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Hyperpop: How Streaming Services Create and Control Genre Through Curation

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Hyperpop: How Streaming Services Create and Control Genre Through Curation

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Abstract

In the past two years, the "microgenre" hyperpop has garnered a cult internet following as well as the attention of journalists and skeptics who seek to contextualize the genre in a variety of ways. Hyperpop is an offshoot of pop; it is best understood as an exaggeration of mainstream pop tropes. But, beyond just defining what hyperpop is through song analysis and genre theory, this paper seeks to center hyperpop in the study of how genre exists in contemporary culture.

Specifically, I draw on recent research to argue that music streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music are more than what they might appear, that is, expansive music databases. Instead, these streaming services wield a curatorial power which allows them to construct genre and create taste through somewhat nonapparent mechanisms (interfaces, algorithmic results, aesthetic authority, etc.). Wielding this curatorial power, streaming services codify and create genres like hyperpop. And subsequently, they become the arbiters of cultural taste through the manipulation of genres.

Intro

Hyperpop is not the cultural zeitgeist of 2020. Despite the cries of a population of music journalists announcing the genre's ascendancy like the second coming, by most standard metrics—Billboard, streams, Twitter mentions—this effusive pop subgenre remains relatively obscure, and only occasionally peeks from the shadows of the Spotify algorithm to share its forward-thinking pop ebullience. But the increased emphasis on hyperpop is indisputable, both in journalistic writing, and in the small but vocal set of acolytes who gather online to litigate hyperpop's meaning and set its boundaries.[1]

So what accounts for the hyperpop hype? And what is hyperpop anyway?

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[1] How Hyperpop, a Small Spotify Playlist, Grew Into a Big Deal, November 10, 2020, 1/20/21 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/arts/music/hyperpop-spotify.html>.

This study seeks to center hyperpop in a cultural context. Heralded as "the most hyped sound of 2020,"[2] and "the chaotic music for the chaotic moment,"[3] hyperpop's emergence reveals the ways in which streaming services like Spotify have become the new arbiters of genre labels, and the arbiters of cultural taste itself as a result. Where, traditionally, radio hosts, record labels, and music journalists had been responsible for categorizing music (thereby exerting influence on how we understood that music) streaming services have assumed the role. However, unlike these "traditional" avenues, the actors imposing genre labels in digital music streaming are more obscured from the public view, and streaming services like Spotify have a great deal of cultural power that goes largely unnoticed. As with the case of hyperpop, Spotify becomes the site on which subgenres and "scenes" are publicly codified, and Spotify's curators impose that influence.

To begin our inquiry, I seek to establish some framework for musical genre—*what is genre and why is it so important?* Then, I outline the power of streaming services to control genre. Finally, we describe hyperpop as the product of these cultural forces, genre and mass-music consumption through, and influenced by, streaming.

Genre Theory

To start, two definitions.

Popular music: *music written and marketed with the intention of achieving mass distribution and sales now principally in the form of recordings.*

Merriam Webster, "Popular Music"[4]

Genres are not static groups of empirically verifiable musical characteristics, but rather associations of texts whose criteria of similarity may vary according to the uses to which the genre labels are put. "Similar" elements include more than musical-style features, and groupings often hinge on elements of nation, class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on.

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[2] Hyperpop or overhyped? The rise of 2020's most maximal sound, December 17, 2020, 2/10/21 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/hyperpop-genre-2020-charli-xcx-rina-sawayama-b1775025.html>.

[3] Hyperpop is the chaotic music for the chaotic moment, October 15, 2020, 1/19/ 2021 <https://www.statepress.com/article/2020/10/specho-hyperpop-the-chaotic-music-for-the-chaotic-moment>.

[4] "Popular Music", <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/popular%20music>.

Since the early twentieth century in the United States, genre has been the central categorization method by which popular music is marketed and distributed, the *lingua franca* of popular music consumption. As the main means by which music is marketed, genre's prevalence began with the advent of records and the radio, and it continues to be the most important categorization method in the age of digital music streaming. Consumers hear genres labels every day And genre is ubiquitous. Psychological studies on musical stimulus often partition music down genre lines, for instance, Pitchfork's nine genres by which you can sort their reviews: electronic, folk/country, jazz, pop/r&b, rock, experimental, global, metal, and rap/hip-hop.[6] And it is quite possible that the ubiquity of genre might lead listeners to think of genre as a *neutral* way to categorize music. This is far from the truth.

