

HOW DO MAINSTREAM CULTURAL MARKET CATEGORIES EMERGE: A MULTI-
LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE CREATION OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC

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Abstract

In my research I explore how a new market category is created in an existing market. I contribute to existing research in marketing by developing a novel framework that conceptualizes markets as constituted of three levels, and by explaining the contribution of each level to the creation of a new market category. My findings emerge from a qualitative inquiry of the creation of the category of Electronic Dance Music (EDM). I find that each level contributes differently to the creation of a mainstream cultural category. Local innovation networks (or LINs) unite consumers and producers and provide unique elements that facilitate the creation of new cultural products by consumers. Niches serve as a bridge between these local networks and a mainstream market. Niche actors contribute to the creation of a boundary infrastructure that supports the transfer, translation, and transformation of the knowledge associated with an innovative cultural product. This, in turn, facilitates the movement of an innovative cultural product from a local network to a mainstream market. Mainstream actors diffuse elements of the innovative cultural product and open what Bourdieu calls “a space of possibles”. Niche entrepreneurs and peripheral mainstream actors seize the opportunity to engineer a new cultural category. I discuss the theoretical implications of this research in regard to the conceptualization of markets as uni-level vs. multi-level, and the conceptualization of market creation from a categorization perspective. I provide strategic recommendations to facilitate the movement of a product from a niche to a mainstream market (i.e., “selling out”). I also provide managerial recommendations based on the use of boundary objects as instruments of power.

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Without further ado.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
List of tables.....	vi
List of figures.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
On markets: existing research and theoretical approaches.....	5
Innovation in cultural markets: local innovation networks, niches, and mainstream markets ...	9
Defining the theoretical apparatus.....	13
The multi-level perspective.....	13
Wrapping it up.....	25
From markets to market categories.....	29
Market categories: a new conceptual perspective.....	30
What follows.....	31
Method.....	33
Data collection.....	36
Analysis.....	40
Context.....	42
A brief history of electronic music.....	43
A multi-level contextualization.....	50
The role of local innovation networks in the cultural innovation process.....	55
Locales in the development of innovative music genres.....	57
Starting stock.....	58
The seeds of a new genre.....	61
From Big Apple to the FWD>> nights.....	68
Champions as local curators.....	76
The role of niches in the cultural innovation process.....	84
Niche actors and the construction of a boundary infrastructure.....	87
Boundary infrastructure and distributed collective memory.....	88
Crossing the three knowledge boundaries.....	94
The role of the mainstream in the cultural innovation process.....	121
Diffusing through adoption.....	123
Branding electronic music for the masses.....	131
Dubstep: the aesthetic catalyst.....	132
Engineering a new cultural category.....	136
Defining the EDM label.....	137
Social identity and social status.....	147
Partnering with intersecting actors.....	154

Discussion	159
On theory	161
The importance of a multi-level approach	161
Categories and market-level changes.....	170
On practice	173
On selling out: How to cross the niche to mainstream boundary?.....	173
Power in market: ANT translations vs. boundary objects	179
Limitations	180
References.....	183
References, academic.....	183
References, archival data	196
Appendix.....	208
Appendix A.....	208

List of tables

Table 1. The characteristics of the three market levels.....	27
Table 2. Data sources, types, and uses.....	35
Table 3. Key differences between firm-driven market development (FDMD) and consumption-driven market emergence (CDME) (from Martin and Schouten 2014).....	164
Table 4. Integrating CDME and FDMD in a Hybrid Process of Market Development (HPMD).	167

List of figures

Figure 1. The MLP in Cultural Fields: A Proposed Theoretical Framework.....	26
Figure 2. Influences in the development of electronic music.....	28
Figure 3. The niche boundary infrastructure.....	97
Figure 4. Boundary infrastructure and mainstream to niche consumer journey.....	113
Figure 5. Electronic music influences in the <i>Billboard Top 100</i> charts (2005-2014).....	125
Figure 6. Magazine covers featuring Skrillex.....	134
Figure 7. The main stage at EDC 2014.....	143

“In the beginning there was Jack

And Jack had a groove

And from this groove came the groove of all grooves

And while one day viciously throwing down on his box

Jack boldly declared

‘Let there be House!’

And House music was born”

“My House”, Rhythm Control ft. Chuck Roberts, 1987

Introduction

Electronic Dance Music (also known as EDM) is a six billion dollar industry (Watson 2014) that seemingly appeared overnight (Bogart 2012). Its stars, such as Skrillex, Calvin Harris, and David Guetta, collaborate with today's biggest pop stars, from Justin Bieber to Nicki Minaj to Rihanna. Its festivals, such as Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC) and ULTRA, receive hundreds of thousands of consumers each year. Its influence is such that electronic music, which had been lurking in the shadows of the North American mainstream music market since its inception in the 1980s, is now playing on mainstream radio.

This story is not unique. The rapid growth of an emerging market category is a phenomenon happening in a number of fields, from sports and snowboarding in the early 1990s (Shah 2000), to lifestyle and the emergence of hipsters in the early 2000s (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Greif 2010), to fashion and the rise of online consumers and their accessible fashion genres (Dolbec and Fischer 2015).

A number of pathways have been theorized for the movement of innovation from a small group of innovators to a greater mass market (Crane 1999; Geels 2007; Lena and Peterson 2008). In cultural markets, Lena and Peterson (2008: 700) have reviewed the evolution of 60 music genres, a "sample sufficiently large ... and diverse to illuminate patterns in genre forms and trajectories." The concept of genre is well-recognized as a type of category and has previously been used as a concept to understand categorization processes (e.g., Hsu and Hannan 2005). In their review, Lena and Peterson (2008) identified three distinct pathways through which a genre evolves. Two-thirds of the genres studied were started by a small group of consumers, and half of them ended up being 'massified' by established corporations. Because this is the most prevalent

pathway through which a genre emerges in the mainstream, it is the pathway that I will explore in this project.

On the one hand, the massification of market categories that were once obscure niche phenomena is often analyzed through the lens of co-optation theory (e.g., Hebdige 1979). Yet, although co-optation is part of this story, the phenomenon is more complex (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). For example, in all above-mentioned phenomena, actors who were central to the constitution of the innovation in the first place both participated in and profited from the massification of the innovation. On the other hand, extant research has positioned the creation of new markets as the result of the work of consumers or producers (Martin and Schouten 2014). In what follows, I explain how the creation of cultural market categories relies on the work of both consumers and producers.

To inquire about these dynamics, I study the emergence of the cultural category of EDM. I trace the origin of EDM back to the city of Croydon in the United Kingdom, some ten years before the mainstream acceptance of electronic music in North America. I follow how an innovation devised by a small group of consumers and producers moved from Croydon to the transnational niche of electronic music, and then to the North American mainstream music market. In doing so, I contribute to extant research in the four following ways.

First, I introduce a multi-level framework that presents three distinct market levels. Each of these levels has a specific contribution to the creation of a mainstream cultural category. I show how previous research has mostly analyzed one of these three levels, and how conceptualizing markets as constituted of multiple levels benefits existing approaches to the study of markets.

Second, my inquiry of the origins of cultural products leads to the theorization of the roles of local groups of consumers and producers as well as local places in cultural innovation. I show how the interaction between consumers and producers allows for the transfer of tacit knowledge, and how consumers who are unconstrained by existing artistic conventions can produce cultural innovation. I then show how this cultural innovation is supported by a few local champions, who further its development.

Third, my analysis of the role of the niche level in the constitution of a cultural category leads me to conceptualize this level as a “middleground” (Simon 2009) between the local and the global. I theorize that niche actors create a boundary infrastructure which allows for the transfer, translation, and transformation of the knowledge associated with a cultural innovation. Such an approach conceptualizes the niche level as a bridge between the local and mainstream levels.

Finally, my analysis shows how a number of actors at the mainstream level are responsible for the engineering of a new cultural category. It highlights how established pop artists open a “space of possibles” (Bourdieu 1996) by diffusing elements of electronic music to the mainstream public, and how niche entrepreneurs and peripheral market actors take this opportunity to create a new cultural category.

In the following sections, I further support these four theoretical claims and expand on both the positioning of these contributions and their theoretical foundations. First, I present existing research in marketing and market creation and show how it has yet to address the phenomenon at hand. I then synthesize and combine a number of approaches from the fields of sociology, cultural studies, urban geography, and innovation studies to devise a multi-level framework for the study of cultural markets. I then discuss my methodology and context of study. The chapters devoted to findings are devised to follow each of the levels of the multi-level

framework. I explore one level per chapter. I then discuss my findings and the limitations of this research.

On markets: existing research and theoretical approaches

In marketing, the study of markets has benefited in recent years from a rising interest from researchers. One of the first examples of a market-level approach in our field is the work of Rosa et al. (1999), who used a socio-cognitive approach to investigate the creation of the minivan market in the United States. Since then, this growing stream of research has explored the dynamics of markets and the roles of consumers and producers in creating, maintaining, and disrupting markets. Research devoted to this endeavor has demonstrated how discontented consumers perform actions to redress unsatisfactory market conditions (Martin and Schouten 2014; Sandicki and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) and how producers work towards legitimating new markets and industries (Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010a).

The cumulative work of market systems scholars has looked at market creation processes as initiated by consumers (Martin and Schouten 2014) or producers, (Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010a) and has highlighted the efforts needed by either type of actor to translate or enroll other actors in their market creation efforts. On the one hand, recent research has shown that entrepreneurs and consumers can collaborate to respond to market co-optation processes. For example, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007: 136) turn co-optation theory on its head and unpack how members of a subculture can “re-politicize co-opted symbols and practices”. This facilitates the creation of a countervailing market promoting the oppositional and co-opted aspects of the subculture through the alignment of the ideals of consumers and producers. Here, producers can recruit consumers to their network because of their common ideology and goal system. Similar to the work of Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007), I will also emphasize the importance of the collaborative work between consumers and entrepreneurs.

Sandicki and Ger (2010) highlight another way the opposition of consumers to established norms can be leveraged by producers. These authors show how entrepreneurs reacted to the aestheticization of veiling by supporting consumers and offering a greater array of aesthetically pleasing veils. The work of consumers towards the aestheticization of the practice of veiling, supported by the commercial offerings of producers, led to the emergence of a “parallel taste structure” based on the “emergent aesthetics that hybridize Islamic and secular/Western sensibilities” (Sandicki and Ger 2010: 31). These new aesthetic dispositions were transposed from the aestheticization of veiling to other domains such as home decoration, literature, leisure, and media. In both of these projects, entrepreneurs responded to consumer-driven innovation and leveraged consumers’ ideology, needs, and desires to open a new market category. From this work, I will retain the idea that entrepreneurs can support an emerging de-stigmatizing consumption practice. If these two studies are helpful in informing the collaborative and de-stigmatizing dynamics at the center of the legitimation of new markets, they also both look at niche markets. In contrast, my project concentrates on the analysis of the creation of a mainstream market category, and examines this process as it occurs at three different market levels, from a local group of consumers, to a niche, to a mainstream market.

On the other hand, new markets can also emerge from the active work of producers. When this happens, producers collaborate with other market actors or work towards recruiting consumers to their cause in order to fend off delegitimizing aspects of a product or practice and open a new market. For example, Humphreys (2010a) explains the creation of a new market through Kotler’s concept of megamarketing, where multiple firms strategize to garner the cooperation of a number of stakeholders. Her research addresses the stigmatized domain of gambling and explains how through material and rhetorical actions (such as the construction of

casinos, the creation of trade organizations, and the framing of casinos as beneficial for the city), firms were able to legitimize a once stigmatized industry and create the casino industry. If producers surmount the stigmas associated with a product or service in order to create a market, threats can also erupt as the main product of a nascent market gains traction. Giesler (2012) presents a brand-mediated market creation process where a company repeatedly fends off the threat of doppelgänger brands, thereby “sustaining a branded innovation’s legitimacy over time” (55). This presents a very different account from the influential diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers 1962) where a firm is solely responsible for the message and brand image of its innovation. The role of the company in these more recent accounts is to develop new brand images to counter emerging doppelgänger ones and enroll influencers to ensure the diffusion of these new brand images. These accounts of market creation are most helpful in understanding how actors legitimize stigmatized products and services thereby creating markets. In comparison to my project, the work of these authors is less attuned to the origins of the product on which this market is constructed. Their work also strongly emphasizes the roles of producers and does not consider how consumers can contribute to the dynamics of diffusion of the new product or the legitimation of the stigmatized industry. In other words, in their accounts, the role of consumers is rather passive: consumers are either adopting or refusing the claims made by journalists and marketers. In comparison, I propose that consumers participate not only to the creation of a new cultural product, but also to its translation to a mainstream market.

Finally, one of the closest works to this project is Martin and Schouten (2014). This article retraces the construction of the niche market of mini-motos, from its invention by consumers dissatisfied with existing product offerings to the constitution of a network of entrepreneurs and established companies catering to a growing demand. Albeit their account is

central to our understanding of the innovative role of consumers in markets, the motivation of consumers in their research was dissatisfaction. In my research, and similar to the work of Dolbec and Fischer (2015), I address passionate consumers who will together devise a new product. Also, Martin and Schouten (2014) concentrates on the translation from a small group of local consumers to the creation of a transnational niche for a sport-related product. My account of the translation of an innovative cultural product from a local group of consumer to a transnational niche is inherently different due to the cultural dimension of the product category at the center of my analysis. Moreover, I also extend beyond the niche to show how niche entrepreneurs, supported by mainstream established actors, create a new cultural category.

While these researchers have contributed immensely to our understanding of the creation of markets and have paved the way for this research, they do not address my focal phenomenon: the emergence of a mainstream cultural category from the combined work of consumers and producers. Moreover, these studies have concentrated on one market “level”, such as a niche (e.g., Martin and Schouten 2014) or a mass market (e.g., Humphreys 2010a). This is unsurprising given that the goals of these research projects were to highlight the mechanisms of market assemblage (Martin and Schouten 2014) or legitimization (Humphreys 2010a; Giesler 2012). What is missing in the account presented by previous research is an understanding of how different levels of a market, composed of specific actors, logics, processes, and mechanisms, contribute to the constitution of a novel cultural product, its translation to a transnational market, and its diffusion to a mass of consumers. In this research, I will emphasize the role of three different levels of a market (local innovation network [LIN], niche, and mainstream), and I will explain the role of each level in the creation of a mainstream cultural category. For these reasons,

this systemic perspective offers an overarching, longitudinal, and multi-level process that extends beyond what has been offered by previous accounts.

Finally, my work also extends the efforts of researchers in marketing who have been interested in electronic music as a context of study (e.g., Goulding, Shankar, and Elliot 2002; Goulding and Shankar 2004; Goulding, Shankar, Elliot, and Canniford 2009; Goulding and Shankar 2011). The research project of these authors have been most helpful in providing an understanding of the phenomenological experience of electronic music consumers, as well as how their lived experiences relate to communities and how they are managed through space. My work departs from their micro-level analyses and concentrates on the production of a new sound, a new genre, and a new market category. In the next section, I present the theoretical grounding for such a multi-level approach.

Innovation in cultural markets: local innovation networks, niches, and mainstream markets

The phenomenon under study in this research project is the emergence of the mainstream category of EDM (Electronic Dance Music). The development of music genres has been of interest to scholars from cultural sociology, music studies, and technology studies. It is an ideal context to inquire about the production of culture, the creation and diffusion of innovation, and the creation of market categories.

The development of music genres has been explained from a number of theoretical approaches, such as the production of culture, field theory, and the multi-level perspective. For example, Peterson (1990) explains the development of rock 'n' roll through a number of factors, namely, a large number of baby boomers demanding music that speaks to their condition; changes in copyright laws and the regulations of radio station broadcasting licenses as well as the

affordable production cost of 45 rpm discs which made possible the creation of a strong independent radio industry; the development of the radio industry; and the concentration of the music industry around four main players who were slow to adapt to changes in the radio industry. He also points to a shift from craftsmen and bureaucratic functionaries to showmen and entrepreneurs. This shift facilitated the rock 'n' roll revolution. Geels' (2007) analysis of the phenomenon highlights similar factors. He emphasizes the role of technological and musical niches in protecting innovations before they can capture the music market and the incorporation of the elements of these niches to the existing music regime. Both of these approaches inform this research as they both cater to dynamics that go beyond the creative work required to make music. In other words, these authors cater to market-related dynamics, such as demography, law, licensing, technology, and the development of adjacent markets. Although these accounts are helpful and insightful, they do not explain all aspects of my phenomenon of interest. More precisely, these accounts lack a clear explanation of the dynamics behind the creation of an innovative cultural product and how this cultural product moves from its origin to the mainstream market.

To understand this process and inform my theoretical framework, I looked into academic work in music (Lena 2012; Lena and Peterson 2006, 2008; Straw 2001) and cultural markets (Arvidsson 2007; Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1996; Currid 2007; Currid and Connolly 2008; Currid and Williams 2009, Currid-Halkett and Ravid 2012; Lloyd 2002, 2004; Simon 2009). These bodies of work highlight the multiple levels constituting cultural markets. Although vocabularies differ (e.g., circle, network, scene, group, subfield), these cultural theorists, urban geographers, sociologists, and music scholars share the perspective that creative departures in culture usually happen in a small group of consumers and/or artists who meet face-to-face in specific geographic

locations and create an innovative new product. These new cultural products then move “up” to larger and more geographically diffused markets. Perhaps the most comprehensive review of the emergence of new types of cultural work is by Lena and Peterson (2008), who mapped the emergence of all music genres that gained mainstream appeal in the last century. They found that in most cases genres first formed in face-to-face “circles” (small groups of consumers as exemplified in Rose [1994] for rap music; Shank [1994] for country music, and Brewster and Broughton [2000], Reynolds [2013] and Silcott [1999] for raving) which provide the creative impetus for the creation of new sounds.

Sometimes¹, the creative innovation devised by such small groups move “up” a hierarchy of levels and develop into “scenes” (Lena and Peterson 2006, 2008). Such scenes have a wider membership. According to Bennett and Peterson (2004), these scenes can be local, but they can also be trans-global and virtual.

Lena and Peterson (2006, 2008) show that the development of scenes is sometimes noticed by established industry actors, such as large music labels and the media. The latter often negatively portray the genre and its fans (echoing the work of Arsel and Thompson [2011]; see also Thornton [1996]). The transition from a scene to an industry-based genre is often accompanied by the dominance of established music industry actors who acquire successful independent scene labels. This presents a relatively simple and straight-forward process akin to commercial co-optation.

¹ Although Lena and Peterson (2006, 2008) provide a comprehensive overarching structure that qualifies the evolution of music genres, the roles and functions of actors for each of the phases are not fully developed in a theoretical fashion. We are left wondering about the functions of the different market levels (i.e., circle, scenes, mainstream markets). In this research, I use the case of EDM to inquire about the particularities of each level and the roles of a range of actors in bringing an innovation to a mainstream music category.

Arvidsson (2007) and Simon (2009) are particularly insightful in explaining that the movement of culture between a circle, a scene, and an industry might be more complex than it appears. These authors propose a mid-level in the translation of cultural innovation from the underground to the mainstream. I will expand on these authors' work shortly.

From this disparate body of work, I retain the following converging points. First, in cultural markets such as music, most innovations emerge from a small group of localized individuals who meet face-to-face. In what follows, I will identify this first market-level as a "local innovation network" or 'LIN'. This term exemplifies the local character of the group and emphasizes the network of actors as well as the innovative function it serves within the greater market system.

Second, the innovation of a LIN might move "up" to a more diverse, geographically expanded, and longer lasting level. I will term this level "niche" for the following conceptual reasons. First, some of the characteristics of scenes as developed by Lena and Peterson (2006, 2008) align well with our understanding of niche markets: they are specialized markets which are targeted by smaller market actors where consumers are often opposed to the mainstream (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Dalgic and Leeuw 1994; Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli 2015; Martin and Schouten 2014). Second, this allows for the integration of the body of work I introduce with existing work in marketing.

Lastly, the innovation of a LIN which moved "up" to a niche might again move "up" to the mainstream market. I will use the term "mainstream" to characterize this level. I will define what the characteristics of the mainstream level later in this paper

I am not the first to propose that innovations go through multiple levels. Perhaps one of the most influential multi-level perspectives (MLP) is the one introduced by Geels (2002) in the

field of innovation studies. In the next section, I introduce Geels' (2002) MLP and explain how it informs my own research. Based on his research and the literature I have introduced, I also further define the three levels I propose.

Defining the theoretical apparatus

The multi-level perspective

This research project is firmly anchored in and borrows from Geels' multi-level perspective (MLP) (2002, 2004). As a heuristic model, the multi-level perspective straddles a number ontologies (Geels 2010). As a crossover model, the MLP "works on dynamic interplay" between these ontologies, which are "not accepted as fully incommensurable" (Geels 2010: 504). The reader will notice that my appropriation of the MLP is tied to the introduction of a number of approaches to the theorization of cultural markets and cultural change. These approaches have been identified as ontologically compatible with the MLP (see Geels 2010). If my theoretical framework is the result of a hybridization of a number of perspectives, it is also mostly inspired by a field-level perspective and work in institutional theory. A reader familiar with institutional theory will see this influence in the use of concepts such as champion, entrepreneur, logic, boundary object, label, and so on, which all have been peripheral to the development of institutional theories (see for example Lounsbury and Glynn 2001; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). This theoretical pairing between the MLP and institutional theory is a well-accepted approach (see for example Fuenfschilling and Truffer 2014). I will now present the MLP and explain how I combined the three level proposed by Geels (2002, 2004) with work on culture and cultural markets.

The multi-level perspective (Geels 2002) is a framework based on the work of Kemp and co-authors (e.g., Kemp 1994; Rip and Kemp 1998) that “provides an overall view of the multi-dimensional complexity of changes in ... systems” (Geels 2010: 495). The MLP distinguishes between three analytical levels: niches—where innovation happens; socio-technical systems—stable institutional fields; and a socio-technical landscape—deep structural trends (Geels 2002, 2004, 2010). Levels are defined as “heterogeneous configurations [providing] different kinds of coordination and structuration to activities in local practice” and they vary “in terms of stability (and size)” (Geels and Schot 2010: 18). I will adapt the work of Geels to the context of cultural markets. I will retain some elements of the MLP and combine these with the three levels I have just introduced, as well as existing work on cultural fields and markets (Becker [1982]; Bourdieu [1996]; DiMaggio and colleagues [DiMaggio and Hirsch 1976; DiMaggio and Stenberg 1985; DiMaggio 1982, 1987, 1992], and Peterson [1976]). I will now define each of the three levels.

According to the MLP (and based on research in transition management [TM] and strategic niche management [SNM]), radical innovations emerge from the work of actors located in niches—protected spaces removed from the influence of mainstream market selection (Rip and Kemp 1998; Geels 2002). Despite having the same name as my second level, the “niche”, these two levels share little conceptual proximity. Rather, Geels’ concept of niches is closer to the concept of LIN I introduced previously. I will retain the following points linked with this first level.

According to Geels, the actors at this level of the market can operate without the pressure imposed by normal market selection. This level thus acts as an incubator for innovation (Law and Callon 1992; Schot 1998) by facilitating processes of learning and experimentation (Von Hippel 1988), social networking efforts, (Rip and Kemp 1998) as well as the definition of a

shared vision and expectations for the innovators (Schot and Geels 2008). These shared expectations align learning processes and innovation efforts.

In technological markets, this level can take the form of R&D laboratories, subsidized projects, or small market niches with specific and hard to meet customer demands (e.g., electric vehicles in Europe in the early 1990s or solar cells for the domestic market) (Geels 2004, 2011; Levinthal 1998). In cultural markets, though, this work is done mostly informally. Lloyd, (2002, 2004) for example, shows how the neighborhood of Wicker Park serves a quasi-institutional function of research and development as the artists and consumers interact and develop new aesthetic products, and help with training each other. In this level, the norms, rules, and heuristics are “less articulated and clear cut” than in mainstream markets and have yet to be crystallized (Geels 2004: 912), allowing actors greater flexibility in action (Sewell 1992). This level provides “the seeds for systemic change” (Geels 2011: 27).

In my model, the first level is termed local innovation network. LINs consist of different types of actors (e.g., producers and consumers) who meet at specific places, exchange their knowledge and expertise, and practice bricolage activities on location (Law and Callon 1992; Geels and Raven 2006). These networks are often geographically centered on a few locations. Music has a number of these central meeting points, such as the Paradise Garage club for garage music, the Warehouse club for house music (Reynolds 2012a), the Blue Note club for drum 'n' bass (Burns 2013), the Happy Days club nights for UK garage (Titmus 2014), and The Dug Out club for trip hop (Goldman 2012). My conceptualization of this level borrows extensively from the strategic niche management (SNM) literature. Strategic niche management has been developed to try and answer the reasons behind the failure of technologies to reach large-scale production. Kemp, Schot, and Hoogma (1998) have proposed that a problem central to the

transition of technologies to large-scale production was their lack of potential to compete with existing technologies in the market, for a variety of reasons ranging from technological to cultural incompatibilities with existing dominant designs or a lack of fit with existing regulatory frameworks. A central insight of SNM is the idea that new technologies must be provided with a ‘protected space’ that shields them from mainstream market selection and allows for their development until they are in position to compete in the marketplace. The success of the development of a new technology in such a protected space is dependent on the learning and experimentation of niche members, the creation of a strong social network, and the articulation of clear expectations and a shared vision (see Geels and Raven 2006). Here, a local innovation network is a space for the development of innovations. Similarly, in his study of cultural industries, Lloyd (2004) finds that a “neo-bohemian neighborhood ... fills a quasi-institutional role in the production of culture, interacting with more formal culture industries ... a site of de facto research and development.”

