Trajectories of Consecration:
Signature Style and the Pace of Category Spanning

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Abstract. Consecration represents the most definitive form of legitimation in every cultural field. Complementing previous research focused on individual, contextual, and structural conditions underpinning consecration, this paper takes a sequence analytical perspective and explores whether diverse creative trajectories are more frequently associated with consecration. We introduce the notion of signature style and the pace of category spanning as key features for consecration. We argue that a consecrated signature style is just as likely to result from a producer's adherence to a specific style over time or from a consistent (and fast-paced) category-spanning creative trajectory. The resulting identity will be specialist in the first case, eclectic in the second. We analyze the stylistic trajectories of 863 electronic music artists and find robust support to our hypothesis. The analysis is corroborated by further exploratory findings that identify intriguing questions for future research. By examining the organization of creative journeys in the career of cultural producers, this paper emphasizes the importance of considering the unfolding and rhythm of creativity over time. This temporal perspective sheds new light on the dynamics of distinctiveness and consecration in cultural fields.

KEYWORDS:

1. Consecration
2. Cultural producers
3. Signature style
4. Pace of category spanning
5. Social Sequence Analysis
6. Electronic Music

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INTRODUCTION

In virtually every field of cultural production, consecration represents the most definitive form of legitimation (Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Allen & Parsons, 2006; Bourdieu, 1993; Cattani et al., 2014). As the "ultimate process of status formation" (Accominotti, 2018, p. 3), consecration exalts producers and makes them worthy of veneration and esteem from the public. To shed light on drivers of consecration, one strand of research in cultural production has focused on field-level mechanisms, noting how a field's structure, evaluative criteria, or audience composition facilitate or hinder consecration (e.g., Accominotti, 2018; Cattani et al., 2014). Another strand has instead focused on individual characteristics, highlighting how the position of a producer's identity in the socio-cultural space in which audiences operate and anchor their evaluations (Goldberg et al., 2016) underpins consecration dynamics (e.g., Aadland et al., 2019; Askin & Mauskapf, 2017; Brewer, 1991; Leung, 2014). Most of this scholarship is concerned with the moment when consecration happens – that is, it focuses on the pivotal creative instant when a certain cultural product attracts unanimous attention, marking a transition from mere appreciation to absolute consecration (Accominotti, 2009; Galenson, 2001, 2004).

Yet, the paths leading to consecration may be very diverse. Consider the much-awaited Oscar to Leonardo DiCaprio, which was awarded to him in 2016 for what is largely considered not his best actor performance: the consecrating event did not fully reflect DiCaprio's cumulated recognition (Kaminsky, 2019). In rock music, the Velvet Underground's debut album took ten years to be consecrated as enlightened and revolutionary. And, reiterating previous puzzles (e.g., Zuckerman et al., 2003), artists as diverse as the extremely eclectic Four Tet and the specialist Paul Kalkbrenner (Formilan et al., 2020) are equally likely to be consecrated despite radically different creative trajectories.

In this paper, we advance a perspective on consecration that sees it as an emerging property of whole creative trajectories. Drawing on the sociology of categories and concepts (Hannan et al., 2007, 2019; Negro, Koçak, et al., 2010), we take creative trajectories as units of analysis and focus on their category-spanning traits as a sequential property. We introduce two key notions to advance research on creative trajectories and paths to consecration: *signature style* and the *pace of category spanning*. First, we argue that despite their marked differences, highly focused (specialist) and highly eclectic (boundary-spanning) creative trajectories share a common trait: they are both internally coherent and, thereby, underpin the creation of distinctive *signature styles* – i.e., coherent ensembles of elements that constitute a distinctive stylistic identity that is, specialist in the first case, eclectic in the second. We surmise that cultural producers who manage to project a clear signature style – whether it is coherently specialist or coherently eclectic –

on the market are more likely to garner attention from the audience and become candidate for consecration.

Second, corroborating our notion of signature style, we also advance that the pace at which categories are spanned over time constitutes a key dimension of distinctive signature styles. In particular, as creators try to project a specialist identity, they need to impose a low-paced rhythm to the eventual changes they introduce to their signature. Conversely, when producers aim at establishing an eclectic identity, a fast-paced rhythm of category spanning delays the development of audiences' expectations and the formation of judgments. In other words, to allow a signature style's coherence to be appreciated by evaluators, cultural producers need to set the right rhythm to a "dance of entrainment" (as it happens among team members; Ancona & Waller, 2007) between what they do and how market expectations develop.

We situate our analysis in the field of electronic music, where infinite variety (Caves, 2000), category-spanning dynamics (Formilan & Stark, 2020; McLeod, 2001), and the speed at which new recordings are released represent key features. Using a social-sequence analytic strategy (Abbott, 1995; Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Chan, 1995; Han & Moen, 1999; Stovel et al., 1996), we examine the relationship between the sequences of stylistic positioning of the recordings composing the discographies of a sample of 863 electronic music artists and their consecration. We complement multivariate hypothesis testing analysis with sequence-analytic illustrative findings that lend credence to our theory and open up promising venues for future research. Our results inform literature on innovation in two ways. First, following previous research on creative careers (Accominotti, 2009; Galenson, 2001; Wohl, 2019), we expose the unfolding of a producer's creative trajectory as the context where creative identities and their attendant signature styles develop. We show that distinctiveness may emerge not only from trajectories characterized by stylistic consistency, but also from continuous, career-long, stylistic experimentation. Most importantly, we highlight how both forms of distinctiveness are equally likely to attain consecration. Second, our study reveals the importance of considering not only a creative trajectory's long-term temporal evolution but also its rhythmical cadence. The notion of pace of category spanning introduces rhythm as a sequence-level category-spanning feature. While deviations from past actions may generally engender confusion and signal lack of expertise, producers who move across different categories at a high pace have an opportunity to establish their category-spanning trait as a constitutive element of their identity.

The notions of signature style and pace of category spanning offer novel insight into a long-standing puzzle in cultural fields: that cultural producers whose creative trajectory is either extremely eclectic or highly focused are equally likely to achieve consecration in their own field (e.g., Zuckerman et al., 2003). In their journey to consecration, cultural producers may reap greater benefits by projecting a signature style that is not only temporally coherent but also rhythmically convincing. Such signature style is key to fueling distinctive identities and sustaining audiences' attention.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

As the most definitive form of legitimation, consecration is important in virtually every field of cultural production. Consecration, by its very nature, imposes sharp distinctions between cultural producers who deserve recognition and those who do not (Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Bourdieu, 1993; Cattani et al., 2014). By propelling individuals in the public eye, making them worthy of veneration and esteem, consecration "appears as the ultimate process of status formation" (Accominotti, 2018, p. 3). Following Bourdieu (1993), consecration has been explained as the result of conditions operating at the individual level (e.g., socio-structural position in the field) and judgments made by social audiences (e.g., peers or critics) about cultural producers and their offers (e.g., Accominotti, 2018; Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Allen & Parsons, 2006; Cattani et al., 2014). Most importantly, consecration stands apart from other forms of legitimation because of the temporality of its occurrence: whereas critical or commercial acclaim may punctuate a producer's career multiple times, consecration only occurs at later stages of one's career when appreciation of his or her creative trajectory becomes possible (e.g., Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Galenson, 2001; Wohl, 2019).