By identifying 1) why genre is so important and 2) who/what has control over it, we might better understand how genre exists as a cultural force, and how streaming services have interest in drawing genre lines. Genre, as a type of corporate fiction, can be used to create and mediate culture.

Why is Genre Important

When we practice or listen to music, we do so in accordance with rules conventions associated with one or many genres that have constitute themselves overtime. Consciously or not, we respond to these conventions in different ways: by playing in specific ways, by valuing musically here, by moving our bodies…

Serge Lacasse, *Towards a Model of Transphonography*[7]

Put simply, genre is important because it defines our expectations when listening to music. A genre label, say, R&B, can prime listeners for certain characteristic musical conventions and allow for descriptive shorthand when communicating about music.

Moreover, a song's genre—or the *perception* of a song's genre—can be understood as feature of the music itself which can color the listening experience. Musicologist David Brackett notes, "The legibility of a genre is what allows readers to create and understand context,"[8] and William Echard calls genre "a horizon of expectation," which provides a "shared set of

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[5] David Brackett. *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music.* 1st ed. California: University of California Press, 2016. Print. **Page Numbers**

[6] Latest Reviews, 2/10/21 2/10/21, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/>.

[7] Serge Lacasse. "Toward a Model of Transphonography." *The Pop Palimpsest.* Eds. Serge Lasse and Lori Burns. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2018. 9-60. Print.

[8] David Brackett, "Categorizing Sound." 13

coordinates" to guide listening practice. Categories are extremely powerful in how consumers relate to media, even beyond what they might realize.

As an example of how genre might color perception, consider a song like *Rude* by the band MAGIC!, which topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 2014.[9] *Rude* certainly sounds like reggae, with a heavy electric guitar backbeat, a prominent bass line, and some backing horns. But certain nonmusical elements—most obviously, the band's whiteness—meant that the song was marketed as a pop song. If you are someone who might, for instance, "not like reggae," the award of a "pop" label to a song like *Rude* can allow a permission structure to enjoy the song. It can even mean looking past all of the most obvious musical elements which would qualify the song as reggae.

Why is Genre Messy?

While this paper will go on to argue that streaming services like Spotify have the lion's share of influence in codifying genre, listeners are still prone to personal disagreements about genre lines. "Any two listeners or critics will often display striking differences between their concepts of how a particular genre should be defined, and which artists should be included," notes musicologist William Echard.[10] And this can make discussion of genre immensely difficult, because even as genre perception is important in influencing listening, our personal definitions and expectations for genre can vary wildly.

Again, genres are corporate fiction; they are categories slapped on certain records that help labels market their product. They are not necessarily bound to any prescribed musical characteristics or any other essential qualities as is clear in the case of *Rude*. For this reason, musicologists will systematically reject any definition of genre that comes too close to "**x genre** has **y feature**." This is called and essentialist definition, and for the reasons described above, has some serious limitations. Certainly, genres *often* describe some tangible element of a recording, but for any definition which relies on these essential musical qualities, exceptions abound. If popular music is *music written and marketed with the intention of achieving mass distribution*, why the hesitance to call rap music pop? If rock has drums, is *Welcome to Machine* by Pink Floyd not rock?

A general audience of music listeners tend to view genre in an ad-hoc, essentialist way, which is very often effective: yes, most rock music *does* have drums. However, it fails to be a cohesive definition for genre such like those created by many musicologists. In the literature, an

[9] MAGIC!'s 'Rude' Tops Hot 100, July 14, 2014,
<https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/6157715/magic-rude-hot-100-iggy-azalea-fancy-sam-smith-disclosure-latch>.

[10] William Echard. "Expecting Surprise Again: Neil Young and the Dialogic Theory of Genre." *Canadian university music review* 22.2 (2002): 30-47. *CrossRef.* Web.

essentialist definition of genre plays in opposition to a more theoretically post-structural definition.

A post-structural definition of genre sees genres as existing within a system of interrelationships. Post-structuralism, the founding philosophy here, is that things cannot be categorized by their essential qualities—apples are red, rap uses hi-hats—but that each genre exists in a mutable web of many genres; nothing is fixed. A quote from Derrida, taken from David Brackett's book on genre theory, describes how genres exists in a post-structural way.