The second level in Geels’ framework is less useful for this research. I will present it to better elucidate what makes niche and mainstream levels impervious to change. I will interlace Geels’ theorization with existing work in cultural fields and markets to draw a connection between these perspectives. I will also segment this level into two distinct ones: niche and mainstream.

Geels’ second level is termed ‘socio-technical regimes’. These regimes are a patchwork of different technological regimes as well as actors, networks, artifacts, and material networks. Rip and Kemp (1998: 338) define such regimes as:

“The rule-set or grammar embedded in a complex of engineering practices, production process technologies, product characteristics, skills, and procedures, ways of handling

relevant artifacts and persons, ways of defining problems—all of them embedded in institutions and infrastructures. Regimes are intermediaries between specific innovations as these are conceived, developed and introduced, and overall sociotechnical landscapes”

These socio-technical regimes have a “hardness” (Geels 2004) that makes them stable, lasting, and hard to change. The rules and regimes provide stability by guiding actors’ actions and perceptions. They are the “deep structure or grammar” of socio-technical systems (Geels 2004: 910). Networks of actors contribute to the stability of systems through “webs of interdependent relationships” (Tushman and Romanelli 1985 in Geels 2004: 911). The materiality of socio-technical systems also contributes to their stability as they lock the systems into path dependencies. Investments in particular technologies are not easily abandoned and some technologies develop interdependencies with others, which leads to a source of inertia in complex material systems (Rycroft and Kash 2002). A key feature of socio-technical systems is their function as selection environments for the retention of innovations (Rip and Kemp 1998; Geels 2002). Innovations that fit established socio-technical systems are thus more likely to be selected and radical innovations that have conflicting rules, regimes, actors, networks, artifacts, and/or material networks are less likely to be selected.

These socio-technical regimes have a number of conceptual links with existing conceptualizations of cultural worlds (Becker 1982), fields (Bourdieu 1996), institutions (DiMaggio and colleagues), and systems (Peterson 1990; Anand and Peterson 2004). These theoretical approaches emphasize the social construction of aesthetic products, whether through conventions (Becker), doxa (Bourdieu), or legitimacy (DiMaggio). In all cases, the status of a piece of art will be dependent on some shared consensus of the rules that define what is aesthetically beautiful. From such a conception, the conventions of the art world, the doxa of the

field, or what is considered legitimate in a market, are more central in defining the direction of the market than the creative abilities of an artist. Thus, what becomes central in the analysis of a cultural market is to understand how such norms and rules come to be, who is responsible for constructing them, and who benefits from them. These authors also emphasize the importance of the social network in which cultural markets are located. Becker is particularly insightful in his reflections on the multiple roles and functions required for the production of an aesthetic product. Bourdieu, on the other hand, is insightful in his analysis of artists' field positions and how the relationships between artists in a field are constituted through dynamics of interdependency and mutual hierarchy. On this subject, he mentions that actors "could not deliver [...] singular truths unless, paradoxically, [they were] set in the system of objective relationships constitutive of the space of competition that [they] form along with all the others" (Bourdieu 1996: 181). These conventions and networks are what make this level "hard" (to borrow Geels' language) to change. They also serve to identify what is considered tasteful or not. Finally, in DiMaggio's perspective, there are in cultural markets "interorganizational structures of dominations and patterns of coalition", echoing the "webs of interdependent relationships" of Geels (2004).

I will separate socio-technical regimes into two distinct levels: the niche level (not to be confused with Geels' niche level) and the mainstream level. Niches are protected translocal and transnational fields where innovative products and practices can develop isolated from the selection pressure of mainstream markets (Lloyd 2002, 2004). Compared to LINs, niches are long lasting. They are characterized by their "stability, coherence, and distinctiveness" and allow for the creation of a status system of actors who are "rated by their knowledge, commitment and status within [them]" (Drew 2004: 65). For example, the niche of electronic music emerged in

the early 1980s and has since supported a number of cultural and material innovations. It also has its own system of stars (Reynolds 2012a). Niches facilitate social interaction by providing places with fixed practices, tastes, and affinities (Straw 2001). Niches serve numerous purposes. They are a way for artists to advance their careers by furthering their professional network and gaining access to gatekeepers. They also create a community of support and a feeling of solidarity between ‘starving artists’ (Lloyd 2004). Stahl’s work (2004) on the Montreal music niche showed how the diverse practices of a wide range of actors, such as DJs, promoters, producers, critics, musicians and sound engineers have an active role in the maintenance of a music niche. Niches allow artists to interact with others in their field and connected fields, fueling creativity (Currid 2007; Lloyd 2002, 2004; Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2005). As I have previously mentioned, niches serve as a space of translation between LIN and mainstream markets, a point that will be made evident in my findings.

The concept of niche has an extensive history in marketing. In marketing strategy, the concept of niche is most often referred to in relation to segmentation. According to this view, a niche is “a small market consisting of an individual customer or a small group of customers with similar characteristics or needs” (Dalgic and Leeuw 1994: 40; see also Kara and Kaynak 1997) and whose need are not fulfilled (Dalgic and Leeuw 1994). Niche marketing thus refers to the focus of a company on a market niche. This is often accomplished through the specialization of a company in such a way as to address the specific needs of its market niche (Kotler 1994 in Kara and Kaynak 1997). Such niche marketing allows for premium pricing and greater profits (Dalgic and Leeuw 1994). Other characteristics attributed to niches are their high potential for growth, lack of existing competition in the segment, and the possibility to easily erect entry barriers (Kara and Kaynak 1997). As such, niche positioning strategy “is less readily copied by

competitors” (Pechmann and Ratneshwar 1991: 145). Examples of niche markets include the market of supercars, freestyle kayaks, and mini-motos.

By comparison, my conceptualization of niches is closer to yet distinct from that of Arvidsson (2007), and Simon (2009). These articles identify a class of consumers that contributes to the emergence of innovations in cultural industries by bridging innovative networks of consumers and established commercial actors. Arvidsson (2007: 19), for example, talks about “network entrepreneurs ... who live off their ability to capitalize on their place at the top of the network hierarchy of the ‘underground’” and who “mediate between event bureaus [who are part of the advertising industry] and underground cultural products.” Similarly, Simon (2009: 37) identifies a “middleground” that “plays a role of knowledge integration and transfer between the underground and the upperground.” Hence, these findings echo the function of niche as a bridge between local innovation networks and the mainstream market. Yet, I find the following differences between these existing conceptualization which are at the center of my definition of the niche level. For Arvidsson, this translation between the underground and the advertising industry is the work of a small number of well-positioned underground members. For Simon (2009), it is the result of the work of a small number of “knowledge brokers” or of “creative communities.” Although these actors are still present in my work, I emphasize the work of a large number of niche consumers and producers in the transference, translation, and transformation of the knowledge associated with local innovation networks to a mainstream market. I also show how these actors create a boundary infrastructure on which the processes of transference, translation, and transformation rely. This emphasizes the role of these objects, rather than the actors, in bridging the three levels.

In my conceptualization, a niche is a type of field, that is, an aggregate of organizations and consumers which constitutes an area of institutional life (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Khaire and Wadwhani 2010). Consumers and producers at the niche level operate on rules that are different from the ones governing LNs and mainstream markets (see Table 1). This type of field operates on specific logics of production and consumption, namely a blend of distinction and commerce for production, as shown by the straddling of these two logics by Arvidsson's "network entrepreneurs", and a logic of distinction for consumers (see for example Arsel and Thompson's (2011) "indie" consumers as an example). Niches are also characterized by their capacity to be long-lasting. As LNs, niches are protected spaces. In comparison to LNs, which are protected by their geographical boundaries and their anonymity (i.e., they are not known outside of their geographical confines), niches are protected by stigmas and/or by strong 'anti-establishment' communal norms (e.g., Hebdige 1979; Hietanen and Rokka 2015). As such, niches as I conceptualize them are not segments identified by marketers, but rather areas of institutional life that contribute to the performance of a market system. Although niches can be small in size, some niches can be quite substantive in terms of number of participating consumers. For example, the niche for Christian music saw sales of 23 million albums in 2012 (Lawton 2013). When integrated within a market system perspective, niches can be both end markets (such as in the case of Martin and Schouten 2014) as well as spaces for the transference, translation, and transformation of the knowledge associated with the cultural innovations produced by LNs (such as in the case of this project).

Finally, my approach to mainstream markets is in line with existing work in sociology and institutional theory and as such is more managerial than critical.

In its most used meaning, the mainstream is seen as the antithesis of authentic subcultures (Taylor, Baker and Bennett 2013; perhaps one of the foremost examples of this is Hebdige 1979). In this perspective, the mainstream is hegemonic (Huber 2013) and its principal characteristic is “a tendency to masquerade as nature, to substitute ‘normalized’ for historical forms” (Hebdige 1979: 101). The mainstream is what is to be subverted. This approach to the mainstream owes much to the work of Greenberg (1939) and Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), who seek to distance the avant-garde and authentic art from mass culture and the culture industry. For Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), the culture industry is deceptive: it replaces happiness with amusement, creativity with ready-made forced classifications, and freedom with passive consumption. Mass culture is characterized by “the exclusion of the new” which rejects risk and controls consumers (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 134) and that uses “for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture” (Greenberg 1955: 12). It is “banal, homogenous, unsophisticated, undiscerning, uncultured, low, inauthentic, fake, commercial, conservative, unimaginative, [and] conformist” (Huber 2002: 82 in Baker 2013).

Although this understanding of culture is most useful to understand and conceptualize communal and individual resistance to cultural and ideological hegemonies of capitalism, it is less so if one’s aim is to understand the movement of a product from its place of inception to its mass adoption. My focus follows the latter route and as I have mentioned is managerial rather than critical. For this reason, I propose to follow Huber’s (2012: 11) proposition of the mainstream as a “historically contingent category that ... refers us to modes of dominant ... behaviors, discourses, values, and identities” and I cater to the logics, practices, and processes specific to the mainstream. Mainstream, then, refers to “certain kinds of music [and associated behaviors, discourses, values, and identities] ... [that] come to temporarily dominate everyday life at certain

times and in certain places” (Huber 2012: 12). I will show that the processes at the heart of the creation of a new mainstream cultural category are performed by both niche consumers and producers as well as established mainstream actors, with the support of mainstream consumers.

Mainstream markets are represented by the convergent (or ‘dominant’) design of an aesthetic market. Cappetta et al.’s (2006) notion of “convergent design”, based on the work of Utterback and Abernathy (1975) on “dominant design”—a technological design that becomes a standard—is particularly helpful in identifying mainstream music cycles. Cappetta et al. (2006) mention that convergent stylistic designs are referent trends that orient the evolution of cultural products due to social and aesthetic compatibility. They explain that stylistic innovations are developed by and/or for a niche group (for motives of differentiation) and as a result become valuable to mainstream ones (for motives of affiliation). As the new style becomes popular, it is adopted by mass market companies and becomes a convergent design. Mainstream markets are governed by these cyclical convergent stylistic designs, as shown in the top part of Figure 1 (see below). Hence, mainstream is a market category (as is EDM) that includes a number of genres. In comparison to the niche of specific genres, songs from specific genres targeted for the mainstream market have “their distinguishing genre characteristics purposely obscured or muted in the interest of gaining wider appeal” (Lena and Peterson 2008: 699). Yet, mainstream artists can still be creative innovators, such as in the case of superproducer Timbaland whose “rhythmic influence” “opened a whole new ‘BeatGeist’[that] became hegemonic across urban radio in America” would also influence the development of niche genres such as 2-step (Reynolds 2013).

I operationalize mainstream music as music that appears on the charts, or so-called pop music. That is, the mainstream market consists of the songs that top the charts such as the

Billboard Top 100. This is a recognized and accepted view of the mainstream music market (see Baker 2013; Dowd 2004; Lena and Peterson 2008; Lena 2012). Besides sales, the mainstream music market also is distinguished by its logic of production which aims to maximize profits, its logic of consumption which aims at affiliation (see Baker 2013 for example), the duration of its ‘dominant design’ which is cyclical (in opposition to the continuously evolving multi-genres that compose a niche), and its global reach. Table 1 summarizes the differences between all three levels.

Since the mainstream is historically contingent, I will now briefly present a short history of the evolution of the category of mainstream music. Dowd (2004) provides an insightful discussion about the emergence of the mainstream music market and its evolution from the late 1800s, at which point it was the sole market for commercial recordings. In the early 1900s, the music published by New York publishers became the dominant mainstream genre, or what Cappetta et al. (2006) would term a convergent design.

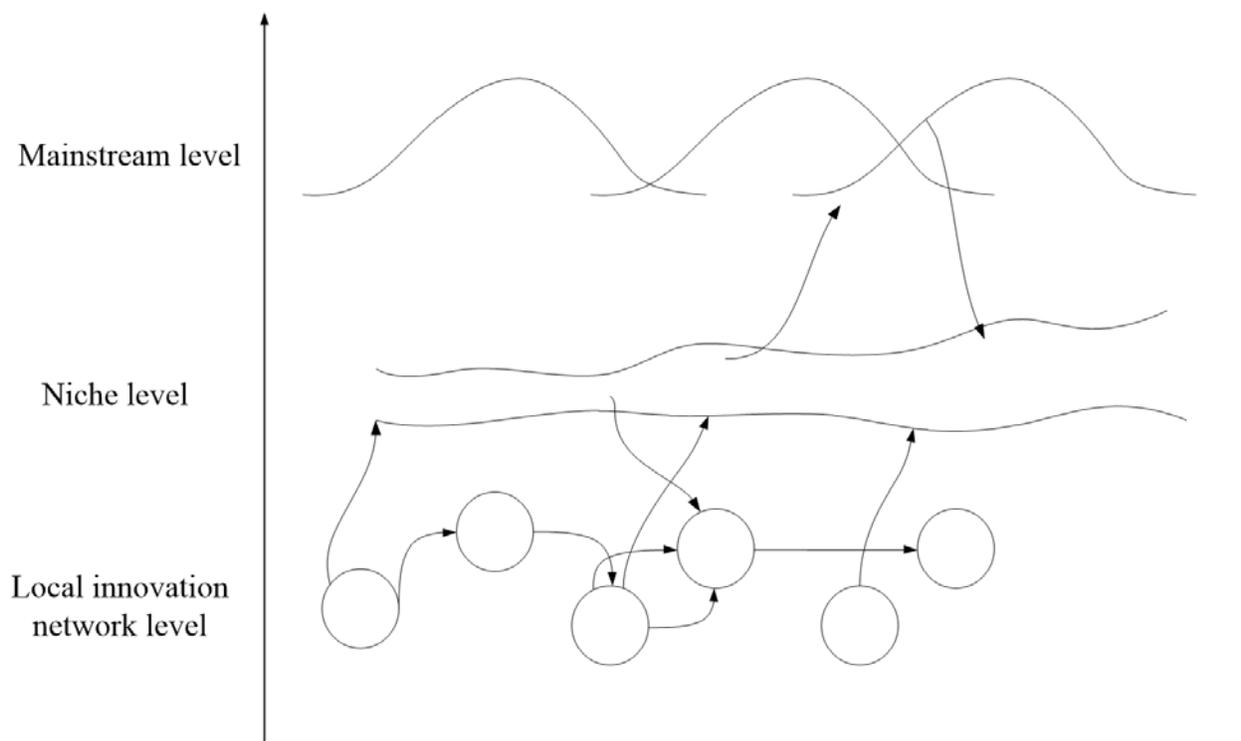
The mainstream market was constituted of the music associated with these New York publishers, whom collectively have been referred to as “Tin Pan Alley”. The 1920s saw the appearance of two other genres: the “race” genre, which would become known as rhythm and blues (or R&B), and the hillbilly genre, which would become known as country. In the 1950s, “the stylistic dominance of Tin Pan Alley gave way to rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll” (Dowd 2004: 1448). Hence, at this point, the mainstream music market was composed of multiple genres. The 1960s brought greater diversity into the mainstream music market. What defines a mainstream market, still, is its broad appeal as well as its high sales volume (see also Dowd 2003; Ennis 1992; Lena 2012; Lena and Peterson 2006, 2008; and Lopes 1992) rather than a specific genre of music.

As such, the mainstream market category is composed of a number of music genres. When genres crossover to the mainstream music market, they are often stripped of some of their defining features (Lena and Peterson 2008) in the interest of wider market appeal (Weisbard 2008 in Lena and Peterson [2008]). Recently, pop music has been dominated by strains of rock and rap music (Colon in Clark et al. 2014). Pop rap (a blend of rap and pop), mainstream country music (a blend of country and pop), and EDM (a blend of electronic music and pop) are all examples of mainstream music genres that evolve within the mainstream music market.

Wrapping it up

I have reviewed the extant literature in a number of fields and showed how my research contributes by filling in existing gaps, addressing oversights, and extending our current understanding of the creation of categories in mainstream cultural markets. In what follows, I integrate the theoretical apparatus I have introduced into a framework for the analysis of my data. My framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The MLP in Cultural Fields: A Proposed Theoretical Framework.

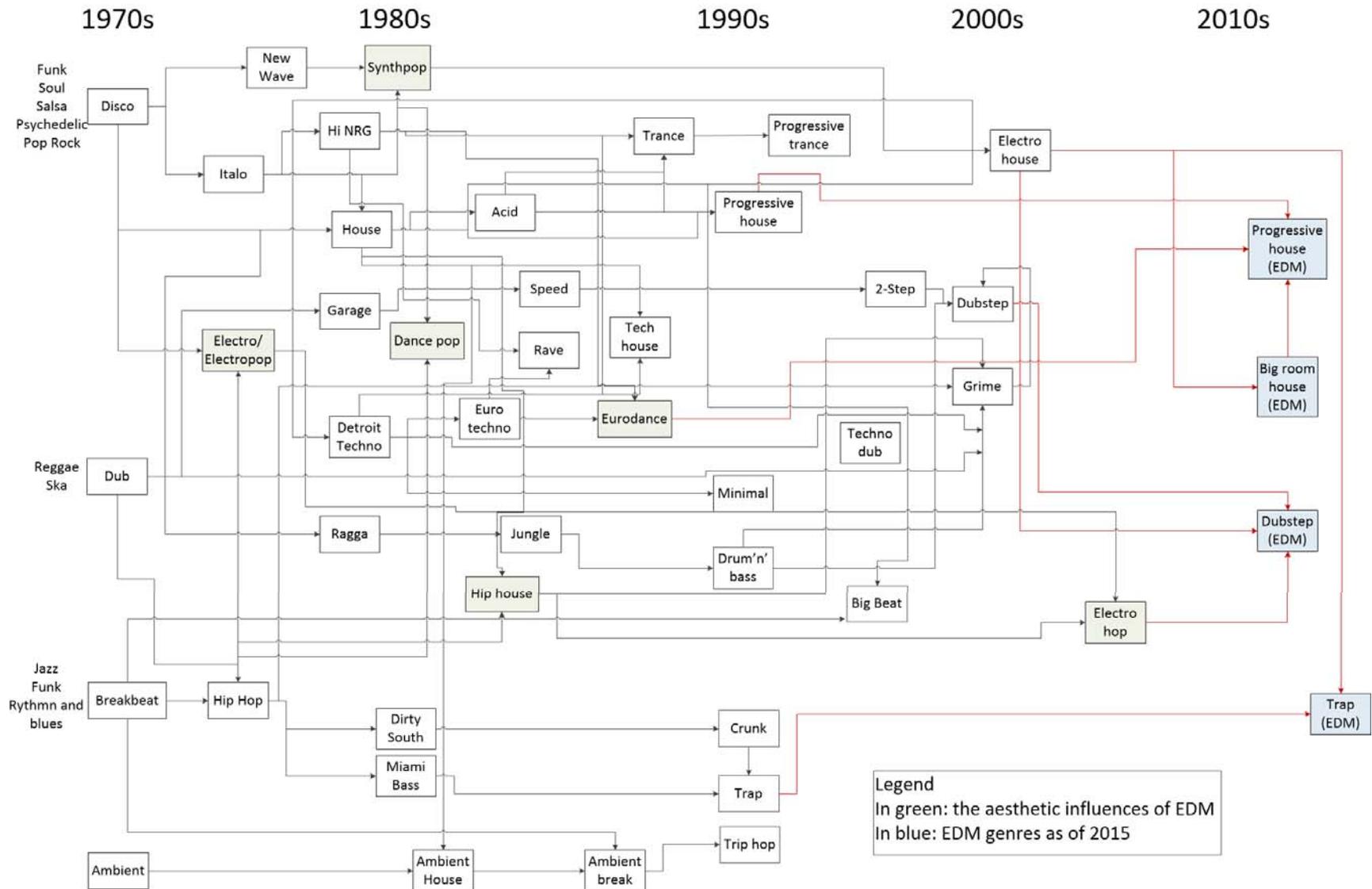


This multi-level framework proposes three different market levels: local innovation networks, a niche, and a mainstream market. These three levels are differentiated by their size and geography, as well as logics of production and consumption, types of actor, types of audience, longevity, where they are performed, and their roles in the cultural innovation process. Table 1 summarizes these main differences. Based on existing work in electronic music (see “Books on the music industry” section in the Methods chapter), I have devised Figure 2, which presents the interaction between different genres to exemplify the influences (arrow) between genres in a cultural market. Before moving on to the method used in this research project, I will briefly explain a theoretical departure from existing work in market creation.

Table 1. The characteristics of the three market levels.

	Level		
	Local	Niche	Mainstream
Role in the cultural innovation process	Innovation	Bridge (and end market)	Diffusion and categorization
Logic of production	Distinction	Distinction/Commerce	Commerce
Logic of consumption	Participation	Distinction	Affiliation
Main territorialization process	Geographic; Anonymity	Stigma and/or community	Institutionalized
Market orientation	Product	Community	Market
Main actors	Prosumers	Entrepreneurs	Established actors Peripheral (focal) market actors Niche entrepreneurs turned institutional entrepreneurs
Audience	Local members	Niche members	Mainstream audience
Duration	Short	Long	Cyclical
Diffusion	Local	Trans-global	Global
Geography	Local night, local club, record stores, homes	Virtual (<i>dubstepforum</i>); transnational (pockets); <i>linked trans-global places</i>	Established actors/firms/festivals/main industry conferences
Media	Word of mouth; Local (e.g., pirate radio)	Specialized (EM magazines, EM blogs, EM communities)	Mainstream
Relationship with other levels	Protected from mainstream markets		Removed from local & niche markets

Figure 2. Influences in the development of electronic music.



From markets to market categories

Although previous research has been positioned on explaining market creation, most of the research projects I have reviewed have examined the creation of new market categories. In Martin and Schouten's (2014) definition of markets based on the work of Caliskan and Callon (2010: 3), they define markets as being characterized by “the conception, production and circulation of goods”, the “monetized exchanges”, the “rules and conventions; technical devices; metrological systems; logistical infrastructures; texts, discourses and narratives; technical and scientific knowledge, as well as the competencies and skills embodied in living beings”, and the resolution of conflict through pricing mechanisms as elements of markets (Martin and Schouten 2014: 857-858). Yet, current research in marketing has seldom examined the creation of most of these elements (e.g., devices, systems and infrastructures of pricing and distribution; construction of market-related knowledge; pricing mechanisms) and has mostly concentrated on discursive elements leading to the construction of a market category or segment (e.g., mini-moto in the moto market; Botox in the aesthetic surgery/beauty market; CSA farming in the food market).

An exception to this approach to the creation of markets (or market categories) is the work of Humphreys (2010a, 2010b). Albeit still leaning towards a discursive analysis, Humphreys emphasizes a number of elements central to the functioning of markets, such as the physical infrastructure of casinos which play a role in legitimizing the market “as a result of being physically instantiated” (Humphreys 2010b: 503), as well as the rules and regulations around the market that structure the monetized exchanges between casinos and cities and the laws preventing corruption and crime.

In this section, I will show how reframing the creation of new markets as the creation of new market categories provides us with a different theoretical vocabulary and conceptual apparatus that will be beneficial to the study of market systems.

Market categories: a new conceptual perspective

Outside of marketing, there has been a growing interest in understanding the creation, maintenance and disruption of market *categories*. From a conceptual perspective, a categorization perspective brings a number of linked concepts that would provide additional tools to market systems researchers. In other words, such a categorization perspective represents a useful heuristic device. Market categories, such as genres, product categories, and organizational categories, are different from practices, brands, and markets: they are cognitive infrastructures that underpin markets (Lounsbury and Rao 2004). Moreover, market categories “capture meaning at a level that is organizationally proximate [...] and capable of integrating meanings from higher-order aggregates, such as logics, without being subsumed by them” (Vergne and Wry 2014). This would facilitate, for example, the study of how market logics (e.g., Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli 2015) are enacted differently within different market categories of the same market. Market categories shape cognition and allow consumers to rapidly process information (Zerubavel 1996). As they allow for the comparison of multiple products with one another, categories enable commensuration and “provide an anchor for making judgments about value and worth” (Vergne and Wry 2014, 58). In market systems, categories are hierarchically ranked (Lakoff 1987). Categories provide central categorical attributes based on which category members will be evaluated and ranked: the closer to the prototypical member (the member who best represents the central attributes), the better the consumers’ evaluations (Vergne and Wry 2014).

When studying categorization processes, the fields of management and organizational studies have combined a number of theoretical approaches (e.g., institutional theory, organizational ecology) with concepts at the center of categorization studies. Most studies have drawn from the cognitively-inspired, self-categorization work of Porac, Thomas and Baden-Fuller (1989) on the one hand (see Kaplan 2011), and the sociological view of categories of Zuckermann (1999) on the other (e.g., Negro, Hannan and Rao 2011; Rao, Monin and Durand 2005) (see Vergne and Wry 2014). I will draw on the latter. From this sociological approach, categories have been linked with role conformity, dynamics of collective identity, and evaluation from consumers and other category members (Vergne and Wry 2014).