A central tenet within extant research on career consecration is that producers moving across different categories (e.g., genres, styles, etc.) are typically at a disadvantage compared to their more focused peers (Zuckerman et al., 2003). This research suggests that careers spanning categories are likely to bring penalties because producers crossing multiple categories have a more ambiguous identity that is difficult for audiences to make sense of, resulting in devaluation (Hannan et al., 2007; Hsu et al., 2009; Zuckerman et al., 2003). Different lines of research support the view that spanning categorical boundaries undermines producers' performance and the recognition of their work. For instance, organizational scholars have noted that producers who create narrowly focused consistent content, or "specialist identities," reap greater benefits. Prospective consumers can more easily identify specialist identities, thus maintaining specialist identities helps producers to be recognized (Ahlkvist & Fisher, 2000; Giorgi & Weber, 2015). Social-psychology theories of visual perception too hold that perceiving predicted stimuli requires less cognitive effort and engenders more positive affect (De-Wit et al., 2010). Evidence of preference for consistency in stimuli has been found in the context of color (Martindale & Moore, 1988), paintings (Farkas, 2002) and semantic categories (Martindale et al., 1988). Audiences may also view producers who display consistent aesthetic content as personally committed to certain aesthetic styles, and this commitment is perceived as a sign of credibility, quality, and authenticity (Cattani, Dunbar, et al., 2017).

Based on these arguments and findings one should expect audiences to generally prefer focused over eclectic producers because the former follow more predictable and consistent patterns and conform to audiences' (explicit or implicit) expectations. Yet, we know too well that renaissance-minded creators (see Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014) who

cross social and cultural categories often are the most celebrated in their field (Zuckerman et al., 2003), suggesting that audiences can also appreciate less predictable identities under certain conditions (Stamkou et al., 2018; Wohl, 2019). For instance, Sgourev and Althuizen (2014) showed that high-status creators are more likely to see their acts of inconsistency (i.e., shifts from established genres or paths) rewarded because evaluators interpret them as signals of outstanding creativity rather than of incompetence. Reputation can also serve as precondition for a creator's successful deviance from his or her previous path (for an overview of the distinction between status and reputation, see Sorenson, 2013). According to idiosyncrasy credits theory (Hollander, 1958), producers could depart from old practices after demonstrating that they are able to follow them. Thus, early stylistic consistency allows others to develop confidence in a person's skills and commitment, which in turn facilitates nonconformity at a later stage (Stone & Cooper, 2009). An illustration of this idea can be found in Lena and Pachucki's (2013) study of the rap scene, where the authors demonstrate that rap artists became influential by first reiterating stylistic elements that their audience had interpreted as legitimate and then introducing new content which increased their popularity.

As this strand of research suggests, creative journeys need to be appreciated in their wider production context. Indeed, creative journeys form career trajectories that are shaped and influenced by the producer's personal and professional experiences (Simonton, 1997; White, 1993), as well as the interplay of work domain and social arrangements (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Gardner, 1993). Audiences, in turn, can form a definitive idea of who the creators are and where they stand in a cultural field only by considering their journey retrospectively. In contemporary art markets, for instance, selection and evaluation of new art is contested because, under infinite variety (Caves, 2000), "no common or standardized set of evaluative criteria for quality or relevance" exist (Buckermann, 2020, p. 10). Consequently, before making a definitive judgment on a producer's work, audiences wait to see how that producer's identity unfolds along a creative trajectory. Instead of focusing on category-spanning per se, audiences observe and evaluate producers' identity as it emerges from their entire creative journey. Considering entire trajectories becomes particularly important when one acknowledges the situated meaning of category-spanning. As Wry and colleagues (2014) noted, audiences are not necessarily concerned with category-spanning per se, but instead with what the spanned elements communicate and to what they contribute. In cultural fields, artifacts serve a key function not only in shaping creators' identity, but also in sustaining the development of audience members' identification (Formilan & Boari, 2021; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Turner et al., 1987). Seeking to establish their own identity via personal investment in collective consumption (Koçak et al., 2013), audiences in cultural fields are sensitive to how a producer's identity unfolds over time, as this trajectory defines the wider and richer context in which her artifacts are situated and interpreted.

Thus, understanding career-level consecration requires one to focus on how multiple offers by the same producer are created sequentially over time and how these

artifacts are harmonized over the producer's whole trajectory (Formilan et al., 2020). To this end, the notion of signature style (e.g., Elsbach, 2009) proves particularly useful. Drawing on a definition of style as durable and recognizable pattern of aesthetic choices (Godart, 2018), we define signature style as a coherent ensemble of elements that constitute a distinctive identity. In cultural fields, a creator's signature style is reflected in a recognizable pattern of cultural properties that make his or her underlying identity distinctive and coherent over time (Cattani et al., 2020). However, while a signature style is characterized by coherence, its constitutive elements need not have pairwise-like coherence. Just as a collection of elements from a given category may form a coherent signature, so does a collection of elements drawn from a wide range of diverse categories. In the first case, the resulting signature will be *coherently specialist*, in the second it will be *coherently eclectic*. In other words, a signature style that is distinctive and recognizable can emerge as a coherent ensemble of elements at the two ends of the category-spanning spectrum: specialism and eclecticism. In the latter case, in particular, a signature style serves as a "unifying device" (Formilan, 2020) that harmonizes a producer's varied output into a distinctive identity (on recent developments of the notion of style in organizational literature, see Cattani et al., 2020).

Especially in creative and cultural fields usually characterized by widespread uncertainty and infinite variety (Becker, 1982; Caves, 2000), the establishment of a signature style does not only depend on the quality of its constitutive elements, but also on the pace at which the style develops dialogically with an audience (Goffman, 1956). As with most processes of organizing, the development of a creative identity and its signature style involves a "dance of entrainment" (as it happens among team members; see Ancona & Waller, 2007) between producers and audiences. Presenting themselves to an audience, producers have to carefully manage the rhythm at which they introduce stylistic changes (which are often inevitable; Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, if a producer' intention is to project a focused identity, a low pace of category spanning can help the audience become familiar with a product and develop expectations on the future evolution of its producer's signature style. Consider the case of rap music, where the need for recognition as authentic members of the music scene (Koza, 1999) prompts artists to reiterate legitimate elements before introducing any significant stylistic change (Lena & Pachucki, 2013). On the other hand, if producers aspire to establish an eclectic identity, then a faster pace of category spanning would help them delay the development of strong audience expectations, postponing de facto the time when a judgment on their identity is formulated – as in the case of contemporary art (Buckermann, 2020).

Building on the notion of signature style and pace of category spanning, we therefore suggest that artists should either fully embrace a cultural category and rarely depart from it, or span multiple categories and do so frequently. Under both conditions, a distinctive and coherent identity is more likely to emerge, and eventually lead to consecration. From a career-level perspective, in other words, the number as well as the pace at which producers span categories throughout their creative journey contribute to

shaping distinctive (creative) identities with a recognizable signature style.