> "I submit for your consideration the following hypothesis: a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. 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."[11]

Thus, no musical record ever definitely *is* part of a genre, but it always must *participate* in the system of genres. This conception is especially useful in that it frees listeners from thinking about genre as simply a checklist of musical characteristics. Instead, one might also consider elements like race, profitability, gender, sexuality, and class in drawing genre lines.

The Sound of Pop

So, while categorizing the "sound of pop" is a somewhat fraught task under the accepted theoretic framework, given the different ways in which contemporary audiences interact with the idea of genre, it is useful to think of pop both in the described post-structural framework, and in identifying some of its most common musical practices. The goal here is to define pop from a few angles in order to understand hyperpop in relation to and opposition to pop. The following are some essentialist qualities of contemporary pop, so there are many exceptions, but these are some characteristic tropes, both musical and non-musical.

Contemporary pop (henceforth just pop) consists mostly of highly-produced, readily-listenable songs between 2:30 and 4:00 minutes, with a homophonic texture, a lead singer, a simple verse-chorus form, and singable, tonal melodies set over repeating chord patterns. Take, for example, Olivia Rodrigo's *drivers license,* a song which recently shattered records for the most Spotify streams in a week.[12] The song is a power ballad in 4/4 time, seemingly drawing on stylistic influences from artists like Kelly Clarkson, Lorde, Taylor Swift, and Adele.[13] The instrumental palette includes piano, reverb-heavy drums, synth pads, and layered vocals. This mix of synthesized and acoustic instruments is common in pop, as is the

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[11] Brackett. *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music.* 1st ed. California: University of California Press, 2016. Print.

[12] Olivia Rodrigo's 'Drivers License' breaks new record, January 18, 2021, 2/10/21 <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/18/entertainment/olivia-rodrigo-drivers-license-spotify-trnd/index.html>.

[13] Olivia Rodrigo and Dan Nigro. *drivers license.* Spotify Vol. Geffen, Interscope, 2021. Print.

sonic polish of *drivers license* indicative of the large team that worked on it. The song credits include two songwriters, a producer, and two audio engineers.[14]

In fact, pop music has become culturally synonymous with an artistic sensibility (or lack thereof) that privileges a lowest-common-denominator taste. In accordance with the Merriam Webster definition, pop is music written and marketed to be commercially successful and has been since its 20th century inception. As a genre (and therefore a marketing tool), pop in the United States was originally part of a four-pronged model for music distribution in the 1920s, which included "foreign, race, old-time and mainstream popular music."[15] Pop music is interested in innovating only insofar as the records produced will be the next, most marketable fad.

This baseline understanding of pop music is essential to understand hyperpop in both a sonic and cultural context. Hyperpop, as stated before, is a genre in conversation with pop tropes. Hyperpop is an exaggeration of pop, but is radically different than pop in its mainstream accessibility. But more on that later.

The purpose of the next section is to demonstrate how hyperpop evolved as a genre, first with some brief history of the key artists working within the genre, and then as the product of a cultural force: streaming services' power to influence music consumption and taste through curation.

Brief History

P.C Music and Hyperpop

[The P.C. music] aesthetic can be summed up as a grab bag of metallic pings, rubbery zoings, helium-soaked Chipmunk vocals, trance stabs, airhorns, hardstyle kick drums, happy hardcore, Eskibeat, K-pop, J-Pop, vocaloid, 8-bit, black MIDI, 808s and Heartbreak, the Windows 95 startup chime, and a healthy dose of James Ferraro's Far Side Virtual for good measure.

Philip Sherburne, *P.C. Music's Twisted Electronic Pop, a User's Manual*[16]

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[14] The Players Behind Olivia Rodrigo's 'Drivers License': See the Full Credits, January 20, 2021, 2/10/21 <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1516831&crid=ea389143-651c-4230-a8d8-f67cf6649d20&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A61TJ-0471-DYRK-V21T-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=5545&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecomp=5bq2k&earg=sr0&prid=891155f0-8800-4fc6-b68c-8b00c89c107f>.