Particularly relevant to this project, categories have also been shown to partition markets and provide a market infrastructure for exchange (White 2002). Categories carry cultural codes that facilitate consumers' evaluations, where consumers attribute a category to a firm or a product, and then rank this firm or product based on the categorical attributes (Durand and Paolella 2013). A product category, such as the one I study here, "is recognized as such when similar sociotechnical artifacts come to be exchanged as products within a distinct market segment that serves as a basis for interaction between products, buyers, and external audiences" (Vergne and Wry 2014: 68). Now that I have positioned my work within research on market creation and categories, I now briefly summarize the content of each chapter before moving on to introduce my methodology.

What follows

Based on the literature I have presented, I argue that in most cases the creation of mainstream cultural categories follows the following process. The cultural product that will serve

for the basis of a new cultural category emerges through the work of local actors located in a local innovation network (see Chapter 4). The work performed within a niche helps in bridging three types of knowledge barriers between LINs and mainstream markets: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (see Chapter 5). Mainstream market actors, such as pop artists, diffuse elements of innovative cultural products to mainstream audiences. Then, institutional entrepreneurs and peripheral market actors engineer a new mainstream category for the innovative cultural product (see Chapter 6). Each of my three findings chapters covers a specific level of the framework I have introduced. The three chapters are anchored around the following three research questions.

First, what roles do local innovation networks (LINs) and local actors play in the creation of new cultural categories? Chapter 4 presents how local innovation networks and the actors that compose them are the loci of the creation of innovative cultural products. LINs provide places for the interaction of consumers and producers. These interactions facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge from producers evolving in the LIN to passionate consumers who want to participate in the market. Because of their geographical boundedness, LINs also allow producers and consumers to be exposed to similar aesthetic influences, which helps in the creation of a shared aesthetic vocabulary. As a new sound emerges from the work of consumers and producers, club nights dedicated for the sound are created. These provide producers with the opportunity for direct feedback from consumers, as well as open a new space for the diffusion of the sound. As the sound gains traction, local champions appear and work towards expanding the sound beyond its current geographical boundaries. This facilitates the movement of the new sound from the local group of consumers and producers to the transnational niche.

Second, what roles do niches and niche actors play in the creation of new cultural categories? Chapter 5 presents how niches serve as a space for cultural translation and bridge

LINs and a mainstream market. Niches allow for the transference, translation, and transformation of innovations and the knowledge associated with innovative LINs. They do so by spanning the boundaries of the three market levels as niche actors actively work to integrate local innovations to the niche. The work of niche actors creates a boundary infrastructure, which facilitates the transference and translation of knowledge between levels. It also makes it easier for mainstream consumers to transform their knowledge.

Third, what roles do mainstream markets and mainstream market actors play in the creation of new cultural categories? Chapter 6 presents how mainstream markets participate in the creation of new cultural categories. Both established market actors and peripheral ones work to unlock parts of the diffusion and adoption puzzles. On the one hand, established market actors adopt part of the innovation created in a LIN some years before. This adoption acts as a selection mechanism of elements of the innovative product and eases a mainstream consumer base into an innovative new sound. It also serves as a diffusion mechanism for elements of the new product, as these elements are integrated into mainstream market products (i.e., pop music). On the other hand, institutional entrepreneurs actively work towards the creation of a new cultural category. The creation of a new cultural category results in the crossing of niche entrepreneurs in the mainstream market as the category becomes legitimate and its products become consumed by the majority of consumers. I will now introduce the methodology used for this project.

Method

To better understand how a mainstream cultural category is created, I collected a combination of archival and interview data in the field of music. More precisely, my data collection was tailored to explore the rise of the category of EDM. EDM is an umbrella term

such as pop music. It encompasses a number of musical genres. In 2015, EDM included, but was not limited to, the genres of house, big room, American dubstep, and trap. It is a category of music mostly tailored for nightclubs and outdoor music festivals (see Garcia 2015; Reynolds 2012a, 2012b; Ryce 2012). EDM represents an ideal site of study to inquire about the consumer-led creation of cultural categories in mainstream markets. The genre has been the main influence over pop music in the last few years. It emerged from a strong niche, the niche of electronic music, which has supported more than 300 genres over the last thirty years (McLeod 2001). Finally, in its initial phase EDM was mostly represented by artists playing bass-heavy, dubstep-inspired music. As such, the influence of dubstep was clear, and I could trace the trajectory of dubstep, from its inception in South London in the early 2000s to its adoption by pop artists and mainstream electronic acts in the 2010s. The Oxford Dictionary (2015) defines dubstep as “a form of dance music, typically instrumental, characterized by a sparse, syncopated rhythm and a strong bassline.” This definition is in accord with the one provided by Walmsley (2009) in the modern music primers series published by the influential independent music magazine *The Wire*. Table 2 provides an overview of all data sources and types, as well as their usage.

Table 2. Data sources, types, and uses.

Types	Sources	Datasets	Uses
<i>Primary data</i>			
Participant observation	<i>dubstepforum.com</i> ; electronic music events (n=23)	1 forum (45 pages of field notes); Events: (30 pages of field notes)	First-hand experience of the culture of electronic music, both niche and mainstream
Interviews	Consumers Artists Promoters Executives A&R Short interviews	3 interviews 3 interviews 4 interviews 2 interviews 2 interviews 32 interviews	Gather phenomenological understanding of the music market from the perspective of different market actors
<i>Secondary data</i>			
Books on the music industry	Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton's <i>The Record Players: DJ Revolutionaries (2010)</i> and <i>Last Night a DJ Saved my Life (2014)</i> , Dan Sicko and Bill Brewster's <i>Techno Rebels (2010)</i> , David Byrne's <i>How Music Works (2012)</i> , Keith Negus' <i>Popular Music in Theory: An introduction (1996)</i> , Keith Negus' <i>Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry (1993)</i> , Mireille Silcott's <i>Rave America (1999)</i> , Peter Tschmuck's <i>Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry (2006)</i> , Richard Middleton's <i>Studying Popular Music (1990)</i> , Richard Middleton's <i>Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music (2006)</i> , Sean Bidder's <i>Pump Up the Volume (2002)</i> , Simon Reynolds' <i>Energy Flash (2012a)</i> , Simon Reynolds' <i>Generation Ecstasy (1998)</i> , Tim Lawrence's <i>Love Save the Day (2004)</i>	13 books	Historical understanding of the music market and the workings of the industry
Archival data from online consumer participation	<i>dubstepforum.com</i> ; blogs and websites (<i>THUMP</i> , <i>Resident Advisor</i> , <i>edm.com</i> , <i>youredm.com</i>)	25 threads (130 single-spaced pages)	Capture key moments of the niche
Articles and podcasts	LIN Niche Mainstream	62 articles 77 articles 230 articles	Perception of the core phenomenon by established market actors. Understanding of the media discourses surrounding the phenomenon. Data from past events.

Publicly-available interviews with market actors (written and videotaped)	Artists; Label executives; Agents; Promoters; Producers; Technicians	Artists (52 interviews); Label executives (14 interviews); Agents (23 interviews); Others (12 interviews)	The perspectives of actors from different status categories. The perspectives of world-renown and hard to access market actors.
Publicly-available panels of music conferences	From <i>EMC, IMS, Scion Music Conference, Renman, ASCAP</i>	32 panels	The perspectives of actors from different status categories. The perspectives of world-renown and hard to access market actors.
Documentaries on electronic music and EDM	<i>18 years of rinse (series), Bassweight, Digital dreams, EDC 2013, Electric Forest 2014, Generation of sound, How Clubbing changed the world, Kaskade Redux, Leave the world behind, Nothing but the beat, Pump up the volume, Summer of Rave, The House that Chicago Built, The Scene, The Ultra music story</i>	15 documentaries	Historical understanding of the music market and the workings of the industry
Industry reports	Examples: <i>IMS Business report 2013; Eventbrite EDM Social Media Listening Project</i>	21 reports	Provide key numbers on the market as well as strategic direction of organizations
<i>Billboard</i> year-end charts	2005-2014	10 charts	Chart the evolution of the genres on the <i>Billboard</i> charts
Songs' length 2006, 2010, 2014	<i>DJ Mag</i> Yearly Top DJs list	3 years; 20 DJs	Chart the evolution of the length of songs of top DJs

Data collection

First, to better understand the dynamics of the market for popular music, I reviewed books published about the music industry, such as David Byrne's *How Music Works* (2012), Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* (1990) and *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (2006), Keith Negus' *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (1993) and *Popular Music in Theory: An introduction* (1996), and Peter Tschmuck's *Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry* (2006).

In order to better understand the greater context of electronic music and in line with existing research in consumer research (Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Karababa and Ger 2011), I

also reviewed a number of books specific to electronic music, such as Simon Reynolds' *Generation Ecstasy* (1998) and *Energy Flash* (2012a), Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton's *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life* (2014), Dan Sicko and Bill Brewster's *Techno Rebels* (2010), Tim Lawrence's *Love Save the Day* (2004), Sean Bidder's *Pump Up the Volume* (2001), and Mireille Silcott's *Rave America* (1999).

My archival dataset is also composed of articles from general and specialized outlets to account for all three market levels. For the local innovation network, I collected articles from varied, mostly specialized sources (e.g., *Interview Magazine*, *XLR8R*, *Time Out*), that described the events either as they were happening (e.g., coverage of a FWD>> or DMZ events, interviews with artists at the center of the LIN), or that retraced the history of the making of the LIN. I also collected blog articles. Blog articles were particularly useful because information regarding the early days of the LIN is rather scarce and because they often features the point of view of early LIN participants. The blog of Martin Clark and his coverage in *Pitchfork* magazine were particularly helpful as they retraced the evolution of the LIN on a month-by-month basis. I also accessed the website *dubstepsouthz*. For archival data related to the niche, I collected mostly articles from specialized magazines, such as *SPIN*, *Magnetic Magazine*, *Pitchfork*, and *Mixmag*, as well as articles from authors specialized in electronic music, such as Simon Reynolds, and reviews from established news sources, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Guardian*. The nascent EDM category was surveyed through a number of online magazines such as *THUMP*, *EDM.com*, *youredm.com* and *Dancing Astronauts*. Finally, for the greater field of mainstream music, I gathered a number of articles from the general press, such as the *New York Times*, *Forbes*, and the *Financial Times*, and from music-specific sources, such as *Billboard magazine*, *FACT*, and the *Rolling Stone*. My archival data set is comprised of more than 350 articles and

covers the period of 1997 to 2015. Finally, I also collected a number of reports from *Nielsen*, *EventBrite*, *Live Nation*, and the *International Music Summit*.

In addition to news articles, blog posts, and research reports, I collected published interviews with industry actors, such as label managers, A&Rs, artists, and promoters. I collected more than a hundred interviews with relevant actors from both news and industry sources, such as *Billboard*, *Booking Agency Directory* and *Music Trades*. Furthermore, I consulted and transcribed a number of interviews with artists available on *YouTube* as well as more than thirty panels given by industry experts between 2011 and 2015 at a number of music conferences such as the *Electronic Music Conference* and the *International Music Summit*. These interviews were particularly helpful as they provided a perspective that would have been harder to gather through interviews as the actors concerned were dispersed geographically and less likely to be available for an interview because of their high status in the industry. These panels covered the state of the industry, its history, its future, and provided a wealth of data related to the research questions.

I conducted 14 in-person interviews with industry actors (11) and consumers (3) between June 2013 and July 2015. In-depth interviews lasted from 1 to 4 hours. In-person interviews with industry actors covered most roles in the music industry, from A&Rs to label executives to promoters to artists. Interviewees were recruited through direct contact, snowballing, and random encounters. I developed a close relationship with two interviewees (i.e., key informants) who also helped in the recruitment of industry actors, and whom I met regularly after the first interview. Interviews covered a wide range of subjects and were tailored to the position of the interviewee in the field. For industry actors, the aim of the interviews was to understand the role of the actor in the industry, the changes they had experienced since their start in the industry, how they understood the last few years, and their thoughts on EDM. For consumers, a

consumption biography of music was drafted with the three consumers in order to understand when they started to consume electronic music. They were also questioned about their involvement in the scene, how they consumed electronic music and/or EDM, as well as their understanding of the differences between both categories.

I also had a number of shorter conversations (32) with consumers. Informal conversations lasted from 2 to 30 minutes. Field notes were taken following informal conversations. During these conversations, I briefly explained that I was researching the scene of electronic music and gathered context-specific data (e.g., opinion of the show and the venue) as well as market-specific ones (e.g., opinion of the Toronto scene, and the changes in the electronic music scene with the emergence of the EDM genre).

Finally, I coded 10 years of the *Billboard* chart *Hop Top 100* (2005-2014). The *Hot Top 100* is a proxy for the pop music category (Lena and Peterson 2008). My aim here was to track the adoption of the genres of electronic music and EDM by mainstream American audiences. Furthermore, I tracked the evolution of the length of the songs of the top 20 DJs in America (according to *DJ Mag*). To do so, I selected three years of *DJ Mag*'s yearly rankings and identified the top 20 DJs for each year. I then used online resource *Discogs*, which gives all releases for an artist as well as associated information such as song length and I compiled a database to analyze the evolution of the length of songs over time. To do so, I selected all songs published by a top DJ one year before and one year after the selected year (e.g., 2006: 2005 to 2007). I then averaged the length of the songs for each of the three years. This step was performed to analyze how top DJs were increasingly conforming to the institutional pressure of the music market (i.e., reducing their track length for radio play).

My analysis is informed by participant-observation in the Toronto electronic scene. In order to acquire the necessary insider cultural knowledge to make sense of the data collected through my archival research as well as my interviews, I participated in shows and weekly events, as well as in the online electronic scene, reading and commenting on web forums (*dubstepforum.com*), blogs and online magazines (*THUMP*, *Resident Advisor*, *edm.com*, *youredm.com*). I attended both EDM and electronic events. My participation in the culture surrounding the emergence of EDM greatly was central to the development of a cultural understanding of the niche and of the tension existing between EDM and electronic music, as well as in identifying the participants of both distinct-yet-related scenes.

Analysis

In my analysis, I followed an iterative process of back-and-forth between theory and data (Spiggle 1994). More precisely at first I started to collect data regarding the emergence of EDM post-2010. A few interviews at this stage as well as discussions with my thesis committee led me to open the timeframe of my analysis to consider the electronic music niche as a whole. In order to better understand the context in which EDM emerged, I read a number of books and articles on the subject of electronic music, as well as the emergence of dubstep in South London. The interviews that followed were thus slightly different, as they took into account the rise of EDM within the context of the larger electronic music niche. I continuously collected data as new blog posts and articles became available online, but also kept collecting archival data to deepen my understanding of the field as a whole.

I also moved between three main enabling theoretical perspectives during my data analysis: institutional theory, assemblage theory from a categorization perspective, and the multi-level perspective. This approach to coding data can be likened to an “alternate templates”

sensemaking strategy which “provides a powerful means of deriving insight from a single rich case” (Langley 1999: 699). The coding of my data reflects these theoretical orientations. For example, when I analyzed my data set using institutional theory, I mostly focused on the institutional actors, logics, boundaries, and work present within the institutional field of music, as well as processes of isomorphism and legitimization. When I analyzed my data set through assemblage theory, I focused on the elements and capacities of these elements that entered and exited the categories of electronic music, pop music, and EDM. Finally, settling on the multi-level perspective yet keeping in mind my previous theoretical approaches allowed me to reposition previous insights at different market levels and understand how each level plays a role in the creation of a cultural category. During these multiple stages of analysis, I also coded emergent themes as I came across them in the data, such as the role of nightclubs’ sound systems and environments in the development of a music genre.

I compared and contrasted multiple data sources: for example, an article on the emergence of dubstep from *Time Out Magazine* was compared to an article from the dubstep zine *Hyperdub* and compared to a retrospective analysis of the rise of the genre featured on *Resident Advisor*. This kind of critical contrast between the data sources helped to identify tension points between actors as well as triangulation between perspectives, and provided information about the role of certain actors in the creation of foundational myths and cues about their roles in the creation of the new cultural category. Most data sources provided corroborating information, yet important discrepancies existed between blog posts of electronic music blogs, dubstep blogs, and EDM blogs, as well as news articles and posts on blogs. I used these differences to identify the boundaries between the three market levels.

Because of the large size of my data set, I coded each article, blog post, interview excerpt, and transcript of secondary interviews and panels with overarching themes. These themes were historical (e.g., “dubstep 01-02”, “EDM 2008”), actor-based (e.g., “Skrillex”, “Loafah”, “Patrick Moxey”), theory-based (e.g., “logics”, “boundaries”), and/or process-based (e.g., “mainstreaming”, “underground conflict”). Each piece of data was then analyzed and related to existing concepts in the three theories I was using in order to understand how they related to one another. In order to make sense of the data from a historical perspective, data was also reviewed in a chronological manner.

I now present my site of study. As I explain the emergence of a new cultural category in the field of music and as this new category emerges from the niche of electronic music which has a history of over 30 years, I first present a brief history of electronic music to establish the historical context. I then present my site of study using my three market levels: I introduce the FWD>> scene, where dubstep grew its roots as a local innovation network; the greater niche of electronic music as a niche; and the emergence of EDM in the mainstream American music market as a mainstream market.

Context

Although the origins of electronic music can be traced to the late 19th century, when Elisha Gray invented what is considered to be the first known synthesizer, I am interested in the emergence of electronic music in North America and especially in its recent post-2010 developments. Although electronic music has enjoyed commercial success in Europe, it has until the 2010s remained a niche phenomenon in North America.

For the sake of brevity and to facilitate the theoretical development, my starting point of the history of North American music will be the emergence of the Chicago house scene in the

late 1970s. It is generally documented as an acceptable starting point (e.g., Reynolds 2012a; BBC 1992). Although the full history of electronic music is not central to my theoretical development, this contextualization is provided to give the reader a general understanding of what electronic music is, where it comes from, and how it transformed. More precisely, the following history highlights the emergence of the major genres of electronic music (house, techno, hardcore, jungle, and garage), some of the central aspects of the culture (such as going to a rave, remixing electronic songs, and taking drugs) and the sources of the stigma associated with electronic music in North America. Electronic music is a term that encompasses more than sound: it is at the crossroad of a network of cities and clubs, technologies, DJs and label executives, laws, and this is what is implied when I talk about electronic music.

A brief history of electronic music

The “sharp decline of disco” in the late 70s is perhaps best exemplified by disco² “demolition night” in 1979³, which Shapiro (2007) qualified as “the harbinger of disco’s doom.” It was one of several events where disco records were destroyed in public, such as Los Angeles’ DJ Darrell Wayne of station KROQ burying disco albums to represent the funeral of disco or Portland’s DJ Bob Anchetta of KGON who destroyed disco albums using a chainsaw. Anti-disco proponents also formed groups, such as the “Detroit Rockers Engage in the Abolition of Disco.” According to Shapiro (2007), these events were emblematic of “the politics of resentment of the

² A glossary that explains the different genres of electronic music is provided in appendix A

³ Demolition night refers to an anti-disco rally organized by Chicago shock jock and anti-disco campaigner Steve Dahl at a baseball game at Comiskey Park in Chicago in 1979. It drew a crowd of 55 000 people, who burned tens of thousands of disco records (Frank 2007).

white everyman” (organized around tensions emerging from a perceived “deviant sexuality”, race, and sexual orientation) that led to the “sanitization of disco”⁴.

Yet, the demise of disco was not only cultural. The diffusion of the genre also suffered from an economic slowdown in the U.S. in the late 1970s. This economic shift led to disappointing sales for disco in 1979. This was accompanied by somewhat dubious marketing and distribution decisions to bring to market disco albums and artists, as well as a diffusion system that was based on the impact of an album on the dance floor, rather than the name of the artist associated with it, at odds with the standard practices of the music industry. These factors contributed on the business side of the equation to major labels divesting from the genre (Lawrence 2004).

Most labels started to close down their disco division. Once the epicenter of disco, Studio 54 was converted in 1982. In the early 1980s, disco went underground (Shapiro 2007). This proved to be a problem for a discotheque (i.e., nightclub) scene that was, as the name implied, playing mostly disco music. The decline of disco meant that the “only clubs that kept afloat ... were ones that encouraged quirkiness and experimentation” (Shapiro 2007). A number of DJs had a tremendous influence in musical developments following the decline of disco, from Paradise Garage’s Larry Levan to Funhouse’s Jellybean and Vega. Since I am interested in the development of electronic music, I now turn my attention to the Chicago scene and house music.

Disc jockeys (or DJs) in Chicago innovated by mixing and matching existing disco records, combining them with italo-disco, old Philly songs, and “SOS Band type-tracks” (Garratt 1986), playing with the tempos of the albums, repeating certain parts of songs, and overlaying songs and vocals. These DJs also start using a rather new musical innovation, Roland’s drum

⁴ Since tracing the death of disco is outside of the scope of my dissertation, I would direct readers to Peter Shapiro’s (2007) *Turn The Beat Around: The History of Disco*, chapter 6 and Tim Lawrence’s (2004) *Love Saves the Day*.

machines, to overlay a bass line and a rhythm tracks with vocals. This became the central dynamic of a new niche and competition between DJs ultimately led to the definition of a new sound associated with the discotheque “The Warehouse”, one of three nightclubs in the city with a DJ (Garratt 1986). It is said that this new sound was first named ‘warehouse music’ based on the nightclub where it was play and it later was shortened to house music (Garratt 1986; Reynolds 2012a; Shapiro 2007). For the better of the first five years, house music was a genre that appealed to sexual and racial minorities (Garcia 2014; Who 2015), and was mostly concentrated in a few clubs: the Warehouse, the Power Plant, and the Muzic Box. The WBMX radio show “Hot 5 Mix” helped in diffusing the remixing of disco albums to the broader public, outside of clubs (Garratt 1986; Reynolds 2012a).

As house was emerging, African American middle class kids in Detroit, such as the Belleville Three (three techno innovators who were attending Belleville High), mixed the emerging genre with sounds close to the influential German band Kraftwerk and experimented with Roland’s drum machines. Detroit electronic musicians “drew inspiration from Detroit’s mechanized sounds and environment, its industrial glories, post-industrial problems and future possibilities, which were tied to technological improvements” (Che 2009: 264). Diffused through high school parties organized by high school clubs in the more affluent suburbs of African American Detroit as well as through a Detroit-based radio show by The Electrifying Mojo, this new sound achieved some local notoriety but never reached the masses. It would later be named techno music (Brewster and Broughton 2014; Reynolds 1998, 2012a). The house and techno scenes were somewhat connected, something that is sometimes exemplified by techno innovator Derrick May selling to house innovator Frankie Knuckles his first Roland 909 drum machine (Broughton 1995).

At the turn of the '90s, both scenes were on the decline. In Chicago and Detroit, local political and legislative leaders started to ban after-hours parties and withhold club licenses. Thanks to music conferences such as the Winter Music Conference (WMC) as well as DJs traveling between the United Kingdom and the United States, house music started to have a following in Europe. The European public was more receptive to the sound, perhaps because of the lack of stigmas associated with disco music. Key scene members in both Chicago and Detroit moved over to the United Kingdom, where electronic music was at the center of a burgeoning industry (Bidder 1999, 2002; Reynolds 2012a).

In the mid-1980s, a scene began to form in the United Kingdom around electronic music. Electronic-inspired songs topped the United Kingdom charts as early as 1987. By the end of the 1980s, the United Kingdom was dancing in nightclubs to the sound of acid house. Acid house was brought about by the introduction of the Roland 303 (a synthesizer) and led to the transformation of the sound of house (Bidder 1999, 2002; Reynolds 2012a).

In 1987, Paul Oakenfold and some friends opened an after-hours club to bring their Ibiza experience to the United Kingdom, combining the drug ecstasy and electronic music (Reynolds 1998). A number of clubs and ad-hoc events followed suit. They had initiated the start of the United Kingdom rave scene. By fall 1988, "it was possible to virtually live in this parallel universe, full time. There was a party every night" (Reynolds 2012a: 48). The coverage of the tabloids of this burgeoning club scene led to an explosive growth of the movement.

The growth of acid house led to a number of actors interested in profiting commercially from the expansion of the music genre. To circumvent the restricted opening hours of licensed establishments (as well as the need to *have* a license), promoters started to organize illegal warehouse and boat parties. During 1989, warehouse parties kept establishing new records of

attendance, from Midsummer Night's Dream (11 000 attendees) to Energy (25 000 attendees). Rave became a noun in 1989 (BBC 2006; Reynolds 1998). The police caught up with promoters' tactics and the Conservative MP Graham Bright drafted the *Entertainment (Increased Penalties) Act 1990*, or the 'Acid House Bill'. This drastically strengthened the penalties for promoters organizing rave parties (see Goulding et al. 2009). The scene, though, only went on hiatus.

The 1990s saw the development of new genres of electronic music. The most successful ones moved away from house as their main musical influence and into techno, which led to the emergence of hardcore music. The 1990s also saw the emergence of dedicated pirate radios, alongside home studio recording, indie labels (independent music labels), white label releases⁵, and specialist record stores. These radios bypassed the regulation imposed by the United Kingdom government and quickly gained followings as they were the only outlet on the airwaves to diffuse electronic music. Pirate radios would become central to the constitution of new strains of electronic music in the United Kingdom (BBC 1992; Reynolds 2012a).

Raves remained widely popular until 1994, with the passing of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*. This act became infamous for strengthening the powers to remove persons attending an event in the open air at which amplified "music [which] includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats" was played, hence directly targeting electronic music events and raves. This led promoters to switch to nightclub events as well as the organizing of rave-sized events in indoor legal venues and led to a general decline of the outdoor rave scene (BBC 1992; Reynolds 2012a). The marketization of rave and the movement of the "combination of dance, drugs, [electronic] music, and space" in

⁵ A white label record is a vinyl record with a plain white label attached. White labels became important in the DJing world as they were often more exclusive, by-pass existing channels of distribution, and concealed the name of the artists so other DJs could not identify the songs (Brewster and Broughton 2014; Reynolds 1998, 2012).

nightclubs made them “far easier ... to authorize, monitor, and control” (Goulding et al. 2009: 762).