> *Hypothesis*: Cultural producers are more likely to be consecrated when their signature style emerges from a creative trajectory that is either focused and low-paced or eclectic and a fast-paced.

EMPIRICAL SETTING, DATA, AND METHOD

Classical musicians began experimenting with electronic instruments since the early 20th century, yet electronic music became a popular genre only in the 1970s. In 1974 the German band Kraftwerk released the LP *Autobahn*, introducing a broad audience to the new sound of drum machines and synthesizers (Nelson, 2015; Reynolds, 1998). The genre then was embraced by young enthusiasts in Chicago, Detroit, and New York, before returning to Europe to experience further developments during second Summer of Love: starting in 1988, illegal rave parties in the British countryside and the subsequent emergence of a club culture throughout Europe (especially in London, Ibiza and Berlin) contributed to the flourishing of new styles and sounds. Today, electronic music is firmly rooted in popular culture, with acts from Madonna to the Coldplay incorporating electronic music rhythms and machine-generated sounds in their production.

From its inception, electronic music has been a 'recombinant genre': funk, rhythm-and-blues and soul influenced the birth of house music in Chicago in mid-1980s, Caribbean and fast-paced drumming flowed into the development of jungle music in the UK in 1990s (Formilan & Stark, 2020). The number of genres, sub-genres, and sub-subgenres in electronic music is impressive (McLeod, 2001). It is not surprising, therefore, that most artists mix elements from different sub-genres (or styles) in their music or move across different styles throughout their careers. For example, the artists in our study have experimented with up to 18 different sub-genres (mean 2.9) and almost half of them have produced music in at least 2 different macro-categories (mean 1.83).

Just like the early jazz music (Phillips, 2013), the path to consecration in electronic music took place in a unique way: through dance. Across the world, abandoned warehouses, illegally occupied buildings and remote fields in the countryside have been the natural sites of an underground dancing culture for many years (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999). Today, clubs and festivals dot the electronic music scene as "techno-tourism" destinations (Garcia, 2015). During these events, the relation between audience and music is mediated by the DJ, who curates the selection of recordings to be played and reacts to audience's response to the selection. While the primary buyers of electronic music recordings are DJs, the dancing crowd is the ultimate evaluating audience of electronic music. In this sense, the success of a recording follows almost pure market dynamics: the tracks that drive the public crazy experience a wide circulation, those that do not pass the dance floor test are soon forgotten. A recording company's decision to reprint (or reissue) a certain recording therefore reflects the amount of acclaim received at the very end of the

market, the dance floor. Tracks like Jeff Mill's *The Bells*, reprinted in 2005 to celebrate its 10th anniversary and performed live with the Montpelier Philharmonic Orchestra in 2006, or Plastikman's *Spastik*, regarded as one of the records that consecrated Richie Hawtin and led him to perform live at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City in 2013, are all techno anthems first celebrated on the dance floor as ecstatic dance experiences.

Data

We analyze the sequences of stylistic positioning of the music records composing the discographies of a sample of 863 electronic music artists. We constructed our sample starting from the population of electronic music artists that released at least one record with a recording company based in Berlin – a crucial hub for electronic music (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010; Lange & Buerkner, 2012). The initial sample of artists has been compiled from the Berlin-based labels' rosters as reported on Resident Advisor (residentadvisor.net), an influential community specialized in electronic music. We then used information from the authoritative database Discogs (Formilan et al., 2020; Montauti & Wezel, 2016), a user-contributed database where users can add and retrieve detailed information on specific artist, record, or style (among other filters). In particular, Discogs has a dedicated profile page for each artist and each recording. From these, we gathered information on the albums, LPs, EPs and single tracks released by our sample artists. For each focal artist's recording, in particular, we gathered data on the styles it has been classified into, the date of its first release and reprints, and the releasing label. Discographies account for albums, EPs and single records published by an artist from the beginning of his or her career till 2014. We excluded from the sample those artists that released less than 4 records in their career to ensure the meaningfulness of sequence analysis while accounting also for young and short-lived artists. Our refined dataset comprised 6687 recordings, published by 863 artists between 1980 and 2014.

Method

To analyze the creative trajectories of our sampled artists we employ a social-sequence analytic approach (henceforth SSA). Originally developed in biology to study DNA sequences, social scientists have applied SSA to study life course data and offer a temporal perspective on important organizational phenomena (Abbott, 1995; Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Chan, 1995; Han & Moen, 1999; Stovel et al., 1996). SSA offers complementary tools to survival analysis and event history (Hosmer Jr. & Lemeshow, 1999; Mayer & Tuma, 1990; Yamaguchi, 1991) and makes it possible to explore trajectories in their comprehensiveness (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2010).

In our analysis, we use SSA results in two ways. On the one hand, we rely on raw sequence information to construct clusters of similarity among the discographies of the artists in our sample. The purpose of cluster analysis is to recode sequential idiosyncrasies into groups sharing common properties and explore how between-cluster differences map to diverse paths to consecration. On the other hand, we compute a set of sequence-based

measures and input them into regression models to identify within-cluster differences and consecration dynamics across creative trajectories. In doing this, we provide an example of how SSA can be meaningfully combined with other analytical strategies to inform the study of creativity and innovation journeys (Formilan et al., 2020).

Dependent variables

To measure the level of consecration of a creative trajectory, we focused on the reprints of each recording in that trajectory. We looked at the time span between the first and last versions of each focal record and defined a record as *consecrated* if: 1) the last version of the record was released at least 3 years after the first version (time span above the median); or 2) a focal record was reprinted at least 3 times (number of versions above the median). Overall, following this approach, only 9.8% of the recordings in our sample were classified as consecrated. Counting the number of consecrated records in each trajectory, the dependent variable – *N. Consecrated* – is a categorical variable that measures the focal artist's level of consecration. For each artist, we also created *Consecrated Artist*, a binary variable that takes the value 1 if the focal artist has a number of consecrated records greater than one standard deviation above the mean distribution of the number of consecrated recordings, and 0 otherwise. Following this procedure, 11.8% of the artists in our sample were classified as consecrated.

Independent variables

To investigate the effect of trajectory-level specialism and eclecticism on artists' consecration, we focused on the main style ascribed to each record by Discogs users (following the acknowledgement that the first element used to categorize an item plays a primary role in orienting people's understanding; see Gregan-Paxton et al., 2005). For each artist, we ordered the set of styles according to the corresponding records' release date, creating a sequence of styles produced by each artist over his or her career.