[15] David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music*

[16] Sherburne, Philip. P.C. Music's Twisted Electronic Pop: A User's Manual, , 2/15/ 2021 <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/485-pc-musics-twisted-electronic-pop-a-users-manual/>.

The history of hyperpop is relatively brief and hyperpop is still in the process of changing. But, by all accounts, it begins with A.G. Cook and his label/artist collective, PC Music (i.e. Personal Computer Music). In 2013, A.G. Cook, London based producer and prolific pop auteur, begins to assemble PC Music, playing shows in underground London clubs. Previously, Cook had been leading the small artist collective Gamsonite, a group of musicians who were making hyperpop-like music. The group included the artist GFOTY (short for 'Girlfriend of the Year') and Danny L. Harle. The official Gamsonite Tumblr is still up, with the last post from 2013. When PC Music really coalesced, solidifying some of the maximalist pop aesthetics of Gamsonite, it included musicians like SOPHIE, GFOTY, Hannah Diamond, Danny L. Harle, and Cook himself, although in the seven years since, the group has worked closely with artists like Charli XCX, Rina Sawayama, and 100 gecs. And even beyond the immediate PC Music label, producers and artists associated with PC Music make up a kind of aesthetic community, often producing or featuring on tracks outside of the label that share a maximalist pop sensibility.

A *Dazed* web article from 2019 recounts the history and excitement surrounding the overblown pop that the PC Music crew was pumping into smoke-filled London underground clubs. And, while never using the word "hyperpop," the article shares a quote from producer Skrillex in which you could easily swap 'PC Music' and 'hyperpop': "PC Music was the first wave of taking shit that was lowbrow and making it highbrow, without being too cool for school. It was so artful, but also disruptive, and it spoke to the weirdos."[17] Today, artists who (sometimes begrudgingly) identify themselves as working within the genre are apt to call PC Music the progenitor of hyperpop. The younger generation, artists like osquinn and glaive, even go so far as to call them the "old school." However, these younger artists, whose work tap into contemporary rap tropes (think Juice Wrld and Lo-Fi) appear alongside hyperpop veterans on the "official" hyperpop Spotify playlist. Their music shares a forward-thinking, futuristic sentiment, an unabashed affinity for polish, and a conviction to pop in all of its conception. Among artists, the group 100 gecs are often thought of as the most representative of the genre in its current form, with their 2019 album *1000 gecs* ensuring their hyperpop legend status.

Digital Music Streaming and Genre

Location of Genre

"I associate pop with a certain level of mass-market viability—although they don't necessarily have to, and often don't, pop records have the potential to cross over into broader consumption, collapsing the context of their immediate scene. In a way they're scene-agnostic. They exist as freestanding objects, or appear that way."

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[17] Selim Bulut, "The history of PC music, the most exhilarating record label of the 2010s ," <u>Dazed</u>.

One way to contrast hyperpop and pop is through an understanding of an extramusical association, that is, the *location* of these genres. This also serves as a way of introducing Spotify's cultural influence.

Pop differs from hyperpop in that it transcends an extramusical association with a specific place, either physical or digital. In the above quotation, Grammy-nominated YACHT frontwoman Claire L. Evans points to pop's "scene-antagonism," a type of atemporality and aspatiality derived from pop's desire for ubiquity. Pop is, by design, marketable and uses the full extent of modern technology to ensure its mass proliferation, and thus thrives in not being bound to a certain geographical place. Evans defines scene as "spatiotemporal…it's about communities of people in a specific place and time making music." Pop contrasts hyperpop in that it does not necessarily have this spatiotemporal element.

Where pop lives everywhere—radios, streaming services, shopping malls, commercials—hyperpop has a very specific digital location: the Spotify playlist called *Hyperpop* which has become all but the official source for what hyperpop is and is not. Hyperpop's association with a single, central, and digital space colors interpretation of the genre. The sense is that the community around hyperpop, a set of approximately 160,000 users, is part of a small "scene" like that described by Claire L. Evans. The Spotify playlist is the authoritative location around which fans gather.