The decline of the United Kingdom rave scene led to a decline in hardcore music, which had been devised with raves in mind: high tempos and loud bass and drums were ideal for oversized sound systems characteristic of outdoor raves but less so for smaller set-ups in more intimate indoor clubs (Reynolds 1998, 2012a). During the mid-1990s, jungle music evolved from hardcore, keeping the fast tempo of hardcore and matching it with hip hop and dub elements, such as breakbeats and a MC (Noys 1995). The genre led to the emergence of garage and speed garage, which were often secondary genres played at jungle events. In pirate radio programs, DJs started to mix UK garage productions with American house and US garage songs, speeding up the songs from the United States to match the beats of UK garage songs (Reynolds 2008). United Kingdom producers began to emulate the songs in their own productions, which eventually led to a specific scene for this new genre: 2step. 2step became the go-to genre for nightclubs in the United Kingdom in the late 90s and early 2000s and enjoyed commercial success on mainstream airwaves (Reynolds 2012a).

As the rave scene was imploding in the United Kingdom, it was exploding in the United States. Frankie Bones is credited for bringing the combination of electronic music and ecstasy back to New York and the United States (Red Bull Academy 2015; Wender 2015). Other promoters followed suit and opened competing events, such as NASA (Nocturnal Audio and Sensory Awakening), which became the epicenter for the cultural invention of what would be associated with rave culture, “baggy trousers ... backpacks, lollipops, flowers in the hair, smiley faces” (Db quoted in Reynolds 2012a: 285).

Across the country, British expatriates started their own party organizations, created their own hippie version of rave (Silcott 1999). In California, the 1991 NYE Toon Town rave pulled in more than 8000 people. Similar to what happened in 1989 in the United Kingdom, there were media outcries, police crackdowns, rivalries between rave promoters, as well as the gangsterism associated with the drugs and illegal nature of the events. These factors led to several promoters stopping their operations around 1992 (Reynolds 1998, 2012a; Silcott 1999). By the latter half of the 1990s, “all across America, police departments, fire marshals and city councils use teen curfew, ordinances and license restrictions targeted at particularly notorious clubs [in an] anti-rave crackdown [that] was nationwide” (Reynolds 2012a: 311; see also Silcott 1999). In 2003, the United States senate voted on the *Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act* and, echoing what happened in the United Kingdom ten years earlier, dramatically increased the sentences for illegal electronic events. Across the United States, promoters and DJs alike moved over to Europe, reminiscent of the Chicago exodus of the late 80s. Germany and Berlin became the center of the electronic music niche for the better part of the 2000s (Reynolds 2012a)

Back in the United Kingdom, the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of big beat music, with bands like The Prodigy, the Chemical Brothers, and Fatboy Slim, which drew from rock 'n' roll influences and tracks “with crescendos, drops, builds, explosions, crowd-inciting drum rolls and whooshing sounds” (Reynold 2012a: 426) as well as a “compendium of tried-and-tested devices for triggering the rave 'n' roll rush” (Reynolds 2012a: 427; see also Campbell 2012). Big beat would be the backbone of the short-lived mainstream electronica period of the late 1990s in the United States.

In the early 2000s, the mainstream market for electronic music was mostly absent in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, the major labels were

recovering from their electronica period and moving into safer territories with the continued success of hip hop and indie rock bands. In the United Kingdom, electronic music fell from 13% of the record sales in 2000 to 7% in 2004 (Reynold 2013). Superclubs such as CREAM closed down and consumers retreated to smaller establishments such as pubs and DJ bars (bars where DJs played a wide assortment of music). This further impacted the development and enjoyment of electronic music. A consequence was the “near -extinction of the dance media, as the general readership withered away” (Reynolds 2013).

Of all the likely places to rejuvenate electronic music and bring raves to the masses, the least likely was probably the United States. Yet, the United States experienced a boom in the late 2000s and early 2010s, mostly driven by electronic music festivals, electronically-mediated music consumption, and a new genre of dubstep-inspired electronic music that fused rock, hip hop, and previous genres of electronic music. This is where my story starts.

A multi-level contextualization

As the multi-level perspective requires the analysis of a number of levels to understand how they inter-relate, I will present my site of study through three market levels: the late 1990s and early 2000s FWD>> scene in Croydon, United Kingdom, as an example of a local innovation network; the greater electronic music scene as an example of a niche; and the mainstream music market as an example of a mainstream market. I will then move on to explain the role of each of these levels in the creation of a mainstream cultural market category.

The FWD>> sound

The FWD>> sound, named after the monthly club nights FWD>>, was developed in and around the city of Croydon in the suburbs of London. Most of the genre innovators worked at the

record store The Big Apple (Martin 2015) and lived “all within 15 miles of each other” (Mala cited in Jones 2012). It is a genre derived from the ‘darker’ 2step productions of UK garage artists such as Zed Bias and El-B, which could be found on the B-side⁶ dubs of UK garage albums (Brewster and Broughton 2014, Reynolds 2012a). These songs were the inspiration for the early innovators, such as 13- and 14-year-old Skream and Benga.

The creation of the monthly happening known as “FWD>>” by Sarah Lockhart, a key LIN member, helped foster an emerging scene. It created a space for the diffusion of the music and the interaction of scene members. The mix of 2step, four-to-the-floor beats⁷, breakbeat garage, and proto-grime played at FWD>> became known as the “FWD>> sound” (Clark 2006a). The sound further diffused through South London thanks to the pirate radio station Rinse FM, in which Lockhart was involved and where a number of FWD>> DJs also had a show. In 2005, the artists Digital Mystikz started their own weekly event, DMZ, where niche influencer Mary Anne Hobbs discovered the genre (Needham 2009). Sarah Lockhart as well as artists Kode9 and Digital Mystikz also supported the genre through their labels, Tempa Recordings, Hyperdub, and DMZ, which started to put out compilations as early as 2002.

Dubstep and the electronic niche

Dubstep owes its name to the confluence of the terms for the genres of dub and 2-step (Hobbs 2005), a testament to its stylistic origins. The genre acquired its name from a 2002 press release by Ammunition (the promotion agency of Lockhart) for a feature in the United States

⁶ B-sides are the flip side of vinyl albums. In electronic music, they often feature a remix of the A-side song (or a “dub”).

⁷ A characteristic of house music, four-to-the-floor beats is a steady rhythm pattern where the bass drum is hit on every beat in common time.

magazine XLR8R. It was then used for a Tempa compilation by DJ Hacha (Dubstep Allstarz), a core member of the early FWD>> community (Kek-W 2013).

A BBC1 radio show by Mary Anne Hobbs, “Dubstep Warz”, broke the geographical barrier, diffused the nascent genre outside of the London boundaries, and “inspired people like [DJ Drew Best] to create a community for that music in [their] city” (Drew Best quoted in Flatney 2012). DJs began to incorporate dubstep into their sets, diffusing the genre onto the dance floor. By 2007, dubstep artist Skream was playing in front of 8000 people at the Sonàr music festival⁸ in Spain (Hutchinson 2007) and the genre was “permeating every conceivable kind of underground event, from Chile to Istanbul” (Hobbs quoted by Hutchinson 2007). The development of the genre was also facilitated by a number of remixes in the mid-2000s for known bands, including Bloc Party, The Klaxons, and La Roux. DJs such as Joe Nice and Dave Q as well as promotion company Smog were early United States adopters of dubstep music. It is reported that Skrillex, who would become the poster boy for the electronic explosion in the United States in the early 2010s, discovered dubstep at a Smog event (Flatney 2012).

Although traditional means of diffusion helped the genre to reach new grounds, the Internet was also central to its development. LIN members moved in together with niche ones in 2005 as the web forum dubplates closed down and *dubstepforum.com* were created. The latter grew a hundred fold between 2006 and 2008 (Reynolds 2012b), mostly thanks to Mary Anne Hobbs’ mention of the web forum on her radio show. According to my interviewees, the web forum became a central meeting point for the genre. Technological advancements, such as torrents and file hosting websites, made it possible to share high-quality mp3s playable in a club setting in a matter of seconds (McKinnon 2007). Message boards also became a place for

⁸ Sonàr is a yearly electronic music festival in Spain

gathering feedback and criticism from fellow members for aspiring DJs, further fueling the “bedroom producer”⁹ role at the center of the evolution of electronic music.

EDM and the mainstream market

In the late 2000s, pop artists and their producers started to incorporate influences from electronic music into their songs. The term EDM was then coined to brand an emerging category of music that had become increasingly popular on college campuses and touring festivals. By 2011, EDM had become the name of a new dubstep-influenced electronic music category and the two biggest United States electronic music festivals, Ultra and Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC), were drawing a crowd of more than 150,000 attendees each. According to the International Music Summit, EDM was a 6.2 billion dollar global industry in 2014 (Watson 2014).

Nowadays, electronic music has become ubiquitous with pop and the influence of electronic music has been such that “pop’s architecture is being radically altered by modern songwriters [such as] Avicii and Zedd” (Beaumont-Thomas 2014). Nowadays, electronic musicians are emerging as stars in their own rights. If Skrillex was the poster boy for the emergence of electronic music in the early 2010s, the stardom achieved by EDM artists is perhaps best exemplified by Calvin Harris, who holds the record for the most top 10 hits from one studio album in the United Kingdom (with nine Top 10 singles vs. Michael Jackson’s seven [Bychawski 2013]), was the first artist to reach a billion streams on Spotify (Renshaw 2014) and was the highest paid DJ in 2013 and 2014 (Forbes 2013, 2014). Today, he is the spokesperson for the brand *Armani* and is dating the highest selling pop artist of our time, Taylor Swift.

⁹ Bedroom producer is a term given to non-professional musicians/consumers who create electronic music at home. This was done previously using drum machines and synthesizer, and is now done on their personal computer with software such as Fruity Loops and Ableton.

Now that I have presented the context in which EDM emerged in North America, I will use the multi-level perspective to explain the roles of each of the three levels: the local innovation network exemplified by the FWD>> scene, the niche exemplified by the greater electronic music niche, and the mainstream market exemplified by the mainstream North American music market.

As I have mentioned earlier, this process is not representative of all possible transitions through which a cultural innovation is transformed and reaches the mainstream. It is, though, according to the review of Lena and Peterson (2008), the most likely to happen, at least in the music industry.

The role of local innovation networks in the cultural innovation process

My first research question asks how local innovation networks and the actors that constitute them contribute to the creation of new cultural categories and innovative cultural products. Local innovation networks consist of networks of different types of actors (e.g., consumers, promoters, club owners, music producers, DJs) who meet at specific places, exchange their knowledge and expertise, and practice bricolage activities on location (Law and Callon 1992; Geels and Raven 2006). LINs are conceptualized as protective spaces that shield the development of innovations from the selection pressures of mainstream markets (Schot et al. 1994; Rip and Kemp 1998; Geels 2002).

Extant research in marketing has seldom looked at the role of local places in the innovation process. A recent exception is the work of Tracey et al. (2015), which examines the role of regional clusters on new product outcomes. Our discipline has also rarely examined how the combination of peripheral producers and passionate consumers evolving in proximity can foster participation in innovation. Rather, marketing researchers have privileged the deepening of our understanding of firm-centered innovation processes, putting aside geographical considerations (e.g., Veryzer 1998). A notable exception to this is the work of Martin and Schouten (2014). These authors show how consumers can create a new market when dissatisfied with current market offerings, and how their efforts can be scaled up by consumer-entrepreneurs to create a niche market. Their research is noteworthy as they consider the role of local race tracks in participating in this development. Yet, the importance of enclosed spatial contexts such as a regional cluster, a neighborhood, or a single store, is downplayed and the emphasis is put on a multi-stage translation process.

Outside of marketing academia, both the role of local spaces and of consumers in the innovation process have been acknowledged. For example, the research streams of Transition Management (TM) and Small Niche Management (SNM) in innovation studies, as well as some work in Science and Technology Studies (STS), have acknowledged the role of local spaces in the production of disruptive innovation (e.g., Geels 2002; Law and Callon 1992; Rip and Kemp 1998). These streams of research, though, have yet to inquire about the role of consumers in innovation. In innovation management, the role of consumers in the innovation process has been addressed (see Lüthje 2004; Shah 2000). Yet, and perhaps because of the influential work of Eric Von Hippel, this stream of research has focused mostly on a specific type of consumer—the lead user—and on how companies can leverage these consumers' expertise to their advantage. Moreover, these streams of research have focused on technological or technical innovations and have yet to address cultural innovation. In contrast, my research emphasizes the role of local networks of consumers who become interested in a cultural field and, with the support of local marginal producers, foster new cultural products.

I will highlight the central role of local places in the creation of innovative cultural products. My analysis suggests that local places, such as neighborhood as well as commercial locations central to an urban scene (Currid 2007), contribute to the development of innovative products by structuring and assisting the three main functions of local spaces in innovation: learning and experimenting, creating a social network, and developing a shared vision and expectations (see Schot and Geels 2008).

In electronic music, local innovation networks are organized around a few places and events, often record shops, nightclubs, and clubbing nights dedicated to a genre. I will inquire about the roles of the record shop Big Apple, and the FWD>> nights as central elements in the

constitution of the FWD>>> sound, which will become a foundational element in the dubstep music genre and ultimately in the creation of the mainstream cultural category of EDM.

Locales in the development of innovative music genres

“Over the last three decades, the foundations for Britain's internationally renowned club culture were built in a handful of sweaty basements, spawning endless new genres.”

(Warren 2011)

In SNM, it is hypothesized that the emergence of successful technological niches is underlined by three main processes: the articulation of shared expectations and vision; the building of social networks; and learning and experimentation processes (Schot and Geels 2008). Shared expectations and vision are necessary as they provide a direction for learning and experimentation processes and help protect and nurture the innovation efforts. Social networks are important as they create a critical mass of individuals interested in working towards the innovation, facilitate the interaction between stakeholders and the diffusion of the shared expectations and vision, and provide the necessary financial, material, and cultural resources to achieve the common goal. Finally, learning and experimentation processes contribute to both the constitution of the innovation, as individuals build upon each other increasing stocks of knowledge, but also foster the development of shared expectations and norms through second-order learning (see Beckert 2010; Schot and Geels 2008; Lloyd 2002; Rantisi 2002; Tracey et al. 2015; Wenger 2010).

In this section, I will show that LNs contribute to these three processes, and more precisely, that the local plays an important role in fostering them. Local places help to organize communities interested in an aspect of a cultural field by providing a meeting point where actors

can exchange with interested others (see also Straw 2001; Lloyd 2002, 2004). They provide places of interactions between consumers and producers as well as a shared institutional and cultural environment (Gertler 2003). As consumers and producers interact, tacit knowledge is transferred between them. Consumers, being less structured than producers in their aesthetic endeavors (Sewell 1992; but see also Becker 1982 on the role of conventions, and Bourdieu 1984, 1996 on the role of the habitus and the *illusio* in cultural fields), are able to create sounds removed from existing conventions. With the help of local producers, these new sounds develop. The development of these new sounds provides a new basis for the development of an interested group of consumers and producers. Champions facilitate the organization of the community by organizing social relationships and curating novel cultural products, which allows these products to coalesce, further developing and refining the emerging genre. I will unpack this dynamic in detail in the following section.

Starting stock

Culture and its production are geographically organized (Pratt 2004)¹⁰. The birth of a musical genre is no stranger to this dynamic. The emergence of the mainstream category of EDM and the niche genre of dubstep might have unfolded quite differently if it was not for a small record shop in the London suburb of Croydon and the more general electronic music environment in the UK at the turn of the millennium. The Big Apple store “acted as a hub for

¹⁰ Despite advancement in virtual technologies, research in geography and knowledge management still highlight the importance of “being there” (Molotch 2002, Gertler 2003) in the creation and transmission of tacit knowledge, which are central elements in the production of culture (Molotch 2002; Gertler 2003; Lloyd 2002, 2004; Anand and Peterson 2004). Very briefly, perhaps the most important underlying reasons for this is an institutional mismatch between geographical contexts that involve “fundamentally different institutional environments” (Gertler 2003). Hence, geographical closeness is crucial in the *creation* of new cultural forms.

people into all sorts of bass-led music” (Artwork 2010), while the greater English and Croydon music environment offered a shared institutional and cultural environment.

In the United Kingdom in the late 1990s, the dominant electronic sound was garage. Garage had developed to be associated with “smart dress, diamonds, and champagne”, signifiers at odds with niche enthusiasts as well as with marginal populations (BBC1 2003). Moreover, the community of garage producers had consolidated to such a point that a number of DJs were said to have met secretly to conspire to ban certain artists that had been deemed as playing songs too different from established garage conventions (Martin 2001). This pushback by established garage producers was mainly against a “darker” strain of garage music, as Neutrino (between others) mentions: “I think people are bein’ controlled, told not to play the dark stuff” (Martin 2001). Yet, this ‘darker’ strain of garage developed and as Goodman (2001) mentions, in the late 90s, ‘darker’ garage had a number of recognized producers:

“Dark garage certainly is no new phenomenon, and there have been several rival strains competing for evolutionary selection. The only difference now is that there is enough quality dubs on the market to make it potentially autonomous as a scene, with all the black holes and dead ends which that can pose... Alongside El-B, Zed Bias, a producer with a wide range of styles in his repertoire (check his awesome Madslinky styles), has largely been held responsible for opening the door to darkside 2-step with the rigid ‘Standard Hoodlum Issue’ on Social Circles. “

This ‘darker’ strain of garage, such as ‘Hotboys’ by Steve Gurley (on *The Roots of Dubstep CD007, 2000*), emerged “in the second room [of jungle clubs], the chill out room ... mellower ... sound, and gradually those second rooms got more popular” (Reynolds 2009). It is

against this backdrop that the Big Apple store started to distribute this underground genre of UK garage as “it was not into the big garage names” (Jones in Mugan 2006), giving the underground a place not only to buy albums but also to gather and exchange their work, their ideas, and their knowledge. The record store served as a meeting ground for electronic producers interested in a ‘darker’ garage sound. It also distributed underground garage records and served as an informal institutional link joining a wide range of producers. The Big Apple record store helped the development of a community of producers and consumers that were interested in sounds competing with mainstream UK garage. It “became the headquarters for [an] experimental sound and everyone took their track there” (Jones in Mugan 2006). To give a general sense of how Big Apple was central to the community, I will highlight the artists who used to frequent the store: El-B (of Horsepower production, one of the early proto-dubstep production duo) “they’re my family ... I used to go into that shop” (El-B in Muggs 2009); Youngsta (an early Rinse FM and FWD>> night DJ) was going there “since day one” (Youngsta in Burrows 2011); Artwork has its studio above the record shop; Hacha was a salesclerk there; the shop was also visited by Skream and Benga (Warren 2008), Plastician, as well as Kode9 and scene insider blackdown (blackdown 2004). Big Apple Records also launched the first album of Loefah, Mala and Coki of DMZ fame. Taking together, these artists represent a who’s who of the nascent genre. Hacha reminisces:

“The Big Apple shop was the big meeting point for young dance music headz as the new dubstep sound began to coalesce. Everyone would be passing through Big Apple Records on a daily basis — right across the genre. From Zinc to Hype to Bailey from Metalheadz — he used to work in the shop as well. We had a bit of everything in the shop, then we had the new labels starting like Tempa, and we had our own label starting as well — Big

Apple Records — which is where we launched Benga, Skream, Digital Mystikz, we launched all of them from our in-house label.” (Hatcha in DJ Mag 2014).

It is at the confluence of these factors, the restrictive UK garage environment, the offerings of underground sounds for marginal producers and consumers, and the emergence of a meeting point for these two types of actors that the story of the creation of the FWD>> sound begins.

In the next section, I will show how local places such as Big Apple act as informal institutional creative incubators by “concentrating talent and potential new products in a visible milieu ... with large amounts of innovative work” (Lloyd 2004: 347). They accomplish this role by being places of informal interactions which favor networking between interested participants. They also allow the recruitment of new scene participants by offering “entry nodes” (Arsel and Thompson 2011). They help in creating a shared vocabulary of practice by diffusing specific influences, which facilitates the creation of a common aesthetic vision and expectations and the transmission of tacit knowledge. As central nodes in a network of places, they help in orchestrating creative endeavors. I will unpack these dynamics in turn.

The seeds of a new genre

I will show how Big Apple was a de-facto creative incubator, serving as a networking place and tying up the creative work of a number of consumers and producers. Through its doors and those of basements and homes around Croydon, the ‘darker’ strain of UK garage underwent transformative work performed by passionate consumers. The Big Apple store played three major roles that facilitated this development: it served as a meeting point and place of passage which fostered the creation of relationships between consumers and producers, it served as a channel of distribution for this ‘darker’ strain of UK garage which established a shared aesthetic

vocabulary, and it provided support by starting a record label to promote the efforts of the first dubstep producers.

Theoretical and empirical research shows that established actors in a field are more restricted in their creative endeavors because of the structuring effects of existing field conventions (Becker 1982), i.e., artists need to create within existing creative conventions, but also because of their internalizing of such conventions (

Sewell 1992). As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first dubstep songs were created by young consumers removed from the field of production of UK garage. Not only are LINs protected from the influence of mainstream markets in terms of selection pressures (i.e., profitability and compliance with existing logics and practices), which favor the development of innovative products, but this ‘protection’ also shields them from the influence of mainstream artistic conventions, thus allowing them greater agency in their artistic endeavors (Becker 1982; Sewell 1992).

If ‘darker’ garage was a well-established underground genre with dedicated producers, it is the work of a few teenagers ranging from 12 to 16 years old that would open the space of possibilities for dubstep music. Benga, Skream, and Hatcha were all hanging out at the Big Apple store in the early 2000s. The first two were interested in producing electronic songs, and were using a Sony PlayStation to do so:

“When Beni 'Benga' Adejumo was 12, he started hanging out at Croydon's Big Apple record shop and making beats with the Music 2000 software on his PlayStation. At 13, his console-created tunes - raw, stripped-down versions of the dark UK garage made by producers such as Benny Ill and El-B - were being picked up by Hatcha, a DJ and producer who worked at Big Apple. By 15, the south Londoner was writing tunes for his

debut album, Newstep, and appearing on a Radio 1 documentary about the nascent dubstep scene.” (Warren 2008)

How did a 12-year-old learn how to produce this ‘darker’ strain of UK garage? Through close interactions with existing garage producers. Big Apple was crucial in providing a place where passionate consumers and ‘dark’ garage producers would meet. Festinger, Schachter and Back (1963) have shown that people sharing the same staircase were more likely to become friends compared to those who were living equally close in proximity but using a different staircase in the same building. Spatial proximity and spatial paths during journeys are more likely to foster social bonds between individuals. The importance of proximity and of the Big Apple store as a central “path” for consumers and producers is perhaps best exemplified by how Benga and Skream, together with Artwork, formed the “supergroup”¹¹ Magnetic Man. Their initial motivation was pretty simple. Their aim was to “smash up Forward [...] we wanted people to freak out” (Artwork in Fitzpatrick 2010). The following quote exemplifies the intricacies of local dynamics at play: the role of strong and weak links in the introduction of Benga to Skream and the importance of a crossing path (Festinger, Schachter and Back 1963) in the meeting of Artwork with Benga. Although the account of how all three met was told endless times, Fitzpatrick (2010) summarizes it best:

"We were just whippersnappers when we met Arthur," Skream says. "My brother worked at Big Apple records and I used to walk past with my mum and sometimes have a look in. The first time I met Arthur I was maybe 12. He had a studio above the shop where he made garage tunes. I was a little bastard kid, DJing in my bedroom, but I ended up

¹¹ A super group is a collective of artists who have already achieved fame on their own, in this case, underground fame

working there. Before there was such a thing as dubstep we were listening to Hatcha play garage like Sweet Female Attitude's Flowers. I didn't have the skills to make that, so I just made dark, bassy music. The production was awful, but the tunes were heavy."

Benga's brother always visited the shop on a Sunday and when Skream told him he was making tunes on his PlayStation, he laughed and said his little brother was doing the same thing. "He got me to call him," Benga says.

Through their close interactions with existing electronic music producers, these teenagers were able to develop their talent as it helped the transfer of hard to acquire tacit knowledge (Gertler 2003). Central local places such as the Big Apple record shop allowed would-be producers, like then 13- and 14-year-old Skream and Benga, to interact with music lovers and producers and learn about the craft of music production. Skream reminisces about his early experiences with Benny Ill of Horsepower productions, who helped pioneer the 'darker' garage sound, in the following interview excerpt:

"I used to sit in the back of Benny's studio most evenings... My mum thought it was a bit strange, that I was going to this guy's house to sit and watch him make music. ... I found it amazing to watch him work – he was using Cubase on an old Atari, for fuck's sake. I'd never seen anything like it. I'd watch him make these tunes, then go out to FWD>> to hear what he'd been making, go back to mine, and try to make my own tunes all night."

(Skream in Martin 2015)

Hence, a second insight is that local places such as Big Apple Records facilitate exchanges between passionate consumers with an interest in participating in the field and established producers, allowing for the transmission of tacit knowledge in music production.

Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is difficult to transfer through codified means. It requires personal contact and regular interaction (Goffin and Koners 2011), a shared institutional environment (Gertler 2003), and is tied to the acquisition of experience in a given field (Lam 2000). Although it is theoretically possible to imagine the creation and translation of tacit knowledge through virtual means, such as on online web forums, the institutional and cultural differences between two geographical contexts, such as differences in “attitudes, practices [and] norms” as well as expectations and general understanding of what is wanted and what is at stake (Gertler 2003: 95) make these particularly difficult and expensive (in terms of time and efforts, as well as economic capital). Thus, it is not that face-to-face contact is of such importance, but that close geographical proximity makes it more likely that participants will share institutional and cultural backgrounds. It is then expected that local places of gathering would be central to the creation and transmission of tacit knowledge its transmission (Gertler 2003). For example, in the case of the creation of the FWD>>> sound, Croydon and the Big Apple store gave would-be producers a common greater cultural environment as well as a similar musical one. Hence, I will next show how the Big Apple store contributed to diffusing a shared aesthetic vocabulary, which facilitated the creation of tacit knowledge by immersing participants in a similar aesthetic environment.

In addition to facilitating networking between passionate consumers and producers and the transfer of tacit knowledge between these two types of actors, the Big Apple store also served as a single diffusion source, which exposed all actors to the same musical influences. This

represents a third insight of this section. Skream was introduced to music by his older brother, Hijak, who was the drum and bass buyer for Big Apple (Brewster and Broughton 2014). Youngsta was also introduced to drum and bass by his sibling, Sarah Lockart (Burrows 2011), who would become one of the most influential figures in the local innovation network. These actors all bought their albums at the same record store, which was diffusing a specific genre of electronic music, and they also hung out with the same mentors. When asked why Big Apple was important in the development of dubstep, Skream mentioned it was “because Jon from Big Apple was pushing the sound so people picked up on that dark vibe early” (interviewed by Blackdown 2005).

The act of creation and the conception of new innovative cultural products are inherently dependent on previous cultural products (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1996). Whether artists try to distance themselves from existing ones or improve on existing work, cultural products need previous referents to be understood (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1996). Employees of the Big Apple record store such as Hacha started to distribute these ‘darker’ garage songs to enthusiast consumers in their area.

“I was giving them Horsepower records, Zed Bias stuff, Madd Slinky, El-B, Phuturistix, I was giving these kids all these kinds of records and saying that I wanted this kind of style. I started incorporating all this into my sets on pirate radio. The next thing I knew, I had a couple of hours' sets every week of all this new music.” (DJ Mag 2014)

Skream and Benga both emphasize this point as well:

Skream: You had to listen to what the elders listened to, and that inspired us.

Benga: Yeah, I can think of a lot of tunes I would not have made, if it wasn't for the tunes we were played back then" (Red Bull Music Academy Radio 2011)

Whether it is listening to the records on display on the second floor of Big Apple or being recommended albums by DJ Hatcha at the same store or going out and listening to the FWD>> DJs, these local places in and around Croydon helped develop a shared aesthetic vocabulary. Hence, diffusion of similar cultural work in music combined with the convergent design of UK garage facilitated the convergence of this new sound. It also provided the necessary shared cultural environment to facilitate the transmission of tacit knowledge (see Gertler 2003).

A last contribution of the Big Apple record store was the promotion and recording of emerging artists playing what would be called dubstep. Although this was a positioning and marketing strategy for the store, as it offered consumers with music not available anywhere else, it effectively helped to provide a voice for the emerging artists as well as started to build an audience around the new sound. Artwork explains:

"We use to make darker garage and the early sort of grime stuff, you know, that kind of sound and it was weird, it was not selling at all, that kind of stuff was very small, and we put together the label as something we would sell just in the record shop. This was before mp3s and file sharing, so if you wanted a tune we had to stop by and buy our vinyls, and you have to come to our shop. This was stuff we wanted to sell only in our shop, so that we would have to come there, or go on the internet because we had a shop where we would sell records and send it out in the post (Artwork interviewed by FACT, 2012) [...]
[Artwork] had a recording studio above the shop and started the Big Apple record label

with John Kennedy and DJ Hatcha. We were the first label to sign Skream and Benga when they were just 15 years old alongside Digital Mystikz (DMZ), Mala, Coki and Loefah. These artists made some of the first dubstep records.” (Artwork 2010)

In sum, the Big Apple store served three main functions which were highly important to the development of innovation: it was a place of gathering which helped the creation of a shared social network; in turn, these links put together consumers and producers and established the first basis for the creation and transmission of tacit knowledge; finally, Big Apple was a cornerstone in the creation of a shared aesthetic vocabulary. Another important site of innovation in the early days of an emerging sound is dance events and club nights, which gather consumers and producers in proximity and further the above-mentioned dynamics. In the next section, I show how the FWD>> nights helped diffuse the sound outside of the Croydon record store, created a small audience for it, and encouraged interactions between audience members and music producers.

From Big Apple to the FWD>> nights

If the Big Apple store served as a hub for “bass heads”, it was not enough to start a new genre. Novel cultural products need to be exposed to be adopted (Lloyd 2002; Straw 2015). Music needs an audience. The FWD>> nights, a series of weekly events first held at the Velvet Club, then at Plastic People, and now at Dance Tunnel, were the first events that gathered both producers and an audience under one roof. This would prove central for a number of reasons, the most important ones being the diffusion of the new sound, the recognition of an emerging genre, and the feedback producers would get from the audience. FWD>>, in the words of Straw (2015: 483), made “cultural activity visible and decipherable by rendering it public, taking some of its

acts of private production and consumption into public contexts of sociability, conviviality, and interaction.” A poignant example is how niche actor Mary Ann Hobbs discovered dubstep at the DMZ night in 2005, after which she became a champion of the sound as I will show later.

The first FWD>> nights happened at a club called the Velvet Room in 2000, yet it wasn't until the nights moved over at the Plastic People club in 2001 that it became an important hub for the emerging community. Plastic People was ideal for dubstep because of the affordances offered by the sound system. A particularly of the club was that it was “specifically designed around the Funktion One sound system” (Swindells 2008), arguably the best sound system possible for electronic music (DJ Magazine's “Best Sound System” award 2013). This sound system would become central to the development of the genre, as early community member Kode9 mentions:

“One of the most important things that happened to catalyse dubstep was that, on a sound system like that, you could get away with producing such minimal, heavy tracks – tracks that had one snare an hour, one hi-hat every two hours, loads of sub in between. That wouldn't have worked on any other system, as far as I'm concerned.” (In Martin 2015)

Like the Big Apple store, the FWD>> nights would become the most important point of gathering for consumers and producers interested in the new strain of music:

“By the bar, I'd meet and greet (or nod at on the dancefloor) Coki, N-Type and Walsh, Skream, Youngsta, Sarah, Loefah and Pokes, Kode9, Spaceape, Blackdown, Distance, Jamie from Vex'd, the Steppa gang, Scientist, SLT Mob, Cyrus, Crazy D, Youngsta, Benny Ill, D1, Dan Hancox, Bok Bok and Manara, Appleblim, Shackleton, Elemental, Boomnoise, Letty and Tom, Chantelle Fiddy, Melissa Bradshaw, Emma Warren, Hanna

and Darkstar, the three DMZ/FWD>> regulars that I called the random trio among others. Pinch would pop in from Bristol and Joe Nice and DQ from the U.S.”

(drumzofthesouth 2015)

Perhaps part of the reason the nights saw about every important figure in the early dubstep scene is because before the establishment of the FWD>> nights, DJs interested in playing that genre of music were often dismissed as marginal players from the suburbs of London (Bradley 2013). FWD>> provided a place for DJs interested in playing this sound to showcase their talent. As Kode9 mentions, “both grime and dubstep were encouraged by the fact that those producers weren't allowed into the wider garage scene” (in Martin 2015). In 2002, DJ Hatcha reflects on this:

“The big garage raves aren't going to book me because I've got my own vibe that they're not feeling, and I'm sticking to it. At these big events you usually have to play the same set as the dj before you, just repeating all the anthems and I don't want to do that.”

The FWD>> nights were and are still today tailored towards musical innovation. They are “an incubation center for the best of the UK underground” (FACT 2013). The nights regroup highly passionate consumers who go to clubs to experience new, often unreleased material directly from music producers. The FWD>> nights did away with the smart dress, bling and champagne of UK garage to concentrate on one thing: the sound.

“FWD>> was known for embracing the new. So new, in fact, that not everyone was initially up to speed with, say, the breakneck 140bpm of grime, or the heavy bass wobbles of dubstep. Writer, DJ and FWD>> regular Martin Clark comments that: “There were a

few times when we'd do a mix and look up and there were, like, two or three people left on the dancefloor, or no one at all, but we'd carry on because it was about getting lost in the music... none of that mattered because we were embracing the excitement about these new sounds.” (In Yates 2011)

The FWD>> nights were an event where both the participation of consumers and producers was expected. It was following a different logic than mainstream music events. Loyal to the first evening organized by David Mancuso at The Loft in the 1970s, a weekly party so influential that *Pitchfork* dubbed it “the dance party that spawned all other dance parties” (Beta 2014), what mattered was not the attendance, the sales of alcohol, or the name of the DJs playing. Talking about the atmosphere of the club, journalist Emma Warren recalls:

“It's no frills, no fancy lights, smoke machines. Just a big pair of speakers and decks. But FWD>> changed my life ... There was a real community. The only time I ever saw someone not turn up for a set was Joker, and that was because he missed his train from Bristol. When Martyn [a producer and DJ] played for the first time, he was so good that people started a petition to get him back again. There was a sense that people felt as if it was theirs. You didn't go along in a passive way – it was active, you were part of it.”

(Warren in Yates 2011)

The FWD>> nights gave a literal and figurative space for these DJs to develop their craft and to witness the reaction of the audience. These no frills, active, and communal aspects of the FWD>> nights were positive stimulants to the development of a new sound. The no frills aspect helped emphasize “people [who were] serious about the music” (DJ Zing in Yates 2011), or in

the words of Lockart (in Hutchinson 2011), “focus on music-obsessed people, and not those who are coming to get pissed.” The communal and active aspects not only encouraged experimentation from artists but also a flat hierarchy which fostered crowd participation (Ramadanman and Clark in Yates 2011), where crowd members could “rewind” tracks.

Throughout the history of the evolution of electronic music, the interaction between DJs and their audience has been key in orienting the sound (Reynolds 2012a). The practice of “rewinding” a song in a club might best exemplify this. Rewinding is “the act of stopping a song—generally playing on a vinyl record or, in more recent years, on a CD—bringing it back to the start, and playing it again” (Fintoni 2015) in response to crowd demand. In clubs like Plastic People, the turntables were located at the audience level. Anybody could rewind a song. “As with the early days of jungle, the rewind was a way for dubstep audiences to participate in the moment” (Fintoni 2015). Clark (2006b) mentions:

“Rewinding shouldn’t be taken lightly... The tune has to be so unfeasibly amazing that you [cannot] control yourself. There’s no decision to cognitively be made, the answer is self-evident. Like being in love: you just know.”

Rewinds are a good indicator of audience enjoyment. They provide a vital interaction between the crowd and the DJ: Much of DJ dance music is a one-way relationship from the DJ to the crowd. Rewinds also provide a more dynamically varied night, with frequent peaks and troughs not unlike a live gig. Part of what Clark mentions has a “fits like a glove” (Allen 2002) aspect: when they called (or did) a rewind, the audience members knew intrinsically that this song had to be heard again. It was, in the words of Allen (2002: 515), “an embodied, holistic experience of perfect fit”. The owner of the Tectonic label Pinch adds that a rewind comes from

“a deep understanding of what was current” (in Martin 2015). Rewinds were perhaps the best indication of the essence of the sound, and by providing a place where both audience and producer could agree on these rewinds and hear them together, FWD>> helped weave the norms and conventions of the sound.

If the FWD>> nights were a space of collaboration between producers as well as between audience and producers, it was also a space for distinction, both between producers and between consumers. This competitive aspect, highlighted as the major driver in the constitution of cultural fields by Bourdieu (1996), arguably helped fuel the development of the scene. The demand by sophisticated high field-specific cultural capital consumers of new and unreleased tracks pushed producers to develop their craft, wow the crowd, and introduce new sounds. Their knowledge, though, also allowed producers more freedom in their creative endeavors, as these trainspotters¹² would “get” the songs. Oris Jay, an early producer of ‘dark’ garage and dubstep, here mentions that in the early days the sounds were quite fragmented, which fueled a consumer base that was highly knowledgeable in electronic music and able to tie it all together:

“There was a period around 2002-03 where the music started to split into distinct strands: the darker side of garage – where [dubstep] came from – then into breaks, broken beat and grime. None of the scenes were big, but all of them had a unique sound, and everyone's influences determined which direction the sound was going to go in. It was all at the same tempo, being played at the same place – but getting more, minutely specific. Those intricacies were partly why a lot of the guys in the crowd were trainspotters. Someone else will have a track of mine, for example, but when I play it out I might play a VIP edit of it, so you know that it's me. Then you get the geeks going: "I

¹² A trainspotter is an audience member who “can successfully identify obscure music a DJ plays. A hardcore trainspotter can take it a step further and identify the source of obscure sample” (Ill 2014).

know what this is, and this must be Oris Jay playing right now because this is a version I haven't heard before." If you were playing FWD>>, you had to come correct. You couldn't play what you played the week before." (In Martin 2015)

As Oris Jay mentions, the knowledge of consumers pushed producers to continuously revamp their set to present new material. This dynamic was furthered by the competition existing between DJs that encouraged them to both bring new material as well as to devise their own sonic identity. At this stage of the development of the innovative sound, conventions were not yet institutionalized enough to structure the creative output of producers. This in turn fueled the development of the genre.

"Everyone at FWD>> brought their own sounds, so there was a dynamic tension between everyone having enough of their own space and identity, and being connected enough to be related: the bare minimum things in common in order to make it coherent enough, and have space to explore." (Clark in Martin 2015)

The sound developed thanks to Big Apple and the FWD>> nights as well as the dynamics intrinsic to each of the places. Yet, it was a fragmented sound, as Clark (2006a) mentions:

"As the Velvet Room sessions took garage in a more concerted, darker direction, its mix of dark 2-step ("nu dark swing"), breakbeat garage, and proto-grime (also then known as "8bar" or "east beat") was for a while collectively referred to as "The Forward>> sound." At this time all parts of the dark garage spectrum influenced each other. Current dubstep purist Youngsta played mostly 8bar, and Wookie's "Storm" and majestic "Far East" were Forward>> anthems. Slaughter Mob played Ghost dubs. Oris Jay evolved

from his 2-step roots to produce breakier hits like "Confused" and "Said the Spider". And that doesn't even cover Lanslide, Jay Da Flex, and Zed Bias' broken beat/dubstep fusions."

Tying together these different yet similar sounds demanded some curation. A risk facing early sounds is a lack of unity, where too much fragmentation makes it impossible to attain the unity and distinction warranting the name of a new genre. When this happens, the scene quickly dissolves and evolves towards something else (Lena and Peterson 2006; Lena 2012).

Because of the reasons I have so far mentioned, FWD>> acted as the glue that held the collective together. It provided spatial boundaries, delimiting membership and practices and allowing the performance of the collective's emerging conventions. According to Bradley (2013), this was essential:

"FWD>> needed to happen when it did, because there was a little gang of garage deejays ad producers – myself, El-B, Oris Jay and DJ Injector – who hated about eighty percent of the vocals that were going on, and were playing the dub mixes that were on the B-side of most garage twelves ... The way I would play them would be religiously breakdown to a big bass drop, so there's no beats, just a bit of atmosphere, then a big bass drop and everything else would come in minus the vocals, so what you were getting was the bassline and the beats. That little group gravitated towards each other, and the darker tunes were, the more we would play them. We could see we were getting the better reactions off the dark stuff and the rolling breakbeats, and we were all digesting those reactions, so the scene was feeding off itself. FWD>> meant we could all see the same reactions."

Although local places of gathering such as Big Apple and the FWD>> nights helped in holding together these disparate sounds by offering similar influences and by grouping producers and consumers interested in bass music at a certain tempo, more was needed for the establishment of a genre. Local champion Sarah Lockhart, the team over at Ammunition promotions, the Tempa label, the DMZ nights, and Rinse FM, all provided the direction required to curate these sounds into a coherent genre. The last section explains this development.

Champions as local curators

“And another important thing that doesn't get talked about as much as it should: when I look at the scene as a whole, there were hardly any women, but if it weren't for Sarah Lockhart and Mary Anne Hobbs, there wouldn't be any of this. The boys were running around, but these two women brought it all together. This was a whole ecosystem of music that no one knew about, and they decided to tell the whole world about it. None of us would be where we are without Sarah, and the exposure would never have happened without Mary Anne.” (Oris Jay in Martin 2015)

As a previous citation exemplified, ‘darker’ garage never fully emerged out of the niche of electronic music as “there [was not] enough quality dubs on the market to make it potentially autonomous as a scene” (Goodman 2001). For dubstep, LIN actors such as DJ Hatcha as well as FWD>> night organizer and Tempa label owner Sarah Lockhart worked to orchestrate the nascent FWD>> sound and nurtured it towards its development as a genre.

An art world is defined by Becker (1982: 34) as “all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art”. The members of art worlds “coordinate the activities by which work is

produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and frequently used artifacts” and that “the same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants. From this perspective “works of art are joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic convention to bring works like that into existence”.

Over a couple of years, the local collective would slowly develop into a small art world, composed of a record store (Big Apple), a dedicated night (FWD>>), a mastering studio (Transition), a small number of labels (Big Apple, Tempa), a pirate radio show (Rinse FM), as well as a promotion company (Ammunition). In 2005, music producers Coki and Mala would start another club night called DMZ, solely dedicated to dubstep.

As I have mentioned, the actors in this relatively close-knit art world benefited from the endeavors of one another: Big Apple and Tempa signed DJ Hatcha, an employee of the Big Apple record store. Consumers who regularly came there and started to produce their own music such as Benga also signed deals with one of these emerging record labels. The DJs of Rinse FM were also the same consumers and producers who hung out at the Big Apple store, and so were the DJs of the FWD>> nights.

Tracey et al. (2015) hypothesize that high density networks promote relational governance as it supports the emergence of shared relationship norms. Relational governance is an interfirm, intermediate governance mode between market-based and hierarchy-based where the parties involved “derive non-economic satisfaction and engage in social exchange as well as ... economic exchanges” (MacNeil 1981: 13). It is a social mode of governance based on trust (Zaheer and Venkatraman 1995) and “abstention from opportunism” (Granovetter 1985: 490).

The early days of the FWD>> scene corresponds well to this description, as the following quote emphasizes:

“Genuinely, for the longest time, with the harmony of the perceived dubstep starting line-up, it was a long, long time before cracks showed... Everyone was very supportive – and against the odds sometimes, too. I remember, around the time of the Winter Music Conference ... when two prominent drum and bass artists tried to round up a load of the young dubstep guys, like Quest and Silkie. ... They were chatting this bad-mind pollution: "All these guys – Mala, Loefah, Skream – they're taking the piss out of you. You should be doing these huge shows" – chatting shit in an attempt to get them to join an agency they'd started. They were creating bad feeling to try to get an investment. It didn't work with us, though. We stuck together. ... people were watching each other's backs, you know?” (Sgt. Pokes in Martin 2015)

This quote evidences the sort of outside-inside boundaries one would expect from a retroactive insider account, and is similarly self-congratulatory and biased. Yet it does appear to indicate that there were some important social links that accompanied the creative ones which kept the scene unified around the music community in Croydon. As I will show, these community links were also kept in check by influential network hubs such as Sarah Lockart. The deep links forged within the network not only ensured that the community evolved following its communal logic, but it also kept out individuals who were seen as outsiders, as the following quote highlights:

“I remember that when we were doing DMZ at Third Bass, [producers] Search and Destroy were working with Caspa back when he was called Quietstorm, and they put on

a party at Mass. We were like, "Hang on. Caspa is a west London guy. Why are they coming down to here, of all of the venues?" We wanted more dubstep parties, sure, but it was an unspoken thing. Maybe we shouldn't have been so precious, but we felt like it was a bit of a snide move. Short story: that's why Caspa never played a DMZ". (Sgt. Pokes in Martin 2015)

As Sgt. Pokes highlights, the dense local network was instrumental in keeping the exclusivity of the scene. The (geographical) links with Croydon, the Big Apple store and the FWD>> nights were also central in deciding who would be invited to DJ the two most important club nights. To add on this, Clark (2006b) mentions:

"Another observation from an otherwise brilliant DMZ was that from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., the vast majority of the tunes came from within a very narrow pool of producers. Witnessing Benga v Chef, N Type v Youngsta, Digital Mystikz v Loefah, and Skream v Hatcha, most dubs would have come from the six or so producers listed."

In the early days of the sound, this helped in keeping in check the expectations and the vision of the collective. If this was partly achieved through relational governance, it was also greatly facilitated by the emergence of local champions who would orient the scene, such as Sarah Lockhart of Ammunition/FWD>>/Tempa and Rinse FM, and the Digital Mystikz team of Coki and Mala and their DMZ events.

Hence, an insight in addition to that of Tracey et al. (2015) is that, in dense local networks, influential network hubs such as Coki, Mala, and Lockhart can exert their influence directly through face-to-face interactions with other network actors. Sarah Lockhart of

Ammunition/Tempa/FWD>> and eventually Rinse FM provides an excellent example of this. As the network around the Big Apple store and the FWD>> night developed and the genre progressed, Lockhart and her enterprise developed with it. She became a central figure in the community, a network hub, facilitating the exchanges between members of the collective.

“The culture of sharing tracks in the early days was a very special one. If you were in the Ammunition crew, you'd go through Sarah Lockhart. You have to imagine her as the early version of the internet for us: our "Soulja." Sarah would say, "I'm only going to give this tune to you and three other people, but I'll take your tune to this DJ and that DJ to play out." I'd give her a DAT tape, she'd take it down to the cutting house, and tell them who can get what depending on where and when they're playing ... (Oris Jay in Martin 2015)

Hatcha cultivated a similar exclusivity to ensure he would have the most unique sets¹³:

“We made music for Hatcha. No one else was allowed it, that was his rule. But we made music for him. ... But the music we were making, compared to the music that was popular at the time, garage-wise, was totally opposite, it was something weird. There was only one place to play it and that was FWD>>” (Oris Jay interviewed by Finlayson 2011).

Lockhart and Hatcha were becoming a main hub for the nascent network and using their influence to shape the emerging genre as well as to ensure exclusivity for the DJs. As the sound evolved and thanks to the involvement of Sarah Lockhart and her brother Hatcha, the FWD>> nights and the Big Apple store developed close ties:

¹³ In DJ culture, the quality of a DJ is partly defined by his capacity to have unique albums and to access songs from known producers first (Brewster and Broughton 2014, Reynolds 2012)

“Around this time Hatcha, who also worked at Big Apple, was championing this sound at a London club night called FWD. We were all making records for Hatcha to spin and meeting in the record shop to discuss the sound we were making. It was a bit like a bass university. And through Benga, Skream, Oris Jay, Plastician, Chef, LB, Kode 9, N Type and Benny Ill, the dubstep sound was brought to life.” (Oris Jay interviewed by Finlayson 2011).

These close ties between the few local places around which the local network of actors was organized helped in keeping the sound together. These influential actors also worked towards bringing the sound outside of its geographical enclave and into the niche of electronic music. Two developments would facilitate the diffusion of the sound outside of the local innovation network. First, following some violent development within the grime scene¹⁴, the pirate radio Rinse FM, which had been instrumental in the rise to prominence of grime, shut down for a few months. When it came back on the air, it had instituted a ban on MCs—a defining feature of grime, thereby banning the genre from its airwaves—and the FWD>> sound was what replaced it. Combined with the website barefiles.com, which archived Rinse FM shows, it “had quite a big influence on how early dubstep spread overseas” (Kode9 in Martin 2015). The ties between FWD>> and Rinse FM got closer when Lockhart became Rinse FM's co-manager in 2005. Highlighting the importance of FWD>> and Rinse FM, Geeneus (Rinse FM founder) mentions that, post-2003:

¹⁴ Grime is dubstep sister sound, where most tracks have a MC in comparison to dubstep which are mainly instrumental. Both genres feature a heavy bass-line and are minimally produced. Albeit “beef” between Grime MCs were often as theatrical as the ones in American rap music, in the mid-2000 there were a number of violent altercations between Grime MCs turned “into real bloodshed” (Beauman 2006), with MC Crazy Titch being sentenced for murder, and fights erupting between MCs. This, combined with a number of fights erupting between club goers during grime events, led to London police to unofficially outlaw grime club nights.

“...on Rinse, dubstep was thriving. Up until then it had been a minuscule scene, sustained entirely by FWD>>, the club night Lockhart had founded in 2001, and its associated show on Rinse helmed by Kode9 – “the smallest show on the station,” Geeneus remembers. “There was one little club night in a 200-capacity venue that wasn’t even full,” says Lockhart. “And there was Rinse doing shows. That was it. Probably a footprint of 500 people. Had the station disappeared or had we at FWD>> said, ‘Fuck this,’ that would have been it. No dubstep.” (Macpherson 2014)

A second important development was the start of the bi-monthly nights DMZ. The FWD>> nights were, as I mentioned, an important incubator for music. To be so, one of their modus operandi was diversity: to be innovative, you have to allow new sounds to be played. Yet, this is less conducive to the production of a coherent sound for an emerging genre. When DMZ started, it filled that role. Also, FWD>> was for a dedicated group of highly passionate consumers and they “might only get 150 heads through the door on a good night” (Roberts 2015). DMZ widened the audience with a capacity of 400, which doubled within their first year of operation. Clark (2005) mentions:

“The influence of soundsystems looms large in dubstep, not least lead by the sound’s top boys Digital Mystikz. Their DMZ night has come to dominate 2005, becoming the scene’s premier night bar none. It’s a shame for original innovators Forward>> which by becoming bi-monthly and taking progressive steps to accommodate the innovations of grime, has become slightly erratic.”