However, styles are not all equally different from one another. For instance, Techno and Industrial have very different origins and target different audiences, while Techno and Tech House share common properties. In terms of creative trajectories, moving from Techno to Industrial may represent an important change in style, while switching from Techno to Tech House might simply entail fine-tuning the same main style. To account for transitions between very similar styles, we looked at each pair of styles produced by the artists in our sample over their careers, and computed pairwise similarity measures following the co-occurrence procedure typically used in categorization research (e.g., Hsu, 2006). By applying agglomerative nesting clustering technique (Hartigan & Wong, 1979; Maechler et al., 2018; Ward, 1963) and the silhouette method for determining the appropriate number of clusters (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 2005), we identified records with high proximity and aggregated them into the same macro-style (8 macro categories, Figure 1). For instance, Techno and Tech House occurred very frequently in our artists' discographies and were thereby recoded into the same style.

Transitions between Techno and Tech House, therefore, do not appear as major stylistic changes in our sequences. At the artist level, we then recoded each artist-specific style with an indexical label reflecting the order of appearance of each style in an artist's career (S1 to S7) and used these labels to construct sequences of style. Overall, our data included 89 main styles, recoded into 8 macro-styles using hierarchical clustering. Artists have spanned 1 to 7 substantially different styles in their creative journeys.

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FIGURE 1 HERE
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We then used sequences of style to create our main independent variables, *Stylistic Diversity* and *Stylistic Turbulence*. *Stylistic diversity* measures the extent to which a trajectory is more or less focused on a given style. It is computed considering the proportion of styles appearing in each trajectory weighted by the overall occurrence of that style in the whole sample. Mathematically,

$$Stylistic\ Diversity_i = -\sum_{1}^{S}\left((\log p_s/S)\cdot\frac{\log p_s}{S}\right)$$

where p_s is the proportion of each style in the focal trajectory *i* and *S* is the total number of styles in the focal trajectory. To compute this variable, we used the original 89 styles, since even micro-tuning within a single category qualify an artist's signature style as more diverse compared to the one of highly focused fellow artists.

Relying on the recoded macro-categories, we computed a measure of *Stylistic Turbulence* following the procedure introduced by Elzinga and Liefbroer (2007). This routine first considers the so-called distinct state sequence (DSS) of each sequence, where consecutive instances of the same state are collapsed into a single state. For instance, a sequence (S1-S1-S1-S2-S2-S1-S2) is transformed into its DSS (S1-S2-S1-S2). Then, it combines the number of distinct subsequences of each sequence's DSS and the variance of the consecutive times spent in each state. Mathematically,

$$Stylistic\ Turbulence_i = \log_2\left(\varphi_i\cdot\frac{s^2_{t,max}+1}{s^2_t+1}\right)$$

where φ_i is the number of distinct subsequences in DSS_i, s^2_t is the variance of the successive state durations in the sequence, and $s^2_{t,max}$ is the maximum value that this variance can take, given the total duration of the sequence. The measure takes increasing positive values, and value 0 if only one styles appears throughout the trajectory.

Similar to what we did to create clusters of proximate styles, we also organized style sequences into clusters of similarity employing optimal matching (Sankoff &

Kruskal, 1983) and hierarchical clustering. The optimal matching algorithm proceeds in two steps. First, it considers the elements composing the so-called *state space* of the sequence object – in our case (S1 to S7) – and the costs to transform any sequence into another one (for technical details applied to creative trajectories, see Formilan et al., 2020). Second, it computes the similarity between each pair of sequences by minimizing the total cost of transforming one sequence into the other. Again, we applied agglomerative nesting technique to identify the most meaningful clusters. The average silhouette method proposed 2 (s=0.723), 3 (s=0.543), and 5 (s=0.511) clusters as optimal clustering solutions. After visual inspection, we decided to subset our sample into 5 clusters (Figure 2).

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FIGURE 2 HERE
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Control Variables

For each artist, we computed a number of additional variables to rule out possible career-level confounding effects, as well as to control for the risk of biases caused by extremely different sequence lengths. *Artist Size* is the logged number of recordings released by a focal artist over his or her career. Further complementing this length-controlling measure, *N. Average* counts the number of recordings that received no consecration in each artist trajectory. *N. Genres* and *N. Styles* measure, respectively, the number of macro-categories and sub-categories in each artist's trajectory. *N. Labels* and *N. Countries* grasp the number of recording companies a focal artist has released his or her music with, and the number of countries where recordings have been released. *Labels Size* is the logged average size (by release volume) of the labels in a focal artist's release history. *Artist Atypicality* measures the average level of atypicality of a focal artists' recordings, computed following the atypicality measure proposed by Goldberg and colleagues (2016). Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation matrix for the quantitative variables. Variance Inflation Factor (not reported for brevity) revealed no multicollinearity concern in our models (all variables' VIF < 3.5).

Statistical model

To model the level of consecration, we used a two-component hurdle regression model (Cameron & Trivedi, 2013; Mullahy, 1986) that combines a left-truncated Poisson with a right-censored binomial logit. The choice of hurdle regression is motivated by the fact that our data are zero inflated: 618 discographies in our sample have no consecrated recording, resulting in a dependent variable that has an excess of zeros. An estimation procedure that did not account for such zero inflation (for example, a single-component Poisson regression) would generate biased coefficients. Instead, by assuming that there might be different processes generating the zeros and the positive counts, our model has

the advantages of maximizing the count and the zero hurdle components separately, and making it possible to interpret the coefficients of the count model net of those of the binomial logit model.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results of hurdle regression models predicting artists' consecration. Results confirm our hypothesis. While stylistic diversity corresponds to a lower number of consecrated recordings in artists' trajectories, increasing stylistic turbulence has a positive effect on the level of consecration. In particular, the higher the turbulence, the lower the negative effects of stylistically diverse trajectories. Figure 3 displays the influence of stylistic diversity on the number of consecrated recordings for levels of turbulence above (black) and below (grey) the 3rd quartile of the distribution. As predicted, artists with a low category-spanning pace (low turbulence) are more likely to experience higher consecration when they remain focused on one or few styles. On the contrary, artists who explore multiple styles experience higher consecration when their stylistic eclecticism develops at a higher pace (high turbulence).

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FIGURE 3 HERE
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Additional Findings

The consecration of certain signature styles may also depend on the context where they are performed and evaluated. Because they are codified through the "cultural infrastructure" (Vergne & Wry, 2014, p. 59) provided by categories, such signature styles are prone to the interpretive schemata that characterize different markets. In the field of music, for instance, scholars have shown how audiences' familiarity with category-spanning practices (Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018) results in less penalties to artists and greater creations that span multiple categories.

From a trajectory perspective, this should remain valid. Different markets (or music scenes, as in our empirical case) are populated by different audiences that hold diverse expectations (Formilan & Stark, 2020). The superiority of focused over eclectic signature styles should therefore depend also on the qualities of their different markets and audiences. In particular, artists embedded in broader markets populated by many competitors should benefit from more eclectic signature styles that make them stand out from the crowd. On the contrary, the audience of niche markets in which interests and expectations are more specialized should consecrate artists that display focused trajectories.

Table 3 shows the first 6 styles that occur most frequently in each cluster. Clusters 1 and 2 are largely dominated by techno music, followed by house and its subgenres.

