive musical interpretations. I hope this dissertation will be just one of many projects to participate in our broad contemporary musical world through an exploration of genre.

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