By the end of 2006, DMZ would switch rooms at the Mass nightclub, moving from the basement to the ground floor, a symbolic change that I explore in more detail in the next section. Before doing so, I summarize the main findings of this section.

LINs foster the development of innovation cultural products. The development of these new products happens within a greater cultural and institutional environment and often against convergent designs, such as the late 90s UK garage sound. In these environments, places such as the Big Apple record store emerge as an alternative diffusion channel that offers products different from the dominant cultural products and provide the physical space for the interaction between consumers and producers. Over time, some consumers acquire the tacit knowledge required to make professional-sounding songs and, because they are less structured by existing conventions, are able to innovate and produce new sounds. The development of this new sound and acquisition and transmission of tacit knowledge is facilitated by a shared cultural environment, such as the one offered by a neighborhood such as Croydon, as well as a shared aesthetic vocabulary, such as the ones diffused by Big Apple. Local commercial actors can then support the emerging new cultural product by providing the means to, in this case, record and distribute the musical products. The creation of dedicated places of diffusion, such as club nights for music, provides a space for diffusion, as well as one to build an audience. The strong communal basis at this stage of the evolution of the cultural product facilitates a close proximity between consumers and producers. The latter can witness the impact of their new product, a probable impetus to the continuation of their professional project. As the community develops, champions emerge who help to orchestrate a vision for the nascent genre and further diffuse the genre beyond its local boundaries. In the next section, I will explain how niches help in translating these new sounds from a LIN to a mainstream market.

The role of niches in the cultural innovation process

My second research question asks about the role of niche markets and the actors that populate them in the creation of new cultural categories. As I have previously defined them, niche markets are translocal and transnational spaces protected from the influence of mainstream market pressures through stigma and communal efforts (see for example the community-oriented market-restricting practices presented by Hietanen and Rokka [2015]) that serve as a bridge between local innovation networks and a mainstream market.

Extant research has positioned niches as end markets, such as in the case of the mini-moto market (Martin and Schouten 2014) or as market segments, i.e., “small groups of customers with similar characteristics” (Dalgic and Leeuw 1994). Conceptualizing niches as end markets or as segments obscures the roles they play in a greater market system. In other words, looking at niches as the result of a market creation process, such as in the case of Martin and Schouten (2014), or as a market to be addressed, such as in the case of Dalgic and Leeuw (1994), structures the analysis on how to strategically create or target these niches. Rather, I conceptualize niches as an intermediary market level between LINs and mainstream markets. Such a conceptualization is close to the conceptualization of niches in the multi-level perspective and also resonates with work in cultural geography. Arvidsson (2007), Lloyd (2002) and Simon (2009) propose that there is a class of consumers that act as a bridge between the innovative underground and the commercializing mainstream markets. These “network entrepreneurs” (Arvidsson 2007) or “neo-bohemes” (Lloyd 2002) are part of the “middleground” (Simon 2009), or what I conceptualize as niche markets.

As I will show, when viewed from an inclusive market system perspective, which integrates all three market levels, niches are both end markets as well as bridges between LINs

and mainstream markets. They allow for the transference, translation, and transformation of innovations and the knowledge associated with innovative LINs. They do so by spanning the boundaries of these three market levels and by actively working to integrate local innovations to the niche, which creates a boundary infrastructure facilitating the transference and translation of knowledge between levels and makes it easier for mainstream consumers to transform their knowledge. Niches also allow for the interaction between local, niche, and mainstream actors. I will concentrate on the role of mainstream actors in the next section on the mainstream level. In the next chapter, I will show how niche entrepreneurs leverage the boundary infrastructure created by niche actors to transform the composition of knowledge related to electronic music through the engineering of a new cultural category. In this section, the emphasis will be on the role of niche actors, such as niche consumers and niche artists. This emphasis is to provide greater clarity to the construction of the boundary infrastructure as well as to the processes underlying the crossing of three increasingly complex knowledge-based boundaries.

Boundaries such as the ones existing between LINs and niches as well as niches and mainstream markets can be interfaces facilitating knowledge production (Star and Griesemer 1989, Lamont and Molnar 2002). These interfaces allow for exchange and communication between bounded entities as well as creative bridging work. Star and Griesemer (1989) propose that boundary objects—objects that inhabit multiple worlds, are robust enough to maintain their identity across them, and are adaptable to multiple viewpoints (Star and Griesemer 1989)—allow actors from these different worlds to collaborate without sharing a consensus on their goals or practices (Lainer-Vos 2013). They are objects that “sits in the middle” of two worlds (Star 1988: 47). This is a stark contrast from an approach that looks at boundaries as elements of an exclusionary mechanism (Lamont and Molnar 2002).

In new product development within single organizations, boundary objects help actors from different functional units of a company to collaborate with one another (Star and Griesemer 1989; Carlile 2002, 2004). The union of multiple related boundary objects that collectively serve similar communities or worlds has been studied under different names. For Bowker and Star (2000: 313), such a “stable regime of boundary objects” is called a boundary infrastructure which is the term privileged here. Carlile (2002, 2004) terms this a “boundary process”. Perhaps the first mention of such interplay between multiple boundary objects can be found in the work of Fujimura (1992) in the form of “standardized packages” which he defines as a “theory and a standardized set of technologies which is adopted by many members of multiple social worlds to construct a new and at least temporally stable definition of” an object (Fujimura 1992: 169). These infrastructures facilitate fact stabilization and the collective work of actors from different social worlds. In this section, I will show how niche actors construct a network of boundary objects through their self-serving and niche-serving actions, which builds an infrastructure that helps bridging LNs and mainstream markets. That is, I will explain how this boundary infrastructure created by niche consumers and producers will help the translation of the innovative sound created in by a small group of consumers and producers in and around Croydon, to the trans-global niche of electronic music, and to the global mainstream market of pop music.

Current research has addressed socio-technical product development projects (e.g., Star and Griesemer 1989; Carlile 2004; Lainer-Vos 2013) where the collaborative efforts of multiple actors can be facilitated through the implementation of a boundary infrastructure (Carlile 2004). The case of the FWD>> scene, dubstep, and EDM provides a cultural innovation context with a number of actors with diverging goals who are not particularly looking to collaborate with one

another. The concept of boundary infrastructure offers an ideal lens to analyze how niches bridge the cultural innovations of LINs and the commercial work of established market actors. I will explain how they do so by creating a number of boundary objects that are used by LIN, niche, and mainstream actors to communicate across the boundaries of these three market levels.

Niche actors and the construction of a boundary infrastructure

I argue that one of the main roles of niche actors is to render “a complex jumble of otherwise ambiguous and contradictory activities, pronouncements, and impressions, into a simplified and relatively coherent portrait” (Ashfort and Humphrey 1997: 53). In other words, niche actors distil and codify innovations and by doing so provide classification schemes, prototypes, taxonomies, and other boundary objects that help both mainstream producers and consumers in interacting with LIN ones. Mainstream actors also participate to the construction of boundary objects that help in the crossing of niche cultural products to the mainstream. Although these dynamics are important, for the sake of clarity, I will concentrate in this section on the work of local and niche actors. At the end of this section, I present a feedback mechanism from the mainstream level that provides the niche with an influx of consumers.

The term distilling refers to the selection of central attributes of an innovation and actors of the LIN by niche actors. There is evidence that the distillation of elements of a culture, whether it is a company culture (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001) or a consumption one (Üstüner and Holt 2010), is accomplished by consumers with higher cultural and/or symbolic capital. Although I will show that all types of consumers participate in the codification of a LIN knowledge base, my analysis also suggests that distilling is accomplished by such niche actors. They do so through their selection of LIN actors and songs to talk about, play in their DJ sets and on the radio, and highlight in magazine interviews, but also when they choose what sound to

replicate as an emerging producer and who they advise to blog and forum readers as a starting stock of artists.

Distilling allows for the emergence of a recognizable category of LIN actors and their integration to the niche. Along with the codification of a genre, it makes them readily recognizable as genre artists (e.g., dubstep artists). It is also an act of selection, which highlights certain aspects of an innovative LIN and obscures others. This is particularly evident in Clark's (2006a) column, where he points out that the FWD>> sound was much broader than what is now known as dubstep: it was "a mix of [different strains of electronic music such as] 'dark' 2-step ('nu-dark swing'), breakbeat garage and proto-grime ('then known as "8bar" or "east beat")". As the FWD>> sound moved to the niche of electronic music, niche actors selected some attributes and left others out, which led to the emergence of dubstep music.

The distillation work of niche actors is often accompanied by codification efforts. By codification, I mean the recording of the material and symbolic resources that serve as a basis to assess membership to a category (see Vergne and Wry 2014). These two different types of work are often co-occurring as distillation work is often recorded (in texts, images, videos, or sounds), by niche producers or by passionate LIN and niche consumers, and then made available thanks to the Internet. I will now show how the distilling and codifying work of niche actors lead to the creation of a distributed collective memory that acts as a readily available bank of resources for interested actors. I will then explain how this is used to facilitate the crossing of knowledge boundaries.

Boundary infrastructure and distributed collective memory

Part of the boundary infrastructure constructed by niche consumers and producers involves the construction of a large distributed collective memory that retains the numerous

innovations of different LINs (e.g., house, techno, chiptune, UK funky). This is done through the intentional and uncalculated creation of taxonomies, repositories, prototypes, exemplars, and other boundary objects.

Electronic music is approaching its forties. Emerging from the death of disco, it has seen tremendous evolution and revolution, changing form as it changed geographical locations and target markets. In 2001, McLeod identified more than 300 subgenres composing the niche of electronic music, such as:

“includes abstract beat, abstract drum-n-bass, acid house, acid jazz, acid rave, acid-beats, acid-funk, acid-techno, alchemic house, ambient dance, ambient drum-n-bass, amyl house, analogue electro-funk, aquatic techno-funk, aquatic-house, atomic breaks, avant-techno, bass, big beat, bleep-n-bass, blunted beats, breakbeat, chemical beats, Chicago garage, Chicago house, coldwave, cosmic dance, cyber hardcore, cybertech, dark ambient, dark core, downtempo funk, downtempo future jazz, drill-n-bass, dronecore, drum-n-bass, dub, dub-funk, dub-hop, dub-n-bass, electro, electro-acoustic, electro-breaks, electro-dub, freestyle, future jazz, futuristic breakbeat, futuristic hardbeats, futuristic hardstep, gabber, garage, global house, global trance, goa-trance, happy hardcore, hardcore techno, hard chill ambient, intelligent drum-n-bass, intelligent jungle, intelligent techno, miami bass, minimal techno, minimal trance, morphing, mutant techno, mutated minimal techno, mystic-step, neurofunk, noir-house, nu-dark jungle, old school, organic chill-out, organic electro, organic electronica, progressive house, progressive low frequency, progressive trance, ragga, ragga-jungle, rave, techstep, techxotica, trance, trancecore, trance-dub, tribal, tribal beats, tribal house, tribal soul,

trip-hop, tripno, twilight electronica, two-step, UK acid, UK breakbeat, underground, world-dance.”

The emergence of bass music, from the Los Angeles’ scene organized around the Low End Theory events to the Croydon’s dubstep scene, has contributed to adding a number of subgenres to this list. Although McLeod (2001: 60) mentions that part of the genre-naming game is “a function of marketing strategies of record companies”, he also recognizes that it reflects “the rapidly evolving nature of the music itself”. On the one hand, subgenre naming is a way for mainstream artists to maintain their authenticity as it facilitates certain “discursive moves that validate their status as authentic artists”, suggesting that the artist is at the forefront of musical experimentation and innovation (McLeod 2001: 69). It can also be a merchandising strategy by music labels, creating a marketable identity out of “faceless” artists. On the other hand, the increase in subgenre naming is also representative of the rapid emergence of new sounds within an established music genre. Genre naming can also be used by consumers as a gate-keeping device that creates a large amount of information and knowledge on which subcultural capital is developed (see also Arsel and Thompson 2011). This helps in maintaining boundaries between niche and mass consumers (McLeod 2001).

Our capacity as consumers to be able to retrieve elements from these genres (such as the late 1980s Chicago house jacking dance style), understand the genres as distinct categories, pull out of a few recent and not-so-recent songs to sonically represent them, and hold a discussion about these, is the result of both the archival work of thousands of involved LIN and niche actors as well as the archival of their interactions, which builds a collective memory of subcultural capital. This allows the codification of the vast amount of knowledge present within each LIN

and niche actors. In other words, it allows for translating the embodied forms of cultural capital which serve as the basis for distinction in fields into capital that is objectified, codified, and accessible by consumers. It translates the large amount of information and knowledge on which subcultural capital is developed into something readily accessible by both niche and mainstream consumers.

The idea of a collective memory in consumption is not new. Belk (1988) argued that our possessions serve to evoke memories and experiences from our (individual) past, but also that “fascination with things past ... involved nostalgia” points to a possible long-term collective (and mythologized) memory. In the digital world, he argues that there is a “new set of devices and technologies for recording and archiving our memories” which expands the archive of “individual and collective autobiographical memory cues as well as links to facts” (Belk 2013: 488). To this is added an increasing documentation of our personal lives and of the lives of collectives.

In dubstep for example, Martin Clark (who is also known as blackdown) wrote a column for *Pitchfork* as well as his own blog and has been called the “unofficial dubstep historian/record keeper” (Earp 2006). He has kept a lively history of the early origins of the genre. Moreover, anybody can retrieve the 10 years plus archives of the *dubstepforum*. Albeit reading 10 years of archives might be seen as an overwhelming task effectively precluding interested consumers in acquiring the relevant knowledge required to interact with other niche consumers, the structuring of the *dubstepforum* facilitates the access to this information. For example, important threads are “stuck” to the top, it is possible to sort threads by number of views and number of replies (which can be used as proxy for the importance of a thread), and consumers have created “guides” (e.g., “What is Dubstep? A guide to start with is here”) to facilitate the entry of new consumers to the

genre. Together with *drumzofthesouth*, which provides photographic evidence of the niche, the work of blackdown and the *dubstepforum* participants have constructed an impressive database of memories, memory cues, and facts about the FWD>> scene and the integration of dubstep into the niche of electronic music.

If these niche actors were central in the archival of material pertaining to dubstep, there were only but two of several hundred and then thousands of members participating online on a daily basis. Belk (2013: 490) mentions that “distributed digital memory ... operates at the level of collective memory” and perhaps one of the best sources of distributed digital memories is online forums and blogs. For dubstep, the archives of forums such as *dubplates.net* and *dubstepforum.com* provide invaluable information about all aspect of the genre and associated scene. More, “every scene has its go-to message boards: “Drum and bass” fans had *Breakbeat Science* and *Dogs on Acid* (recently re-launched as *DOA: Reborn*), while sites like *TranceAddict*, *Ravetrash*, *mnml.nl*, and *Buzz Board* provide outlets for their associate subcultures” (Gentile and DJ Ayres 2014). Consumers also gather on blogs, exchanging their perspective on current and historical events, which contributes to a vast-verging-on-encyclopedic knowledge of LIN and niche histories, events, and information.

An example of this work is the blog of Greg Wilson, where he provides a history of electronic music in the United Kingdom from the perspective of less central actors, or redresses historical accounts he considers biased (e.g., “Cutting Shapes: How House Music Really Hit the UK”). The posts on Wilson’s blogs are well researched and often offer a first-person account of events. They also draw an important response from his readers, some of which chime in with their own personal views and experiences. The post mentioned above, for example, drew 100 responses from the readers. The total length of the post with the responses is 51 pages single-

spaced pages of in-depth information. The following excerpt exemplifies the kind of knowledge exchanged by niche members. Here, Tim R. relates to the original article, before explaining his own perspective on the development of the house scene. He establishes his importance as a contributor to the phenomenon as the A&R (artists and repertoire, or talent scout) for *Jack Trax Label*, and both confirms as well as extends the original blog post by mentioning a number of key events as being central to the emergence of UK house. Tim's post is one of many that unfolds this way, showcasing the kind of readership of the blog as well as providing relevant and hard to acquire bits and pieces of knowledge about the emergence of UK house in the 80s and 90s. He mentions:

"... I saw the whole House scene develop, from an interesting perspective as an insider so to speak... I worked for and eventually ran A&R for The groundbreaking seminal Jack Trax Label in the UK. ... The first few records drifted in from Chicago 85-86, but the main ground being laid by actually as several correctly point out, a few uptempo black records such as Colonel Abrahms - Trapped, Willie Colon - Set Fire to Me, Serious Intention - You Dont Khow, At the time the UK was focused on Black Hip Hop post Electro, and The Soul Boogie scenes, of old. Norman Jay and Judge Jules were pioneering the Warehouse Rare Groove Scenes, along with Jay Strongman and Mark Moore who were playing to an eclectic mix of Hip Hoppers and trendy Rockabillicies left over from the Punk Scene." (Tim R.)

These transmissions of experiences and information, perhaps as I have mentioned as overt signals aimed at objectifying consumers' subcultural capital, lead to the archiving of the history of LINs associated with hundreds of electronic genres and to the creation of a number of

boundary objects such as the ones I have mentioned before (taxonomies, repositories, prototypes, exemplars). Participation on blogs, web forums, and social networking websites ultimately creates the knowledge-based backbone of the niche of electronic music: a boundary infrastructure that aids knowledge representation, learning, transformation, and creation (Bowker and Star 2000; Carlile 2004). Posts like the one above stimulate discussions and support the interactions between niche and mainstream actors, as well as the acquisition and constant revision of information. They also provide points of entry for interested consumers to learn about niche and mainstream markets. In the next section, I show how this collective memory is built and how it is leveraged to cross knowledge boundaries.

Crossing the three knowledge boundaries

I adapt Carlile's (2004) integrative framework on boundary-crossing knowledge to explain how niche actors construct and use a boundary infrastructure to bridge all three market levels. Carlile's (2004) framework proposes that there exist three progressively more complex boundaries that knowledge crosses, combined with three progressively more complex processes of boundary crossing.

First, he proposes that knowledge crosses an information-based *syntactic* boundary through *knowledge transfer* through the use, for example, of taxonomies, storage, and retrieval technologies.

Second, knowledge crosses meaning-based *semantic* boundary through *knowledge translation* through the use, for example, of cross-functional teams (or in this case niche consumption communities) and boundary translators. A key point is the generation of a shared understanding for consumers and producers located on each side of the boundary. This provides them with a context similar enough so that information can be interpreted in similar ways.

Third, knowledge crosses a politically based *pragmatic* boundary through *knowledge transformation* through the use, for example, of objects and models that demonstrate possible form, fit, and function (Carlile 2004). A key point of this last boundary is that individuals have a vested interest in the knowledge they possess and that their interest in their knowledge impedes them from sharing it. In the field of arts, Bourdieu (1996) mentions that the acquisition of knowledge is the entrance price to pay to participate to a field and that in fields, the very constitution of knowledge is at stake. Hence, to cross the pragmatic boundary, consumers and producers need to find ways where the transformation of knowledge either upholds existing power structures, changing the kind of knowledge that is at stake or “facilitates a process where individuals can jointly transform their knowledge” (Carlile 2002: 452). Carlile’s framework is particularly useful in a cultural market, where the production and enjoyment of innovative cultural products are based on the transference, translation, and transformation of knowledge (e.g., Khaire 2014).

My work departs from that of Carlile (2002, 2004) and subsequent applications of his framework in the management and organizational studies literature as it looks at a market—where actors can have no particular goals and which, when they do, differ widely in terms of scope and objectives. More, in markets, the political efforts of actors to define boundary objects to their advantage greatly impacts the development of the market as well as financial returns for actors—rather than at an organization—where functional groups (e.g., vehicle styling, engine, power train, climate control, safety [Carlile 2004: 561]) have very precise objectives, are asked to work in concert to reach a common solution, and whose efforts all contribute to the organization. In adapting Carlile’s work (2002, 2004) to institutions (vs. organizations), I thus depart from some of his analytical stance and will emphasize, mainly in the next section on the

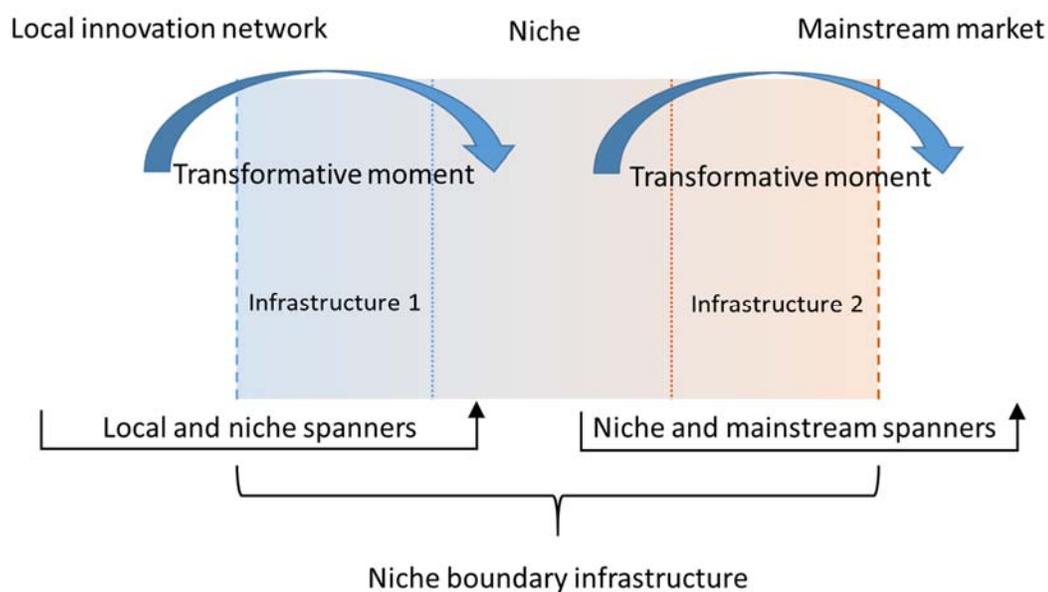
work of actors at the mainstream level, the political efforts of actors to define boundary objects to their advantage through their cooperation with other niche entrepreneurs and peripheral market actors.

Also, although the crossing of these three boundaries could be seen as a progressive process, the reality is messier, and the three boundaries are often crossed together, sometimes using similar boundary objects. Hence, the typology established by Carlile (2002, 2004), that matches specific boundary objects to specific boundary crossing moments is less appropriate. More, Carlile (2002, 2004) mentioned that solely the pragmatic boundary is politically laden. In my context, I find that boundary objects used to cross each boundary can be created through politically laden processes. Hence, in a market such as music, the creation of boundary objects is almost always a political project, although I will mostly cater to these dynamics during the crossing of the pragmatic boundary. By doing so, I want to highlight that even if all boundary crossings are political, some of them are more so than others. In other words, the boundary objects used to cross the syntactic boundary are *mostly* characterized by informational aspects associated with the cultural innovation; the boundary objects used to cross the semantic boundary are mostly characterized by meaning-based dimensions associated with the cultural innovation; and the creation of the boundary objects to cross the pragmatic boundary are more politically-laden than the creation of the boundary objects associated with the previous two boundaries.

Figure 3 below offers a graphic representation of the processes underlying the boundary crossing of consumers and producers facilitated by the niche boundary infrastructure. I differentiate between two different boundary infrastructures, infrastructure 1 and 2, which when joined together represent the whole boundary infrastructure associated with the niche level. Both

of these boundary infrastructures are associated with a transformative moment. Infrastructure 1 is conjointly constructed by local and niche consumers and producers, and local and niche boundary spanners. The transformative moment is associated with the crossing of the pragmatic boundary of the knowledge associated with the FWD>> sound, which is transformed into dubstep. Infrastructure 2 is conjointly constructed by niche and mainstream consumers and producers, and niche and mainstream boundary spanners. The transformative moment is associated with the crossing of the pragmatic boundary of the knowledge associated with dubstep into the category of EDM. Taken together, both of these infrastructures, as well as those constructed for the some 300 and more genres I mentioned earlier, compose the boundary infrastructure of the niche of electronic music. To illustrate this argument, I will now unpack the crossing of the three knowledge boundaries between the LIN and niche levels.

Figure 3. The niche boundary infrastructure.



Crossing of the syntactic boundary

I have briefly explained how consumers' and producers' distillation and codification efforts help to construct the backbone of the boundary infrastructure of the niche of electronic music. I will now delve into details about the crossing of knowledge of the syntactic boundary through the work of consumers and producers. As a reminder, the syntactic boundary is information-based. Here, the boundary objects facilitate the transference of information and the crossing of the boundary at which they are located. The crossing of the syntactic boundary relies on boundary objects that "supply a common reference point of data, measures, or labels across functions that provide shared definitions" (Carlile 2002: 451). The main type of boundary object for this is repositories (e.g., online forums, file-sharing websites, specialized record stores, product-focused websites, club nights, radio shows, and blogs covering the niche). The main role of repositories is to represent knowledge at the boundary (Carlile 2002). Previous examples I have given on the web forums *dubstepforum*, the scene historian *blackdown*, as well as the blog *drumzofthesouth* are all examples of boundary objects that codify aspects of the cultural product and associated practices. I will extend these examples and will highlight how a consumer created an important library of archived radio shows that became a go-to destination for niche consumers interested in learning about dubstep, and by doing so created a repository.

In March 2006, then 17 years old deapoh started a website called *barefiles*. In his word, barefiles was "a website with loads of dubstep and grime mixes ... some 900 or something ... all free downloads ... from *Rinse FM*, lots of *Rinse FM* ... stuff from Hatcha, Benga, Big Apple records" (Darkside 2006a). By November 2006, the website was receiving 800 visits a day. The website would grow to be recognized as a central element in the dubstep scene as it "had quite a big influence on how early dubstep spread overseas" (Kode9 in Martin 2015). Websites ran by

consumers and local scene members, such as *barefiles* as well as *blackdown*, *Hyperdub*, and *dubstepforum* were central in the crossing of the syntactic boundary because, as Hatcha mentions (in Muggs 2014), “even if you weren’t in the raves, you could hear it ... where the original dubstep was visible to the outside world.”