Clusters 3 and 4, while still dominated by techno, include also less central sub-genres (ambient and electro in Cluster 3, ambient and experimental in Cluster 4). Cluster 5 is markedly different from the other clusters, with industrial, abstract and acid jazz counting for more than 30% of the overall subgenres. The row labelled "Market Size" shows each cluster's market size, constructed as the sum of the proportion of each cluster's style multiplied by the occurrence of those styles in the whole dataset. Cluster 1 corresponds to the largest market (size=411.704), while Cluster 5 represents a niche market (size=24.809).

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The last row in Table 3 shows the consecrated artists' coefficients of an OLS regression model (not reported for brevity) predicting the likelihood of having a more eclectic signature style (computed as the interaction between *Stylistic Diversity* and *Stylistic Turbulence*). The coefficients in Table 3 reflect the interaction term between different clusters and the dummy variable *Consecrated Artist*. For instance, consecrated artists in Cluster 3 tend to have a more eclectic signature style compared to other fellow artists in the same cluster (+1.006 at 0.05 significant level). Confirming our main findings, artists in all clusters benefit from having a more eclectic signature style, except for artists in Cluster 5: indeed, these artists are the ones who developed their creative trajectory in niche markets. This preliminary evidence suggests that an apparently homogeneous audience – electronic music fans – is actually composed of heterogeneous sub-groups with different expectations (Cattani et al., 2020).

Finally, one might wonder if the stylistic turbulence that characterizes the creative trajectories of some consecrated artists does not simply stem from phases of stylistic experimentation following an initial period of stability (Inglis, 1996; Lena & Pachucki, 2013). Providing a preliminary answer to this question, Figure 4 displays the sub-sequences that precede the first and second consecrated recordings. The trajectories leading to the first consecration are far from univocally stable: consecrated recordings correspond to a stylistic change in 27.7% of the cases, and 39.7% of the trajectories include at least one stylistic change before consecration. Furthermore, in 29.8% of the cases, the style that was consecrated differs from the style the artist introduced first. Surprisingly, the situation is almost identical when observing the trajectories between the first and second consecrated recordings. In 26.6% of the cases, the consecrated recording corresponds once again to a stylistic change, 35.9% of the trajectories include more than one style, and in 30.2% of the cases the consecrated recording is in a style different from the artist's first style. Also, in 26.9% of the cases the recording that follows the first consecrated recording is in a different style.

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FIGURE 4 HERE
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This exploratory analysis further suggests that stylistic stability does not necessarily result in superior performance. Instead, the pace at which a creative journey unfolds – even in its initial phase – is key to understand the consecration of category-spanning artists.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown how category spanning, i.e., the process by which a member is simultaneously associated with two or more categories located at the same level of the classification hierarchy, results in less positive social evaluations (for a review, see Negro, Koçak, et al., 2010; Vergne & Wry, 2014). The reason is that patterns of participation across categories signals an actor's expertise to audience members, and actors who participate in multiple categories are viewed as lacking expertise in each category. Stylistic consistency over time has been found to be an effective strategy to acquire legitimacy across different domains, including management style (Covin & Slevin, 1988; Sadler-smith et al., 2003), product design (Elsbach, 2009), professional careers (Zuckerman et al., 2003), and the arts (Accominotti, 2009; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). By guiding the actions of producers, stylistic consistency shapes the perceptions of audience members (Godart, 2018).

However, examples of stylistic eclecticism abound in many cultural fields. Theorizing on such evidence, previous research in the sociology of categories and concepts has outlined how category contrast (Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Negro, Hannan, et al., 2010) or fuzziness (van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018), actors' status (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001) or style (Formilan, 2020), and processes of negotiation and contestation (Jones et al., 2012; Sgourev, 2013) can deeply alter the reception of products and producers that span multiple categories. Embracing a career-long perspective, some research has also explored the conditions under which consumers and critics view favorably departure from established paths (Inglis, 1996; Lena & Pachucki, 2013; Sgourev, 2013; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). In music production, for instance, artists as diverse as The Beatles (Inglis, 1996) or rappers (Lena & Pachucki, 2013) introduced variations in their style, especially when such variations followed the establishment of a recognizable style.

Addressing this heterogeneity of creative trajectories, Leung (2014) noted that "most past work conceptualizes a candidate's identity as merely a function of what she did most recently, thereby ignoring the ordered nature of accumulated experiences" (2014, p. 137). Producers' identities are indeed "also drawn from the historical path of their past experiences, which may vary among generalists" (2014, p. 137). Labeling specialists (who are members of a single category) as experts and generalists (who span multiple categories) as dilettantes overlooks the historical order of accumulated experiences. From this perspective, audience members are not indifferent to how this historical order unfolds

over time. Understanding the pattern of change underlying different creative trajectories is important because the distinction between specialists and generalists falls short of recognizing that boundary spanners may accumulate experiences through a variety of different paths, some of which face penalties, while others are rewarded. But why is this the case? In their study on artists launching independent record labels in the music industry, for instance, Kacperczyk and Younkin (2017) examine the paradox of when prospective entrepreneurs accumulate broad functional experience – which signals mastery of different skills and resources, but can also undermine the legitimacy of their entrepreneurial claims because they are not seen as specialists. Specifically, they show how the transition to entrepreneurship is "most likely to occur when an artist's functional experience is broad but market experience is narrow: he or she has mastered a variety of skills but solicited few audiences" (Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017, p. 731), thus combining the benefits of functional breadth and market focus.

Although we build on this strand of research, we depart from it in two important ways. First, we embrace a sequence-analytic perspective on category-spanning behaviors that is attentive to how different creative offers follow one another over time. In doing this, we shift our attention from consecration as legitimacy granted to situated instantiations (a music album, a movie, a book; e.g., Accominotti, 2009; Galenson, 2001; Wohl, 2019) to consecration as legitimacy attained by concatenations of elements (a musician's discography, a director's career, a writer's corpus). Second, we depart from a definition of stylistic consistency as pairwise coherence between the constitutive elements of a creative trajectory. A central claim of this paper is that the way in which these elements follow one another matters to identify the (in)consistency of a creative trajectory. In particular, we showed how creative outputs (here music albums) that are stylistically inconsistent with previous albums can ultimately sum up to construct a coherent and eclectic journey. Sequences composed of similar or persistently different outputs share indeed a common characteristic: they are both internally identical and, therefore, equally likely to be the source of distinctive signature styles.

To capture and substantiate our analytical shift, in this paper we introduce the notions of signature style and pace of category spanning as key dimensions to deepen our understanding of innovation journeys and their consecration. We argue that establishing a distinctive signature style is critical for an artist to attract audiences' attention and, therefore, attain consecration. As consecration addresses producers' whole creative trajectory rather than its disconnected components, the notion of signature style proves useful to analytically detect traits' similarity across diverse trajectories (Waltham-Smith, 2015) and pay attention to their harmonized unity. Moreover, while the concatenated temporality of creative production is key to the development of a distinctive identity and its attendant signature style, the rhythm of such temporality also represents an important dimension. Our results revealed that the pace of category spanning, measured in terms of sequence turbulence, plays a major role in the consecration of stylistically diverse creative trajectories. Whereas category spanning, *ceteris paribus*, might still hinder the

consecration of a cultural producer's career, creative journeys that proceed at a fast category-spanning pace ultimately are more likely to project a distinctive identity to the market. By imposing the appropriate rhythm between their creative output and audiences' expectations, cultural producers are able to negotiate the moment when evaluators formalize their judgement and determine whose identity is worthy of consecration.