Spotify's Interface & The Featured Playlist

Beginning simply with the user interface of Spotify, the site deals mostly in playlists as a compilatory package for music. Users, companies, and Spotify itself can create these playlists with up to 10,000 ordered songs. Spotify also has a "radio" function, which algorithmically selects subsequent songs based on current listening and user data. And of course, albums are readily accessible. However, playlists are king on Spotify. Research notes that Spotify's appeal—and what distinguishes it from other streaming services—lies in the ability to curate playlists, gratifying an urge comparable to the ownership of physical music: owning a record collection, creating a mixtape, or burning a CD. It is said that the "personalised playlist typifies the innovation of streaming platforms to structure listening," which music industry researcher Mathew Flynn draws in sharp contrast to radio's inability to do so.[19] And, Spotify succeeds in the flexibility it provides with these playlists. They become a kind of cultural currency, and others'

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[18] Claire Evans. *Re: Pop Music Research.* Ed. Anthony Christiana., 2021. Print.
[19] Mathew Flynn. "Accounting for Listening: how music streaming has changed what it means to listen." *Musical and Media Connectivities: Practices, Circulation, Interactions* 6 (2016): 36-59. Web.

playlists can be found by searching or using the "Browse" page, both controlled by Spotify's algorithms.

Most significant here are the so-called featured playlists. These playlists, of which the hyperpop playlist is one, are featured prominently on the Home and Browse pages of Spotify, as well as more heavily weighted to appear in search bar results. Spotify curates hundreds of these featured playlists, which might include artist specific playlists ("This Is Tom Waits"), functional/temporal playlists ("Workout Vibes" or "Songs to Sing in the Shower"), and, relevantly, genre playlists. To this end, *Streaming Music: Practices and Culture* notes:

> There is a certain hierarchy between the playlists, whereby those created by Spotify are easier to reach and have a more dominant position on the page than those created by other actors (like record companies, radio stations, etc.) and private users. To playlists organized according to genre, mood and so on, a new form called "Featured playlists" was added (Figure 5.5). Over time, this new category has become the most salient type of playlist…

Creation through Curation

The line between Spotify as a distribution outlet and Spotify as a promotional intermediary blurs.

Music Streaming: Control Curation

Spotify is aware that "the 'quality' of streaming music services … is reflected in the content-level mix of services they offer (i.e. recommendation algorithms, human curation, personalization features, social connections, etc.)."[20]

Streaming Music: Practices, Media, Cultures

Here is where the hyperpop playlist really becomes the central focus. Should a user be interested in hyperpop, having heard of the genre through a snippet of conversation, some music journalism, or the ascendent influence of TikTok (where hyperpop has seen increasing prevalence),[cite] that user might search Spotify for a playlist which bears that name. And, despite the 1000+ playlists with "hyperpop" in the title, the first playlist they will see, unsurprisingly, is Spotify's own featured playlist, with a clean-looking cover and the company's logo in the top left corner. This is no accident.

Streaming services like Tidal, Apple Music, and Spotify would seemingly run into a problem: they each catalogue roughly the same amount of music. So, what separates someone from choosing Apple Music versus Spotify versus YouTube Music comes down to interface,

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[20] Sofia Johansson, et al. *Streaming Music: Practices, Media, Cultures.* 1st ed. Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. Print.

surface functionality, and, most relevantly, curation. Thus, Spotify has a vested interest in making sure their "hyperpop" playlist shows up as the first results. Their market value is dependent upon providing these accessible and streamlined curated playlists. Certainly, Spotify has "transformed itself from a distributor of music into a producer of a 'branded musical experience.'"[cite] In privileging its own curated playlists in searches, it stakes out a place in the steaming market. But what Spotify also does as a byproduct is create the so-called "official" versions of these genres. That is, users begin to ground their conceptions of genres in the very tangible Spotify lists. For pop music, this might not be that big of a deal: the US Top 50 playlist functions like a playlist version of the Billboards charts. However, for small playlists or new genres, Spotify can quite literally create and codify genre. Spotify actively creates cultural goods (genre, community, scene). Spotify uses its featured playlists, to exert its influence and optimize its cultural and actual capital.

When the first result for a "hyperpop" search is the Spotify-curated playlist, not only does the Spotify-brand polish invoke a sense of authority, but other playlists which might have an alternative conception of the sound are being suppressed. Thus, the Spotify playlist becomes the definitive sound for hyperpop (or most genres, although newer or more niche "microgenres" are particularly affected) by controlling an algorithm, essentially cheating, to garner a huge listener base.