Deapoh’s efforts were collaborative and he had a number of central contributors to his website who helped in recording mixes from different pirate radio station. He acknowledges the help of his “main man Boomnoise, [who] has recorded and sent loads to me. Also *Hova records* many grime sets. The rest are usually from people who record a couple times and I found the links or if I record them myself” (Darkside 2006b). According to *dubstepforum* users, “this sound and this community owe a lot to deapoh and barefiles’ influence. In a large measure, deapoh is responsible for pushing it global, and making the music easy to find” (seckle, *dubstepforum* admin, 2010). Other users chimed in stating, as dubloke (2010) exemplifies, that *barefiles* “pretty much got [them] into dubstep.”

Repositories supply a common reference point for actors from multiple worlds and help transfer information. Websites such as these represented what dubstep and grime was. Deapoh efforts were not overtly political: he simply archived as many sets as possible. His archives became a shared resource that electronic niche consumers could readily access, breaking both the geographical boundary of the LIN as well as providing the necessary resources for the transference of knowledge associated with the emerging dubstep sound. These mixes, from radios such as *Rinse FM* and *Sub FM* were not only diffusing music, they were also talking about events, artists, covering the development of the scene, and thus offered extent information about the genre.

Consumers can also collectively participate to the creation of elements of a repository, such as posts on a web forum. An example of this is the thread “dubstep milestones” on *dubstepforum*. On this thread, some forty users contributed to identify the key moments in the development of the dubstep genre to help a Polish journalist who was “writing an article about dubstep for one of the Polish lifestyle magazines” (Poolsh 2007). On this thread, users mention several key albums, thus creating a repository of exemplars of dubstep music. For example:

“But personally, I think the crucial period for the sound was October 05 - Feb 06. In succession, there were vinyl releases for Midnight Request Line and Root / Goat Stare. Then Dub Wars aired. And immediately after, Qawwali and Haunted / Anti-War Dub hit the racks. [...] That quartet of releases, sandwiching Dub Wars, was an incredible statement. Whatever hype dubstep got afterwards, that little period right there justified it - it was an amazing sequence of tunes. Incredibly high standards and wildly diverse sounds. And arguably still the four best releases the scene has produced.” (User DW)

This kind of consumer participation of the *dubstepforum* fosters the creation of a knowledge bank similar to the example of a repository constructed by Grinnell in Star and Griesemer (1989: 410): a “library of specimen” of the dubstep sound and information bits from which a number of actors from different social worlds, such as local and niche consumers, electronic DJs, and journalists such as the one mentioned above, were able to draw to make sense of the genre.

As Carlile (2004) explains, the role of boundary objects such as repositories and taxonomies is to cross the syntactic boundary: they establish a knowledge base which actors from all functional teams, or here, consumers and producers from different market levels, can pick from, as well as serves to represent the knowledge associated with a LIN. Thus, actors such as deapoh

and the *dubstepforum* users, through their efforts to archive and catalog the productions and evolution of the LIN, facilitate the knowledge crossing from LIN to niche and further down the road, from niche to the mainstream. Next, I show how consumers and producers also produce boundary objects that facilitate the crossing of the second boundary, the semantic boundary.

Crossing the semantic boundary

The crossing of the second boundary relies on boundary objects that allow for the creation of shared meanings and the transmission of tacit knowledge (e.g., post-club night or festival write-up; after-festival video; how-to videos; tutorials; photographic evidence of live events). Carlile (2004) also mentions the role of boundary spanners (such as “network entrepreneurs” [Arvidsson 2007] and established mainstream artists) and the creation of cross-functional teams (or in this case, niche consumption communities) as central to the creation of shared meanings and the crossing of the semantic boundary. In this section, I show how boundary spanners and a niche consumption community help to create shared meanings and facilitate the crossing of the semantic boundary.

A crucial milestone in the crossing of dubstep from its LIN to the niche of electronic music was the radio show of influential niche actor Mary Anne Hobbs. Hobbs was such a boundary spanner, bridging the niche of electronic music and the local network established in Croydon. She helped bringing the local network and the niche by mentioning the online meeting ground *dubstepforum*. Hobbs discovered dubstep during the *DMZ* events. She was the “host of *BBC Radio 1*’s hugely influential *Breezeblock* program ... a late-night forum for left-field electronic music of many kinds” (McKinnon 2007). In 2005, she hosted a dubstep-only show titled *Dubstep Warz*, where she invited what McKinnon (2007) refers to as the “godfathers of the genre.” Her show, the artists she invited, and the songs she featured became a central articulating point,

which provided a function similar to Kozinets' (2008: 866) use of the notion of quilting point, "a semiotic anchor that retroactively fixes the meaning of whole chains of signifiers" (Kozinets 2008). Mary Anne Hobbs helped forged what would become the very foundational meanings of the dubstep genre. The show "painted a picture of what dubstep meant. That show was traded throughout the Internet, to the point where it's almost a cliché to say that it influenced you" (*Smog* label owner Drew Best quoted in Reynolds 2012).

The creation of niche consumption communities was also an important step in the creation of shared understanding. Albeit at first populated by dubstep-centered consumers, the boundary-spanning intervention of *Radio 1* DJ Mary Anne Hobbs and her *Dubstep Warz* radio show bridged the trans-global niche of electronic music and the local network established in Croydon. After the show, the online location grew from a few hundred to a few thousand (*dubstepforum* user secckkk, 2006), and eventually, to "a million" (Drew Best quoted in Reynolds 2012b). The mention of the *dubstepforum* during that show provided a rallying point for the niche community: if the FWD>> scene was localized in and around Croydon, the creation and diffusion of an online meeting point allowed for the scene to expand beyond its geographical boundaries.

At this point, anybody interested in the genre could go on the forum and discuss it, share their knowledge and ideas as well as songs and tracks, and get recommendations and advice on their productions. Some ambassadors, such as U.S. based Drew Best, Joe Nice and Dave Q, who met on such forums, would also around the same time start organizing their own U.S. based events, which would prove central in disseminating the genre in North America. A DJ I interviewed highlights this aspect of online communities:

“ [That online forums] were fundamental in making EDM big [is something] that gets overlooked all the time ... a hub for people to go to and find stuff and for people to connect ... people discovering the Internet’s potential in meeting like-minded people ... the cultural template created by the idea shared on that website and others like *hollerboard* and *Erol*, that cultural template that was provided by blogs, posting songs from these forums, and people just talking all the time, and party series would appear in every cities in North America and they were all playing the same kind of music, repping the same kind of stuff, ... at the same time in the UK there was a forum called the *Erol Alkan* forum by this DJ, *Erol Alkan*, who was a number one DJ in the UK, similar story, a lot of techno people who came from that forum, I was part of all of these different forums keeping tab on stuff, famous DJs now came out of these forums ... I got to know people through that” (DJ BBW)

As this celebratory and self-elevating quote highlights, online forums like the *dubstepforum* contributed to the creation of a “cultural template”, or shared meanings and practices. It was according to Hammond (2008) “the virtual nerve center for the dubstep scene.” These shared meanings and practices were then diffused through an online network of blogs and forums, as well as through local events such as the ones organized by Dave Q and Joe Nice, and tied back to the niche through online sharing of sets and pictures and accounts of experiences of these local events. *Dubstepforum* was one of many online forums available for enthusiasts of electronic music in the early 2000s. Gentle and DJ Ayres (2014) highlight the important role of these online communities in their article on Diplo’s forum, *Hollerboard*, which one of my informants characterized as “crucial” in the emergence of EDM:

“Back in the day (the 90s and early 00s), forums like the Hollerboard were where dance music communities came together. In a time before Twitter, Facebook, MySpace (or even EDM), it’s where DJs went to get their likes, share their opinions, and flame their friends. Every scene had its go-to message boards ... Because of the board, a cross-continental network of parties and promoters was able to emerge. There were Hollerboard-affiliated parties in “every city,” says Low-Bee. “It seemed like everyone got their turn to play this place and that place,” he says. “The parties were all influenced by the music being talked about on the Hollerboard.” ... “it amplified and fed into IRL [in real life] relationships in a cool way,” says Fools Gold label head Nick Catchdubs. “When you showed up for a gig in a random city, you weren't playing with strangers—you were playing with friends you'd ‘known’ for years, whether that's a Four Color Zack in Seattle or a Morse Code in SF.” ... “It helped create a real circuit,” Nick Catchdubs continues, “a community that laid the groundwork for what Diplo would grow with Mad Decent, and what A-Trak and myself would grow with Fool's Gold.” (Gentiles and DJ Ayres 2014)

This cultural template was fostered by and enforced through conversations on online forums between consumers and between consumers and producers. The creation of “guides”, such as the one I mentioned previously, helped consumers in acquiring the “right” kind of knowledge. Perhaps more important was a number of threads that operated as Q&As, where consumers asked questions related to dubstep and together developed an understanding of what this genre is. Members who had already developed an understanding of the genre would also orient conversations in order to transmit what they considered was important. These

communities united both neophytes and consumers and producers who had been involved within the genre for a number of years. Next, I highlight the first transformative moment, as the FWD>> sound moved into the niche of electronic music and was transformed as dubstep.

Crossing the pragmatic boundary: protecting the niche

The crossing of the pragmatic boundary is a political act: it reshapes the power relationships between actors and transforms the product crossing over the boundary and the knowledge associated with it. Boundary objects such as prototypes and exemplars (e.g., “heroes”, compilation albums, headliners at high-status festivals, charts) contribute to the crossing of the pragmatic boundary. In my context, I identified two “transformative moments” associated with the crossing of the pragmatic boundary, where the cultural innovation was transformed as it crossed the boundary, from the FWD>> sound to dubstep and from dubstep to EDM. Here, I present the first of these two transformative moments, when the innovative new sound crossed the boundary between the LIN and the niche and was transformed into dubstep.

In the next section on the mainstream level, I explain how niche entrepreneurs transform knowledge at the boundary of the niche and the mainstream market by creating a branded category. I show how this successful cultural engineering provides niche entrepreneurs and peripheral market actors with a commercial advantage as they open a new mainstream cultural category for electronic music. Here, I describe a process where dubstep moved from the local to the trans-global through a number of power-laden processes. Carlile’s (2002, 2004) work emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge by all actors in such a way to ensure that the knowledge developed would benefit the co-creators. In my context, I find that the crossing of the pragmatic boundary, perhaps because of the sheer number of consumers and producers involved in the genre at this point in time, is bound to leave some consumers and producers behind. That

is, by transforming the knowledge, consumers and producers change what is at stake. This transformation has as a consequence to privilege some actors over others.

As I have presented, the FWD>> scene was not a distinct genre. Rather, it was a varied genre mostly united by songs produced on a 138BPM (beats-per-minute) tempo and a love for loud low bass. The array of sounds that comprised the genre was vast, from 2-steppish garage to half-step, from Mala and his broken dub house, to Coki's ragga and dancehall sound, to Loefah's reinvention of jungle (Loefah in Martin 2015), from Hyperdub experimental sound to Skream "bass-y wobble". The translation of the FWD>> sound into dubstep left some producers behind, so much so that even six years after the construction of the LIN, it will be necessary to "track down lost producers to prize mixed masters from their vaults" (Clark 2006a).

As the genre developed, it became increasingly associated with a few characteristics. This facilitated its development into a full-blown genre, i.e., a clearly defined model under which consumers and producers can classify songs, rather than a loosely organized group of sounds following the same tempo (138 bpm). Hancox (2006a, 2006b) mentioned in 2006 that dubstep had become afflicted by "dubstep purism ... i.e., this is dubstep, this is not dubstep." These debates would ultimately come to reflect what would be considered as the genre's prototype, a model of what dubstep songs are. Some have hypothesized that, as the genre moved away from the LIN and into the niche, some (niche) consumers started to listen to dubstep while having a very limited exposure the whole range of sounds it comprised. This impacted the reception of songs that were outside of what these newcomers had been exposed to. Clark (2006a) mentions in his April issue of "This Month in Grime/Dubstep" that "lately, it would be easy to assume that dubstep=halfstep. Indeed, a lot of recent dubstep sets are dominated by this style." Reynolds (2013) also highlights the hegemony of half-step in the latter half of the 2000s.

My analysis led me to conclude that the organization around the half-step sound was spearheaded by two central developments: the movement of the main night dedicated to the genre away from FWD>> to DMZ in 2006, and the launch of the FabricLive 37 compilation by Caspa and Rusko in 2007. As I have mentioned, this ‘transformative moment’ is political and the re-definition of dubstep reshapes the power dynamics between actors as the genre evolves from the FWD>> sound into dubstep.

The first event is notable as it moved the core of the dubstep sound away from a club night that had always emphasized diversity to one exclusive dedicated to (wobbly) dubstep. Albeit some called for diversity, it is this half-step wobble-infused rhythm that would become one of the main ingredients of EDM. As the FWD>> nights were continuing on their path of diversity, inviting grime artists to play with dubstep ones¹⁵, the mecca of dubstep switched from the FWD>> nights to the DMZ events: “I think when DMZ emerged, that was a center of gravity for dubstep as a distinct thing. FWD>> was always more mixed up” (Kode9 quoted in Roberts 2015). The DMZ nights were organized by the dubstep group Digital Mystikz, who championed the wobble-inspired sound (Reynolds 2013). As the main night for dubstep moved towards DMZ, the sound moved away from its original diversity and organized around the bassier half-step. The “dubstep purism” that Hancock lamented, whether positive for the development of the genre or not, marked its transition towards a codified model, a blueprint, with a few noticeable characteristics. As Clark (2015) mentions,

“...what people think of as dubstep now is only half of what the dubstep scene really was. The other side was a much smaller, but still intense, group of people who wanted to take the percussive patterns of garage and make them more break-focused.” He adds: “once

¹⁵ The mix of grime and dubstep was perhaps the main reason behind conversations about “dubstep purism.”

half-step became a blueprint ... the group that became known widely as "dubstep" get the dubstep moniker, but they also focused around DMZ: booking and not booking certain people, playing and not playing certain records, releasing and not releasing certain records."

This might have hindered the diversification of the genre, as it slowed down the sonic innovations and structured artists around a specific sound, but it also facilitated the integration of an “audience [that] has expanded well beyond [the] core fanbase” (Clark 2006b), bridging between the LIN and the niche levels. For the consumer new to the sound, getting acquainted with dubstep became much easier: like other genres, it had specific characteristics, such as a tempo (around 138 BPM), sonorities (e.g., the wobble), and transitions between parts of a song. It also organized together a greater number of LIN and niche actors who were united around this model.

Although in the early years, the FWD>> scene corresponded more to a horizontal network of power relationships, it became hierarchized as the community grew. The growth of this community allowed for the differentiation between new and old community members, neophytes and experts, as well as consumers and producers. This development facilitated processes of distinction at the center of the logic of consumption on which niche consumers partly operate (see Arsel and Thompson 2011; Thornton 1996). According to Clark (2006c), the movement of the DMZ night from the basement to the upstairs room of the nightclub Mass can be used to exemplify such a turning point:

“But the end of Joe Nice's DMZ set might prove to be a turning point for the dubstep scene. 3rd Base, a 400-capacity space in part of the Mass club complex, was now full at

12 a.m., yet the queue stretched far into the night. DMZ had outgrown its own venue and had to move, literally there and then. ... Mala DMZ went on the mic, explained what was about to happen, and pointed the way up to Mass' main room. The whole club traipsed up the stairs and what felt like a new era of dubstep began. ... Whereas DMZ at 3rd Base had the DJ on the dancefloor, the speakers next to the fans, and everyone together united in bass, Mass has a different feel. ... it has two semi-circle spaces for ravers-- a pit and an upper deck-- that face onto a stage. Flanking the stage are two 15-foot fake Greco-Roman pillars, at the top of which-- up steep, inaccessible stairs-- is the DJ booth. As an ex-church, this is Mass' pulpit ... as a consequence of the move it was the first time the sound felt separated from its audience. At 3rd Base [as well as at the FWD>> nights] there was an unbroken circle between the DJ, the producers, and the DJ/producers of the future...aka the crowd. They were one and the same. But when you put your DJs behind Greco-Roman pillars up 15 feet of stairs, that circle is broken.”

A second influential development was the launch of a compilation of dubstep music by London superclub Fabric (one of London's top nightclub). As the story goes, the superclub shopped around for DJs for their mix CD but “nobody [from Croydon] wanted [to do] it” (Sgt. Pokes in Martin 2015). The Fabric mix CD ended up being curated by “a pair of young bucks” from West London: Caspa and Rusko. This represented a departure of the original dubstep scene in a number of ways since neither Caspa nor Rusko was a member of the FWD>> crowd, nor were they from Croydon, and this geographical distinction had been to this point central to determining in-group vs. out-group members. In their hands, dubstep became:

“party music ... The bassline became known as the "wub", and along with its rascally brother, the "wobble", became one of the most familiar hallmarks of the nu-dubstep. With these new dancefloor-crushing tools, dubstep was poised to take over the world” (Pattison 2011).

The mix CD had an important influence on the progression of the sound as it opened the door for the development of the sound that would come to dominate the United States radio airwaves. Reflecting on these developments, core LIN member Loefah mentions:

“They came at it independently and smashed it.' But when someone who'd been DJing and making dubstep tracks for less time than you were all of a sudden playing Fabric, that was when we thought, 'Fuck, we're not in control of this any more.' It was coming from producers that weren't from Croydon.” (In Martin 2015)

These developments moved the center of the community away from Croydon and allowed for an influx of producers interested in developing this wobble-heavy sound. It has as a consequence the reinterpretation of the power dynamics at the expense of the *Ammunition/FWD>>/Rinse FM* team and the artists organized around them.

Rusko would launch his debut album on United States tastemaker and DJ Diplo's label in 2010. The sound he had championed in the 2007 *Fabric* mix CD would be “bombarDED [in] college campuses across America.” In its transition into the United States, the genre would derogatorily be named “brostep ... for the fraternity-brother types drawn to it” (Yenigun 2010). The new sound organized on Caspa and Rusko's compilations and supported by the brand

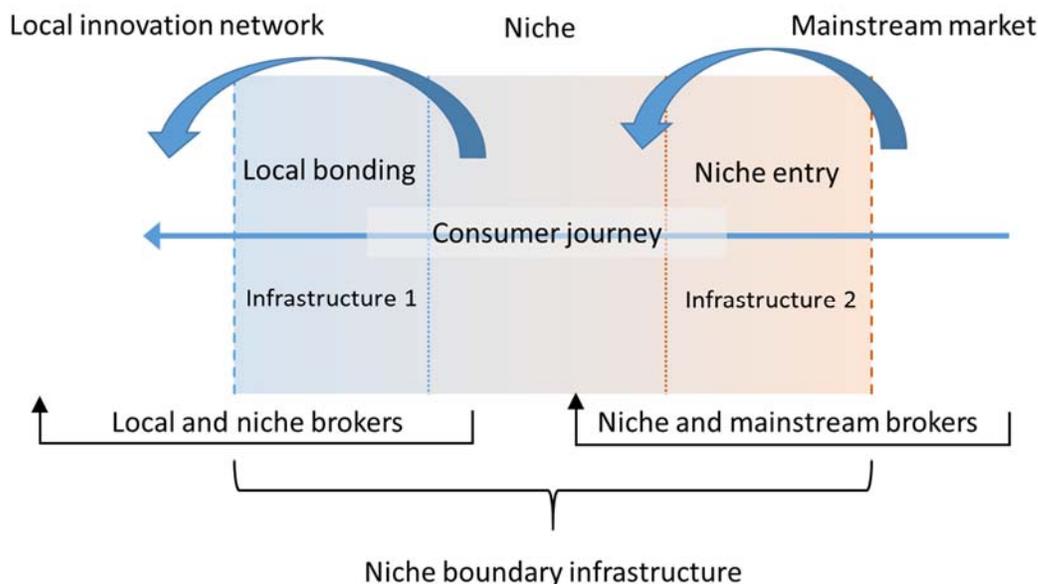
recognition of the *Fabric* superclub effectively allowed dubstep to cross over from the LIN and into the greater niche of clubbing and electronic music. It would take the intervention of pop artists, though, for the genre to finally cross over the American airwaves.

The transformation of dubstep into a specific sound, through the expanding *DMZ* nights and through the Caspa and Rusko compilations was accompanied by the creation of dubstep “anthems” and exemplars. The creation and legitimation of compilations, anthems, and exemplars led to the identification of central dubstep artists. Promoters for electronic festivals, such as the Sonar festival in Spain or the Piknic Electronik in Montreal could then invite dubstep artists such as Skream and DMZ’s Mala as emblems of the genre and they could be received as such by the niche audience. Heroes were identified. The creation of boundary objects associated with the three types of boundaries made dubstep understandable outside of its local setting into the greater niche of electronic music. This allowed dubstep songs to travel around the world while retaining their cultural meanings. It became possible to experience dubstep in clubs and festivals not only in the United Kingdom, but also in Canada, the United States, Spain, and Australia.

In this section, I have highlighted how niche actors in electronic music transformed the very basis of the FWD>> sound into a half-step, wobble-inspired type of dubstep music, which allowed for the transformation of the genre and for the development of a model to represent it. In the last section of my findings, I will show how mainstream actors helped in diffusing the electronic music sound to the mainstream audience. I will also show how niche entrepreneurs partnered with actors from intersecting markets to engineer the cultural category of EDM. Before doing so, I present how the creation of a new mainstream category changes the niche by bringing new consumers from the mainstream level to the niche level. This movement is facilitated by the

creation of boundary objects by niche consumers and niche and mainstream producers that aid the translation of these new consumers. This can be read as an alternative to the strategies used by Arsel and Thompson's (2011) consumers. In their research, the boundary between scenesters and 'real' niche consumers is one of opposition and distinction that serve to emphasize difference (see also Lamont and Molnar 2002). Yet, the meeting of people at a boundary, as I have conceptualized it based on the work of Star and Griesemer (1989), can be seen as an opportunity for collaboration. In my work, I find that consumers and producers do enact demythologizing strategies as those presented by Arsel and Thompson (2011). They also, though, enact strategies to facilitate the translation of the other to their world. By doing so, they accompany mainstream consumers in their journey towards becoming niche ones. This account of the transformation of mainstream consumers into niche ones adds to existing account of consumer acculturation to niches and subcultures (e.g., Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and emphasizes the role of the niche boundary infrastructure in such a process. This also extends the function of such an infrastructure and points towards possible research avenues. Figure 4 exemplifies this process.

Figure 4. Boundary infrastructure and mainstream to niche consumer journey.



In the next few paragraphs, I will briefly exemplify some elements and actions that niche consumers and producers took to facilitate the transition of mainstream consumers into the niche and to insure the continuity of the niche as it increasingly faced commercializing pressures from the mainstream market.

One of the consequences of the massification of the electronic sound through the creation of the cultural category of EDM is an influx of potential niche members. A constant reminder by lead niche actors, such as Ultra’s Patrick Moxey, Pete Tong, and Tommy Sunshine, whom all were early niche members (Sunshine was a well-known raver across the mid-west in the early 1990s [see Silcott 1999]; Moxey founded Ultra records in the mid ‘90s; and Pete Tong organized the first house compilation in the UK, “The House Sound of Chicago vol. 1” in 1986), is that this influx is not a threat but an opportunity. Talking about the explosion of the scene, Sunshine mentions in a *Mixmag* article:

“I grew up in the Chicago suburbs in the late 80s and witnessed house music birth itself to the world. It was an amazing, special time [...] But, unlike the past, we are now taking over America’s commercial airwaves, shutting down metropolitan cities for festivals and invading the whole of American youth culture; it’s working, finally. I couldn’t be a happier man and am proud to be a part of it both socially and professionally. [...] I feel like there are more amazing producers now than there ever were. I do not see anything lacking and when I do, I turn to the left and there is a whole new genre with a supporting scene intact to keep it more than. I have nothing but hope for the future of this music, of this culture.” (Gomori 2013)

On the one hand, as Sunshine says, some “old-skool producers and fans are filled with seething hatred” because their beloved niche is being invaded by consumers who don’t have the right taste and who are lacking a thorough understanding of the scene, such as its customs and its history. Yet, this influx of consumers is also commercially beneficial and provides financial and attention-based resources to sustain an increasing number of niche artists. What is required, then, is an efficient transformation of mainstream consumers’ knowledge from the mainstream taste regime to the niche one. Adding to Sunshine’s position, Patrick Moxey of Ultra records mention in an interview with *MusicWeek* (2013) that:

“It’s been a long road but it’s so gratifying now. People might come in on a David Guetta record and discover other dance music. A lot of people can say “Oh, some of these dance records are so pop” but I think it’s creating a bigger universe for more credible underground music.”