As noted in previous research (e.g., Jones et al., 2012), the pace at which new categories are created proceeds asynchronously relative to the pace at which market participants codify the same categories. Similarly, the creation of a new identity precedes its market classification, and this time-lapse represents an opportunity to establish an eclectic identity: the faster the pace at which category-spanning identities develop, the greater the chances that those identities will be framed as renaissance instead of being dismissed or ignored as dilettante. Looking for inspiring cultural producers with a "larger than life" character (Formilan & Stark, 2020, p. 577), audiences as diverse as critics, peers and consumers are more inclined to follow and endorse actors who follow a clear path. Whether or not such path involves crossing categorical boundaries does not matter in the short run. However, the more it takes to make identities visible, the less likely those identities are to attract market attention.

In this sense, the present study contributes to recent research that seeks to elucidate the conditions under which "multiple categorical memberships can mitigate the potential legitimacy discount by rendering an unfavorable categorization less salient, as individuals can be re-categorized using an alternative classification system" (Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017, p. 733). By conceptualizing creativity as a process or journey that unfolds over time and following different rhythms, we found stylistic consistency in an artist's creative journey to signal a clear market identity even when it involves spanning multiple categories – provided spanning happens at fast pace.

Our study also generates preliminary insights that can inform future research questions on the innovation journey. As outlined in our additional findings' section, a complementary explanation for the consecration of such diverse creative trajectories can be traced to the styles that artists embrace in their work. Different stylistic niches are populated by audiences that may hold rather different conceptualizations of stylistic consistency. This resonates with Bourdieu's (1993) original insight that the availability of a homologous reception space, namely an audience whose members are predisposed by their view of the social world, beliefs and taste to accept (or at least, listen to) the ideas or styles proposed to them, is a crucial precondition for enabling artists to marshal attentional resources and make an impact in their field. As previous research has shown, the presence of multiple audiences may "facilitate local legitimation with one (or more) audiences shielding pressures from competing audiences" (Cattani, Ferriani, et al., 2017, p. 986). In the context of entrepreneurship, for instance, discrepancies "in expectations across multiple audiences… can create opportunities for entrepreneurs to select niches in which they can satisfy one set of expectations while being shielded, at least temporarily, from alternative expectations" (Aldrich & Martinez, 2015, p. 449). This explains why some

audiences allow prospective entrepreneurs to acquire a variety of skills without risk of incurring a penalty (Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017). Likewise, some audiences are more willing to let producers pursue creative trajectories that other audiences, on the contrary, may discard or even oppose.

Finally, our study also shows how SSA, informed by theoretical interests, has a the strength to address theoretical questions (Abbott, 1988; Ragin, 1987) by bringing a novel set of tools to explore "old ideas" (Abbott, 1995). SSA allows to directly measure sequence resemblance, examine the temporal dynamics leading to specific outcomes (e.g., consecration), and develop sequence-based variables to be used as part of other analytical strategies. In the study of innovation journeys, therefore, SSA represents a powerful analytical strategy to complement other qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Our research design could be applied, for instance, to the analysis of scientists' inventive trajectory, coding productivity over time according to the technological classes in which they patent (Fleming, 2001) and, thereby, expose individual, organizational or industry level technological trajectories. Following Stinchcombe's (1978) suggestion, one could further develop ideal-typical sequences of historical development and study the developmental trajectory of creative organizations, artistic movements or project networks. Previous studies tracing innovators' journeys from the periphery to the core or from the core to the periphery of an existing field have highlighted how these different career trajectories shape creative outcomes and reflect career choices that are sometimes deliberate and sometimes the result of events or forces over which innovators have no or only little control (e.g., Cattani et al., 2015; Corbo et al., 2016). Researchers might also be interested in examining the extent to which certain creative trajectories explain other trajectories like in the case of an earlier sequence predicting a later pattern within the same sequence – e.g., predicting the entry into a certain stylistic phase as a result of an artist's particular sequence of experiences up to that point. Most of our understanding of creativity rests on evolutionary or interactional theories. SSA contributes to those theories directly by facilitating the identification of time-based patterns of social processes – an important precondition that often receives little attention – before turning to the question of which mechanisms are responsible for them (Abbott, 1995).

In their competition to standing out and being deemed outstanding (De Vaan et al., 2014), cultural producers must carefully manage the unfolding of their creative journey. Projecting a signature style that is temporally coherent and rhythmically convincing allows cultural producers to capture and retain audiences' attention, thereby increasing their chances of being consecrated.

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Figure 1. Dendrogram of styles, resulting from agglomerative hierarchical clustering on between-style distances. Aggregated styles are marked with numbers in box.

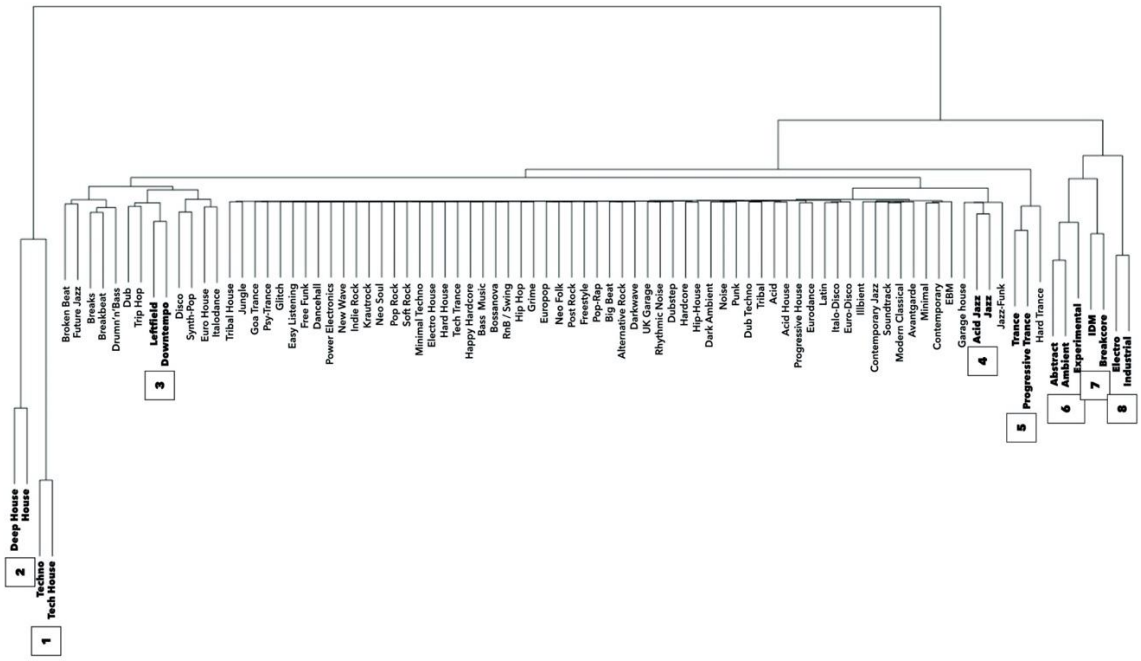


Figure 2. Partitioning of sequences into 5 clusters (marked with a star symbol), displayed as state distribution.