This is essentially Spotify's game. On one level, the service still works to categorize music descriptively. In fact, Spotify employs a man named Glenn McDonald, their "'data alchemist,'" whose job is to find emerging sounds on the platform and to classify them into "'microgenres.'"[21] Currently, Spotify categorizes 5,071 distinct genres. On the other hand, officializing these genres through control of the algorithmic search/browse system makes the resultant playlist means that these small genres become all but synonymous with the official Spotify playlist.

 The whole process begins to snowball as artists who understand the central location for the genre are asked to guest curate the playlist, such as the 100 gecs hyperpop playlist takeover in July of 2020, which adds an extra level of authority in the eyes of listeners. Put succinctly: "rather than neutrally channeling sounds, platforms such as Spotify take an active role in framing music, which includes the promotion of certain values and subjectivities." Spotify creates culture through curation. The nebulously defined "hyperpop," borne from a collection of loose aesthetics and word association, becomes codified on Spotify because the mechanisms of Spotify favor that. And it is for this reason that the featured hyperpop playlist is synonymous with this evolving genre, and not just a descriptive collection of musical works collected for ease of searchability.

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[21] How Hyperpop, a Small Spotify Playlist, Grew Into a Big Deal, November 10, 2020, 1/20/21 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/arts/music/hyperpop-spotify.html>.

Who (what?) has the power?

If this structure—the featured hyperpop playlist—has the ability to create cultural definitions of genre through its hegemonic control of a search algorithm, who is the person (or machine) deciding what specific songs are destined to be codified as hyperpop?

Since its first virtual publish in August 2019, the hyperpop playlist has been curated by Spotify Senior Editor Elizabeth "Lizzy" Szabo. Her name is uncredited on the site itself. Rather the playlist says, "created by Spotify," which may well be closer to the truth: a collective "Spotify" rather than the personalized "Lizzy."

Before 2015, Spotify did not employ human curators whatsoever,[22] and was more interested in paying services like Topsify, Filtr, and Digster to have their fingers on the pulse of public taste and create Spotify-backed playlists. However, cutting out these middlemen reduces cost, and allows Spotify greater control as they exert influence not just on abstract components like genre, but even in songmaking itself as evidenced by the rise of easily playlistable "Spotify-core," and an increasing emphasis for artists to consider streaming processes in order to optimize their sound.[23] Lizzy Szabo and her colleagues at Spotify work like radio DJs, who undoubtedly wield influence over taste, except they work namelessly under the aesthetic authority of the platform itself, the "official" featured playlist. Szabo has curated the hyperpop playlist for two years now, and has also curated playlists like Lorem.

Fast forward five years from the first Spotify playlist curator and featured playlists are "algotorial," or constructed both through algorithmic and human curatorial input. Undoubtedly, featured playlist curators retain a large portion of the editorial power of radio DJs, but their song selection process is in conversation with an algorithm which seeks to optimize playlist value: increase likes and saves, maximize time spent with the playlist, and invite repeat listens. The algotorial curation style, as outlined in Bonini and Gandini's 2019 research, sees the Spotify curator compile the playlist themselves in the first week of its mainstream distribution as a featured playlist. In the second week, an algorithm sorts through listeners' interactions with the songs and adjusts the playlist accordingly, changing the song order of the playlist or removing songs altogether. And while this might at first seem trivial, the difference between the first and second spot on a featured Spotify playlist can be worth thousands of dollars worth of streams, a huge boon for small artists who come to regard their fixture on the hyperpop playlist as a source of income. This can contribute to an increased awareness on the part of community-oriented Spotify listeners who understand that their attention to small artists on a featured playlist is a form of active market participation; users now understand that their streams are being analyzed by the algorithm, which can make or break their favorite small artists.[cite] Their attention is artist profit. This algotorial approach to playlist curation also emphasizes the mix of prescriptive

[22] Robert Prey. "Locating Power in Platformization: Music Streaming Playlists and Curatorial Power." *Social Media + Society* 6.2 (2020): 1-11. Web.

[23] Jeremy Wade Morris. "Music Platforms and the Optimization of Culture." *Social Media + Society* 6.3 (2020): 1-10. Web.

and descriptive music culture creation/consumption on the part of Spotify. Who is driving hyperpop's definition? Seemingly, it is a mixture of the listeners, the algorithm, and the featured editor, though to what relative extent, it is impossible to know for sure.
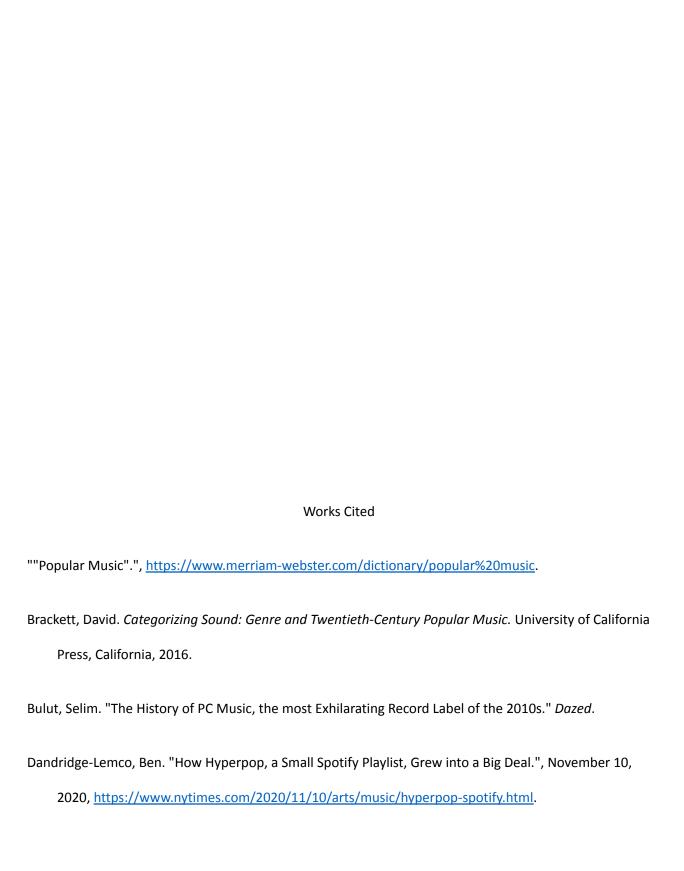
Conclusion

Central Paradox

Hyperpop exemplifies the paradoxicality of genre: genre is fictional, but immensely important. As Spotify gains control of writing that fiction, listners must contend with their ability to influence and create culture.

The story of hyperpop has been this:

Hyperpop as a genre may have begun as a descriptive label assigned to a subset of experimental pop records, but Spotify soon co-opted the label as it was in their interest to do so. Spotify then exerted its influence through a set of algorithmic and curatorial practices which have ensured its success as a streaming service and *voila*, what began as fiction, a tweet, a label about some underground London pop records by a 20-something-year-old is now a subgenre with an attached subculture. A fierce community of supporters have close ranks around the genre, with the hyperpop playlist as the locus of power. This audience—in dialogue with an algorithm which monitors their tastes and Lizzy Szabo, the editor—has begun to form an identity around hyperpop, and litigate what it is and what it isn't. In fact, when PC Music founder and "hyperpop godfather" A.G. Cook did a playlist takeover in September, he was met with backlash from fans who believed his musical choices—Nicki Minaj, Kate Bush, J Dilla, and others—were not representative of the hyperpop sound, which has increasingly moved towards younger and newer artists even in its brief life.[24]

Genre is corporate fiction. But it is maybe the most important fiction there is in music marketing and music consumption. It is fiction which, under the right circumstances, can make or break careers, connect people, create subcultures, and allow for the creation of identity around it. Discussion of genre can feel silly: why not call Nicki Minaj hyperpop? But for those like 15-year-old artist osquinn, whose songs are displaced from the playlist by Nicki Minaj, that can mean a difference of thousands of dollars worth of streams. Moreover, if you are a fan who holds the genre label close to heart, emphasizing the fictionality of genre might elicit a strong reaction. More than ever in music, the artificial and seemingly trivial have real world consequences, and more than ever, the arbiters of these fictions are hidden from our view and ingrained into interface and algorithm.

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[24] How Hyperpop, a Small Spotify Playlist, Grew Into a Big Deal, November 10, 2020, 1/20/21 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/arts/music/hyperpop-spotify.html>.

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