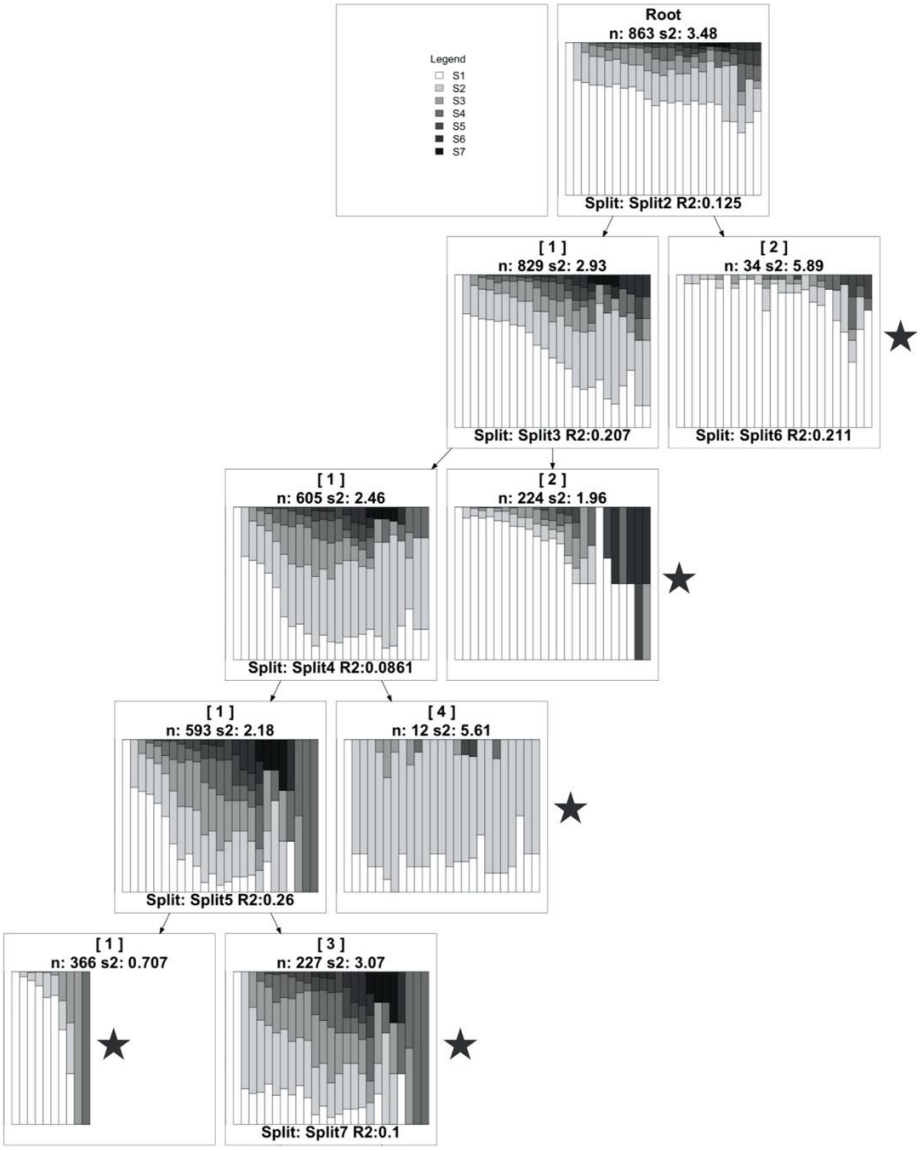
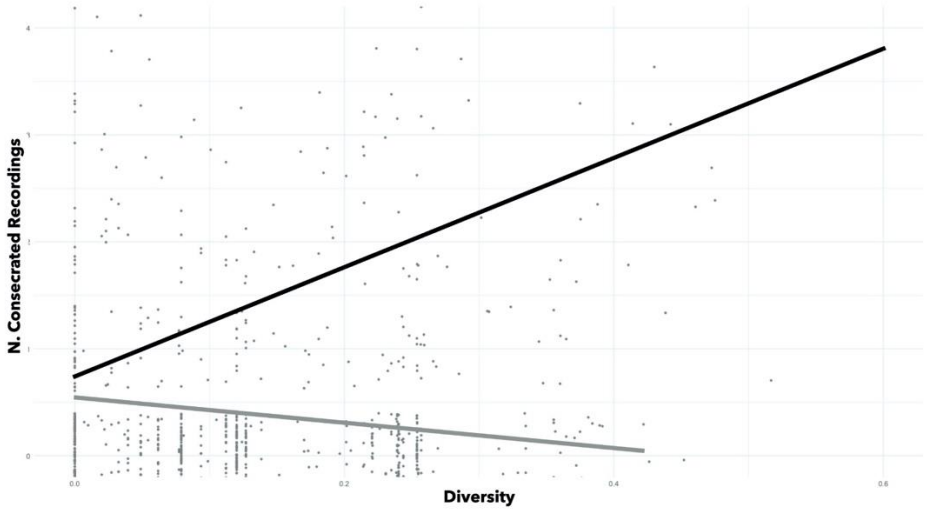


Figure 3. Effect of stylistic diversity on the number of consecrated records, for high and low levels of stylistic turbulence.



Note. Trajectories with *N. Consecrated Recordings* above the 95% of the distribution omitted from the plot for clarity purposes.

Figure 4. Trajectories of style before first (left) and second (right) consecrated recordings. For each sequence, the last event corresponds to a consecrated recording. Dark events reflect macro-category stylistic change; the height of each sequence corresponds to its frequency in the sample.

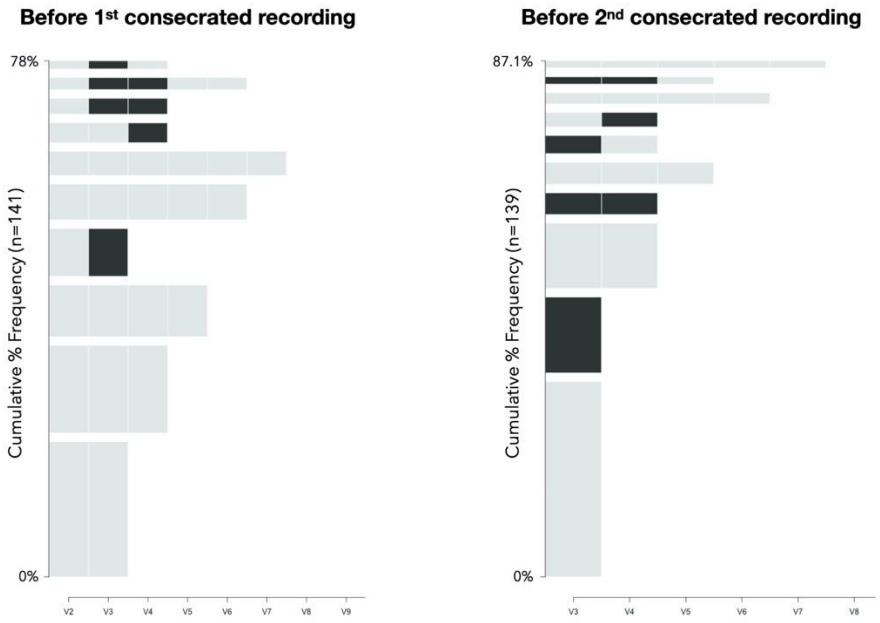


Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Matrix (N=863)

	min	max	mean	sd	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Artist Size	1.61	4.26	2.05	0.45										
2. N. Genres	1	7	1.83	1.06	0.408 **									
3. N. Styles	1	18	2.92	1.71	0.510 **	0.791 **								
4. N. Labels	1	29	4.29	2.54	0.704 **	0.216 **	0.386 **							
5. N. Countries	1	13	2.72	1.5	0.592 **	0.254 **	0.376 **	0.695 **						
6. Labels Size	0.69	4.16	1.97	0.66	0.182 **	0.085 *	0.062	-0.112 **	-0.047					
7. Artist Atypicality	0	0.54	0.3	0.12	-0.058	0.228 **	0.268 **	-0.102 **	-0.116 **	0.114 **				
8. Stylistic Diversity	0	0.6	0.14	0.12	0.390 **	0.421 **	0.613 **	0.257 **	0.235 **	0.054	0.287 **			
9. Stylistic Turbulence	1	39.9	2.82	3.09	0.603 **	0.824 **	0.807 **	0.438 **	0.438 **	0.092 **	0.152 **	0.491 **		
10. N. Average	0	52	6.99	4.47	0.916 **	0.389 **	0.520 **	0.676 **	0.585 **	0.165 **	-0.050	0.375 **	0.637 **	
11. N. Consecrated	0	23	0.76	1.97	0.570 **	0.378 **	0.440 **	0.483 **	0.419 **	0.075 *	0.017	0.182 **	0.622 **	0.436 **

Significance Codes: *<0.05, **<0.01

Table 2. Hurdle models predicting the likelihood of having a higher level of consecration (Component #1) conditional on having any level of consecration (Component #2).

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Component #1 Positive Counts – *Truncated Poisson* (N=245)	Stylistic Diversity			-0.127*	-0.107 †	-0.157*
				(0.061)	(0.063)	(0.067)
	Stylistic Turbulence				0.220***	0.123 †
					(0.053)	(0.064)
	Diversity | Turbulence					0.066**
						(0.024)
	Cluster 2		-0.670**	-0.702**	-0.501*	-0.449*
			(0.216)	(0.217)	(0.220)	(0.220)
	Cluster 3		-0.868***	-0.819***	-0.535*	-0.464*
			(0.218)	(0.219)	(0.225)	(0.230)
	Cluster 4		-0.672*	-0.789*	-0.445	-0.228
			(0.302)	(0.308)	(0.322)	(0.332)
	Cluster 5		-0.675*	-0.746*	-0.385	-0.106
			(0.304)	(0.306)	(0.315)	(0.332)
	N. Genres	0.175*	0.234**	0.219**	0.093	0.146
		(0.069)	(0.083)	(0.084)	(0.093)	(0.098)
	N. Styles	-0.061 †	-0.085*	-0.053	-0.112*	-0.149**
		(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.048)
	Artist Size	2.347***	2.513***	2.569***	2.290***	2.393***
		(0.181)	(0.249)	(0.250)	(0.252)	(0.254)
	Intercept	-4.805***	-4.734***	-4.944***	-3.957***	-4.047***
		(0.416)	(0.488)	(0.495)	(0.540)	(0.530)
Component #2 Zero vs. Positive – *Binary Logit* (N=618)	Stylistic Diversity			-0.310*	-0.588***	-0.650***
				(0.143)	(0.158)	(0.170)
	Stylistic Turbulence				3.255***	2.110***
					(0.405)	(0.446)
	Diversity | Turbulence					0.804***
						(0.169)
	Cluster 2		-0.679 †	-0.780*	0.035	0.072
			(0.353)	(0.358)	(0.395)	(0.400)
	Cluster 3		-0.895*	-0.847*	-0.326	-0.276
			(0.357)	(0.359)	(0.373)	(0.396)
	Cluster 4		5.596***	5.154***	9.116***	10.809***
			(1.053)	(1.055)	(1.332)	(1.458)
	Cluster 5		8.853	8.640	10.718	11.501
			(13.408)	(13.166)	(13.453)	(16.596)
	N. Genres	0.551***	0.783***	0.694***	-0.969***	-0.589 †
		(0.152)	(0.198)	(0.203)	(0.294)	(0.306)
	N. Styles	-0.095	-0.043	0.073	0.085	0.185
		(0.103)	(0.119)	(0.131)	(0.140)	(0.145)
	Artist Size	10.605***	14.555***	14.914***	15.414***	17.579***
		(0.933)	(1.308)	(1.325)	(1.336)	(1.492)
	Intercept	-18.369***	-23.020***	-23.981***	-20.037***	-24.111***
		(1.421)	(1.878)	(1.950)	(1.850)	(2.138)
	Log-Likelihood (Df)	-666.1 (18)	-617.6 (26)	-612.9 (28)	-570.8 (30)	-553.9 (32)
	AIC	1368.198	1287.170	1281.874	1201.546	1171.887

Note. Each model also includes *Artist Atypicality*, *N. Labels*, *N. Countries*, *N. Average* and *Labels Size*, not reported for brevity. Robust SE in parentheses. Significance Codes: † <0.1, *<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

Table 3. Clusters' Style Composition (first 6 styles).

	Cluster 1	**Cluster 2**	**Cluster 3**	**Cluster 4**	**Cluster 5**
Styles (proportion)	Techno (0.422) Tech-House (0.221) Deep House (0.172) House (0.128) Trance (0.032) Ambient (0.024)	Techno (0.508) Deep House (0.164) Tech-House (0.141) House (0.118) Trance (0.043) Abstract (0.025)	Techno (0.350) House (0.181) Ambient (0.132) Tech-House (0.121) Trance (0.113) Electro (0.103)	Techno (0.440) House (0.219) Ambient (0.111) Deep House (0.110) Trance (0.074) Experimental (0.046)	Techno (0.344) Trance (0.181) House (0.131) Industrial (0.125) Abstract (0.119) Acid Jazz (0.100)
Market Size	307.132	411.704	141.558	115.01	24.809
Consecrated Artist	(base level)	0.461†	1.006*	4.231*	-2.283**

Significance Codes: † < 0.1, * < 0.05, ** < 0.01, *** < 0.001