If this bigger universe helps to legitimize electronic music as a whole and has the potential of growing the audience for niche artists, there is also a potential risk associated with the translation of consumers from the mainstream market to the niche market as the codes, taste, practices, meanings, and so on are quite different from one market level to the other. Yet, these consumers can be integrated as fellow niche members if they change and develop a sensitivity to the appropriate taste regime, i.e., transform their domain-specific knowledge to fit the niche level, as the following quote from a producer I interviewed highlights:

“[EDM has brought] a totally new audience. I see so many people who got into electronic music through like deadmau5 and stuff, and then because they appreciate the culture and the form, they’ve changed, they’ve developed their taste and they all looked to the underground afterwards.” (BWWG)

In order to develop their taste, consumers can access resources from the boundary infrastructure. This is particularly important considering the role of the niche as a bridge between innovations and mainstream markets. If this transformation is to be done, some say that niche members have a responsibility to both preserve the collective memory of the niche, but also to educate neophyte consumers. In an interview, a Toronto and Detroit promotion collective which started in the mid-1990s reaffirms this mission of the old guard in educating the new mainstream consumers:

Adam: “Now that electronic music has been accepted in a larger mainstream community [...] what I fear is a loss of the history, tradition, hum, cultural reference points, and diversity [...] as participants in that culture we have a deep and tangible responsibility to preserve and honor that legacy and that is what I am afraid is lost in your average “hey

it makes me feel good to pump my fist and pop a molly” [...] encouraging that awareness is real important [...] a large club in Ibiza should never be able to do that [...] that’s something we try to be very conscious of [...] sharing and celebrating a deep historical legacy for this music that is some 40 year olds”

The three niche producers and consumers in this promotion agency try as much as possible to incorporate the niche while promoting events, by merging old and emerging artists, as well as different genres of electronic music and by pushing the boundaries by showcasing experimental artists.

Writing about his article in *MixMag* titled “The Great EDM Debate” (Gomori 2013), on whether or not the massification of electronic music was a warranted and positive thing for the niche, Gomori talks about another example of a niche artist preserving the culture of the niche:

“As many commentators have said – Sunshine included – the underground will always be there, and hopefully it may even be stronger as a result of this current wave of hyper-success, both through a potentially greater audience being available to recruit and also by way of a reaffirmation of it being about everything that the mainstream is not. Key proponents of the underground are certainly concerned enough with the situation to be actively trying to preserve their culture – Richie Hawtin’s CTRL tour of the US a prime example of one such stalwart trying to show this emerging audience the other side of the coin, for instance.”

“Key proponents of the underground” are not the only ones actively trying to preserve the culture associated with the niche level. In what is a departure from existing accounts of

mainstream actors pillaging the cultural resources of an oppositional subculture and co-opting cultural meanings, at least some mainstream actors are as involved in preserving the niche as niche ones. This is perhaps due to the fact that a number of actors now involved in the mainstream level were previously also involved in the niche level.

This is well exemplified by the panel titled “Is the American style of business killing dance music?” which happened at the *International Music Summit (IMS)* in 2013 and highlighted tensions brought about by the movement of electronic music in the mainstream level. *IMS* is one of the foremost business conferences where electronic music actors, such as artists, label owners, and club promoters discuss how to move electronic music forward, the best business practices associated with the genre, and the technological development fueling its growth. The speakers at this panel were some of leading figures in EDM, such as Ash Pournouri (manager of AVICII), Shelly Finkel (Chairman of Strategy and Development for *SFX Entertainment*), and Maria May (Senior Agent at *Creative Artists Agency* and one of the 25 most important people in electronic music according to Forbes [2014]). The comments during these panels highlighted the desire of these actors to preserve the niche culture. May mentioned:

“I’m an original house baby and growing up in the scene for 20 years and I actually chose a year ago to work at Creative Artist Agency which is a big American agency because I did feel quite strongly that the heart and soul of what we do and how we got here was at risk. And I felt that it was important that some of the culture of where we came from and how we got here was preserved. The new style of business is about winning more than caring ... The heart of this panel is about how for 20 years dance music has been massive and for me we have been making money with my artists and booking them everywhere and suddenly in the last five years there has been much more

interest in America in owning that music, and buying it, and controlling it ... We've never seen in Europe, in the UK or in the rest of the world people with the foresight or the vision to say investing in such a large way in our culture ...” (In Finkel et al. 2013)

Here, May, as a previous niche actor who is now a mainstream one, mentions her efforts in trying to preserve the culture of the niche of electronic music as the category of EDM is booming. Similarly to the niche actors I presented who are devoting efforts to translate mainstream consumers into niche ones, May works at bridging these two levels on the side of the mainstream level. A possible analysis of this could be to shield herself from a possible backlash by other niche industry actors because of her choice to join a “big American agency.” Yet, this discourse is constantly repeated by niche actors who have made to jump to the mainstream and, far from being altruistic, the reasoning is more often than not firmly anchored within a business rationale.

These actors have a perception of the relationship between the niche and the mainstream as a symbiotic one, where a strong niche is necessary for the long-time success of the mainstream. These mainstream actors are clear about the relationship between the niche and the mainstream levels. The following discussion at the 2013 EDM panel “When dance music becomes big business” (Adell et al. 2013) drives these points home. In the following citation, Mac Clark, a music agent at *Creative Artist Agency*, one of the biggest entertainment agency and an electronic DJ who started in 1994, exchanges with Richie McNeil then Director of Special Operations at *SFX Entertainment* and who founded in 1990 *Hardware Corporation*, an electronic events and touring company which created some of the biggest electronic events in

Australia. These actors were thus both involved at the niche and mainstream levels and had an extensive career in electronic music:

Riche McNeil: "The festival crowd, a lot of these people come, come, they have, I call it a career, they have a festival career, of somewhere between 4 and 7 years... then they get a job and start settle down ... the festival is the entry level point to the music for a lot of these fans, and then after they go for a couple of years they get sick of the stuff at the main stage and what the radio shoves down their throat and on TV commercial, they then start going to small clubs and this and that and find their niche, find their genres, that they actually, they search for something deeper ... So I guess we`re kind of a breeding ground in some ways for new entry level."

Mac Clark: "From an agent perspective ... a lot of our acts ... their platforms to succeed on a club touring scale, there is direct correlation in the way that, you know, Richie programs his festivals, Richie taking the time out to program these people ...on some of his smaller stages, that is creating profiles and brands for them in Austral-Asia that allows us to go on these tours in clubs ...he is creating platforms for these artists, he is diversifying talent ...the festivals are definitely helping to bridge the gap for some of these talents that aren`t pop radio massive stars, and that is globally driving revenues on the touring side in a big big way ... and because the business is exploding now ... if you`ve been around for 15 or 20 years you understand that there is a longevity in the business, you have to be forward thinking about the next 2, 5, 7, 12 years, it is very important, and for artists careers as well, as agents ...you have to find a common ground that will continue to allow for this business to thrive, nobody succeed when somebody loses money, if the club loses money, the artist won`t be coming back the next year, if the

club goes out of business, as an agency you lose an opportunity to tour your other 100 clients, so it has to be a partnership to really nurture this business as it continues to mature.”

Here, we see both Richie McNeil and Mac Clark discussing the role of mainstream festivals as a boundary object allowing for the interaction of consumers at the boundary of niche and mainstream levels. These festivals serve as a boundary object as they regroup a number of niche and mainstream artists and because they allow consumers to sample these artists throughout their festival experience. This, combined with the evolution of consumers in their journey within the realm of electronic music, facilitates their transition towards the niche level as expressed in Figure 4. Although these are preliminary and peripheral findings, they point towards the analytical power of the concept of a niche boundary infrastructure.

In this last section, I have shown that niche consumers and artists as well as mainstream ones work to facilitate the crossing of the boundary between niche and mainstream levels for mainstream consumers by transforming their domain-specific knowledge and aligning it with the core values, practices, and meanings of the niche. In the last section of my findings, I will show how mainstream actors help diffuse the electronic music sound to the mainstream audience. I will also show how niche entrepreneurs partnered with actors from intersecting markets to engineer the cultural category of EDM.

The role of the mainstream in the cultural innovation process

My last research question asks about the role of the mainstream level and the actors that populate it in the creation of new cultural categories. As I have previously defined it, the mainstream level in music refers to “certain kinds of music [and associated behaviors, discourses, values, and identities] ... [that] come to temporarily dominate everyday life at certain times and in certain places” (Huber 2012: 12). The mainstream level is also characterized by a market logic, where actors aim to maximize their profits (see Alvarez et al. 2005), a high degree of institutionalization (Schot and Geels 2008), a cyclical lifespan for the convergent dominant design, and a global reach. Examples of mainstream markets include the mini-van market (Rosa et al. 1999), mass fashion (Dolbec and Fischer 2015), and the *Billboard* chart music (Dowd 2004; Lena and Peterson 2008), or what I refer to as pop music.

Extant research has posited that innovation reaches mainstream markets following four main routes: the first route is the construction of the market by established market actors. For example, Rosa et al. (1999) explain how the mini-van market was constructed as established market actors made sense of consumers’ behaviors with the innovative product. The second route is the construction of the market by actors at the periphery of the mainstream market, or institutional entrepreneurs. For example, Munir and Phillips (2005) present how Kodak transformed the photography market and made photography a part of everyday life. Third, established market actors can appropriate innovation from consumers. In fashion, an oft-referenced case of this co-optation is the impact of the punk aesthetic in high-fashion (Kawamura 2006). Finally, established market actors can either work in conjunction with innovative consumers, or survey lead consumers and create products that these users find useful in hopes of creating the next big product (Baldwin, Hienerth, and Von Hippel 2006; Von Hippel 2007).

The case of the creation of the mainstream category of EDM, however, is one where all actors intervened. While previous research has emphasized one type of actor over the other, whether it is an established firm or a group of innovative and stigmatized consumers, in the creation of market categories and markets, the dynamics I have presented include a large array of actors: group of consumers and fringe producers; niche entrepreneurs; and now mainstream actors. The emergence of EDM was the result of step-wise development: first, a group of consumers and fringe producers gather and through their interactions a new sound emerges. Second, niche entrepreneurs and artists help to translate this innovation from the LIN to the niche and build the necessary boundary objects to bring it to the mainstream. I will now address how mainstream market actors, both established and peripheral, in concert with niche entrepreneurs, work towards the construction of a new market category.

My theoretical insight regarding the role of mainstream markets in the creation of new cultural categories is that the work of both established market actors and peripheral ones contributes to the construction of the mainstream cultural category. On the one hand, established market actors play the almost stereotypical role attributed to them: they adopt part of the innovation created by consumers some years ago. This adoption acts as a selection mechanism of elements of the innovative product and eases a mainstream consumer base into an innovative new sound. It also serves as a diffusion mechanism for elements of the new product, as these elements are integrated into mainstream market products (i.e., pop music). In the case of electronic music, established artists such as Britney Spears adopt the wobble bassline and rhythm of dubstep music as the instrumental track on which they sing. If the use of elements of an innovative cultural product creates familiarity to the mainstream audience, it also serves as a basis for legitimation. This echoes the hypothesis of Jensen (2010: 43), which states that stars

grant status to cultural products and genres “which makes it more likely that they are perceived as normatively legitimate.” This does not, though, create a new cultural category. Adoption by mainstream actors, if left unaccompanied by actions of institutional entrepreneurs, is generally theorized using co-optation theory and, if useful in rejuvenating mainstream market categories, does little else to create new ones.

On the other hand, institutional entrepreneurs actively work towards the creation of a new cultural category. Institutional entrepreneurs, such as niche producers and peripheral market actors, have a vested interest in creating new cultural categories as these can facilitate the transformation of the hierarchy of actors and ease their entry into mainstream markets (Kerin, Varadarajan, and Peterson 2001). The creation of a new cultural category results in the crossing of niche entrepreneurs in the mainstream market as the category becomes legitimate and its products start being consumed by a majority of consumers. The engineering of a new cultural category is accomplished by the definition of a label for the new cultural category and the establishment of a social identity and related social status for members of the new category. The engineering of a new cultural category is also facilitated by the partnering between niche entrepreneurs and actors from intersecting markets (such as the market for festival and nightclub promotion).

In the paragraphs that follow, I elaborate on the roles of both types of actors, mainstream established actors and niche entrepreneurs, and I delve into details about each of these.

Diffusing through adoption

“...but yeah, the lines between what used to be termed electronica and what is pop music today are completely blurry, there is really not much difference.” (Jay-J at EDM 2012)

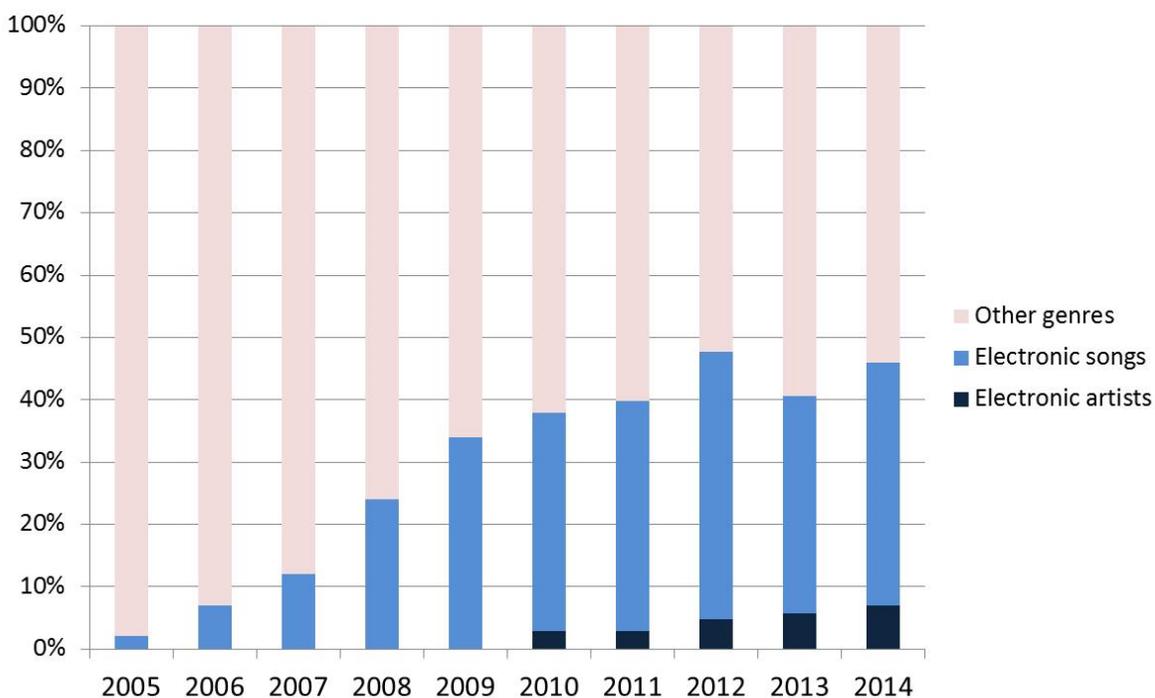
Mainstream markets are characterized by a constant renewal of signs and meanings (Crane 1999; McCracken 1986) as established mainstream actors are vying for new winning alternatives to crowded market recipes (Kim and Mauborgne 1997). In other words, as established mainstream actors want to gain market shares, they look for attractive alternatives that could woo consumers. In the case of pop music, these alternatives come in the form of new sounds, not too divergent from existing conventions, yet sounding new and innovative. These new sonic products have to be aesthetically compatible with the dominant mainstream style (they need “attributes expressing a ... coherence in the aesthetics ... of the elements located or used in the same context” [Cappetta et al. 2006: 1277]). In this case, the integration of dubstep into pop music was facilitated by the “tempo [that] is very accessible” and the fact that artists “can sing or rap over it with ease”, as well as its “wide scope for song structure” (Chase and Status in M Magazine 2010). Perhaps because of its proximity to grime music, where MCs rapped over dubstep tracks, dubstep was very compatible with the current main influences of pop music, namely hip hop and R&B (see Figure 5). Early on, it is mainly elements of dubstep that appeared in pop songs, such as rhythms and specific sounds, rather than the complete arrangement of musical elements known as dubstep. It was a piecemeal appropriation. Lena and Peterson (2008: 699) propose that this process is typical in pop music, as obscuring the distinguishing genre characteristics helps to seduce a wider public.

As such, hip hop and R&B pop stars were instrumental in bringing electronic music to the year-end *Billboard* Top 100 chart. As Bogart (2012) puts it, “the narrative of new music has so often been one of building from a despised underground after years of struggle, rip-off, and hustle to mass popularity. But EDM came in by no back door but right through the front gate” with pop music artists, such as “Lady Gaga in 2008”, who used electronic music rhythms, beats,

and sounds in their songs. Lena and Peterson (2008), in their review of more than 60 genres that made it to the *Billboard* charts, show that this road is the most taken and that the hustle of a despised underground might be more trope than true.

In Figure 5, I show how the main influences of pop music, that is, country, rock, rap, R&B, and electronic music, evolved since the first incursion of electronic music on the *Billboard Top 100* chart in 2005. In 2005, only one of the year-end *Billboard Top 100* chart had electronic music influence. By 2012, the combined total of electronic music songs by electronic music artists and electronic music inspired songs by other genres of pop artists had almost reached 50%.

Figure 5. Electronic music influences in the *Billboard Top 100* charts (2005-2014).



Although electronic elements have been present in songs of the *Billboard Top 100* since the early days of disco, they became more prominently featured by 2006. Two of the first artists

to bring the genre to the mainstream were singer Justin Timberlake and his 2-step-inspired producer Timbaland. Between 2006 and 2007, Justin Timberlake and Timbaland brought nine electronic-inspired songs or half of all the electronic music inspired songs on the charts.

Reflecting on his album *Futuresex/Lovesounds*, where most of the singles came from, Timberlake mentions that he:

“...wanted to do something different at that time. I wanted to do something that was like, this is like nothing I hear on the radio. That was my effort with that one ... I got like terrible reviews on that record, and so to talk about it now... I just think that [Timbaland] and I were onto something different and I just think that anytime you put out something different, it's polarizing. And polarizing is good, I think, because polarizing starts a conversation.” (In Bychawski 2013)

In “Timberlake’s new age” (Powers, Kane and Cromelin 2006), this “something different” might have been the influence of “Kraftwerk, those synth-playing German humanoids who laid the groundwork for modern dance music” (Powers, Kane and Cromelin 2006). The influence of electronic music on Timberlake’s album created a “sonic surprise ... channeling the genial disco-funk of *Off the Wall*” and “ambient electronica” to produce “the most avant-garde record ever issued under the name of a platinum-selling former boy-band star” (Rosen 2006). Yet, and as it goes with category spanners, the album initially received mixed critiques (see Vergne and Wry 2014).

This foray into electronic music helped rejuvenate pop music and it became one of the major influences in pop. As we can see in Figure 5, there is a sharp rise of the electronic music influences in pop song from 2007 to 2009, with more than 34 songs containing elements of the

genre in 2009. The proliferation of electronic sounds in pop music became such that it was hard to identify who was responsible for it. Music journalists and electronic artists have all their go-to artists who they see as responsible for the emergence of EDM in pop music:

“A few artists [are responsible for the rise of electronic music in the charts] but no one's name came up as often in interviews for this piece as the ever-shapeshifting, reggaeton-cum-house vocalist Pitbull. ... “EDM got another heavy dose of validation when Kanye West and Jay-Z's Watch the Throne ... rap over the textbook dubstep beat on “Who Gon' Stop Me.” (Makarechi 2011)

“Something we saw over the last two or three years—more in America than anywhere else—is that the normal Top 40 radio pop culture has been influenced [by EDM]. Suddenly Rihanna and Usher want to become dance electronic artists.” (DJ Paul Van Dyk interviewed by Lynch 2012).

If pop artists were the conduit for the diffusion of electronic music to mainstream America's households, in reality, the electronic sound featured on the *Billboard Top 100* became the property of a small number of producers. Although the roles of producers are wide, they usually either produce (i.e., “make”) the tracks on which the artists will sing or rap, while also often managing teams of writers and other producers with whom they work. They are generally seen as the “conductor” of a song (Seabrook 2013).

In terms of production, Timbaland helped in propelling the genre: between 2007 and 2008, he placed 14 of the 19 songs with electronic influences on the *Billboard Top 100*. Other producers took over by 2009. Between 2009 and 2012, the period during which electronic music

saw the most growth on the *Billboard Top 100*, it is producers such as Dr. Luke (29 songs with pop artists such as Miley Cyrus, Ke\$ha, Pitbull, Robin Thicke, Katy Perry and Snoop Dogg), Benny Blanco (21; Ke\$ha, Mike Posner, Maroon 5, Christina Aguilera), Stargate (12; Rihanna, Drake, Wiz Khalifa, Ne-Yo), RedOne (12; Nicki Minaj; Jennifer Lopez, Pitbull, Lady Gaga), Shellback (10; Britney Spears, Usher, Pitbull, Maroon5), and David Guetta (10; Usher, Black Eyed Peas, Sia, Nicki Minaj) who were driving the genre. Together these six producers produced almost half of the 153 songs with electronic influences that reached the *Billboard Top 100*. Once Justin Timberlake and Timbaland exposed the mainstream public to pop songs with electronic influences, the market consolidated quickly and allowed these producers and their artists to rapidly acquire an important market share of the pop music market.

The use of electronic music and electronic producers by pop artists allowed playing songs with elements of electronic music on the most effective institutional channel in music: radio (Ahlkvist and Fisher 2000; Percival 2011). This introduced electronic sounds to the mainstream, opening up a space of possibles (Zilber 2006) by building the potential for a new audience for electronic music. By including some artistic elements of the genre in a legitimate environment, the adoption of electronic music elements by pop artists and pop producers allowed not only to showcase an electronic sound in a legitimate environment, but to link the genre to more positive models (pop artists), concert venues, and practices (e.g., listening to the song in your car vs. in a nightclub or at a rave). Artists and journalists agreed with this reading of the impact of pop artists on diffusing the genre. Grammy-nominated electronic artist AVICII mentions:

“... I think what’s made it big is when David [Guetta] starting making more records with American artists. Then suddenly artist like the Black Eyed Peas and Akon were introducing house beats to American audiences. That introduced electronic music to a lot

of people. It opened their minds. I just think people were looking for something new and this was it.” (AVICII interviewed by Gottlieb 2012)

Artists such as Lady Gaga, Pitbull, Black Eyed Peas, and Akon were effective boundary spanners, leveraging their legitimacy within the field of mainstream pop music to integrate elements beyond the existing music conventions governing the category. Not only did this help in opening a space of possibilities for electronic artists by introducing their new sonorities to the mainstream public, but it also provided a first glimpse at the possible value of electronic producers who were producing these electronic-infused songs for pop artists. The rise of electronic music on the radio opened the door for electronic artists to produce for pop artists. This facilitated the evaluation of the economic potential of artists and their economic value based on the institutional norm of radio plays. In other words, by gaining positions at the *Hot Top 100* in association with pop artists, electronic artists showed they had a mainstream appeal and commercial potential.

Evidence of this is the rise of electronic producers providing their services for pop artists between 2009 and 2011, such as David Guetta for Black Eyed Peas, Calvin Harris for Rihanna, and Afrojack for Chris Brown and others. The influence of electronic artists in songs provided a signal not only for established commercial actors but also for electronic artists who would begin to play by pop music rules from 2010-onward. For example, the length of electronic songs was greatly reduced between 2006 and 2014, moving from 6 minutes in 2006 to 5 minutes 21 seconds in 2010 to 4 minutes 33 seconds in 2014 (all mean differences are significant within a

99% confidence interval)¹⁶. This could be read as electronic artists starting to obey the institutional norms prevailing in pop music, which favors radio play: as radio stations often have standardized playlists that have to be a certain length (Ahlkvist and Fischer 2000), producing music that fits the radio guidelines regarding song length makes it more likely to be “sold” to radio stations by label representatives (Ahlkvist and Fischer 2000; Percival 2001). An alternative explanation would be that the standing of DJ Mag came to integrate radio-friendly electronic musicians. In both cases, it shows a merging of electronic and pop music.

Other changes highlight this merging of electronic and pop music. Dubstep and electronic artists alike started to feature vocals on their songs and several artists released full-length albums, something almost unheard of at the turn of the millennium. Both of these developments helped in integrating the artists within the greater institution of pop music. David Guetta’s album *One Love* is pointed to as a blueprint of merging pop and electronic music (Petridis 2012). The “effortless integration of catchy beats and expressive vocals” was pinpointed by *Billboard* (2009) as “a good example of the album’s potential crossover appeal”. These developments would provide a model of how to produce electronic music for the masses (Moxey 2013).

In this first section on diffusion through adoption, I have shown how the adoption of elements of electronic music by pop artists and producers has familiarized mainstream consumers to electronic music. I argue that this made it possible for would-be niche entrepreneurs to enter the market. In the section that follows, I will show how entrepreneurs and

¹⁶ The average length of top electronic producers was calculated using the DJ Mag ranking, and taking all songs produced by the top 20 ranked DJs in the year before and the year after the ranking (e.g., 2006 = 2005-2007), and averaging the length of all songs (2006: n=196; 2010: n= 257; 2014: n= 188, note: some DJs had not released any songs in the period under study) Mean differences are significant between 2006 and 2010, and 2010 and 2014 within a 99% confidence interval (2006 vs. 2010 t-value: 4.567 ; 2010 vs. 2014: t-value = 5.967).

artists from the niche of electronic music as well as actors from intersecting markets worked towards crossing over to the mainstream market.

Branding electronic music for the masses

If elements of electronic music were reaching the masses as early as 2006 and 2007, it still took some years for electronic music to gain wider recognition as a genre. As I presented in the history of electronic music, a number of factors led to the stigmatization of the genre and its community, which reduced the commercial appeal of electronic music. Overcoming the barriers to the legitimation of electronic music would not only require the work of a number of actors, but also a product that could be sold to the mainstream audience. This product had to be far enough from existing electronic sounds as to not elicit immediate negative reactions, yet close enough to existing mainstream genres so that it could be considered by a mainstream audience. In this section, I will show how niche entrepreneurs leveraged the opening of a new space of possibilities by pop artists to engineer the cultural category of EDM. I will first show how dubstep served as a Trojan horse, catalyzing the adoption of electronic music by mainstream audiences. I will then explain how niche entrepreneurs engineered a new cultural category. Finally, I will briefly survey the role of intersecting markets and how actors in both the music market, as well as adjacent ones, worked to profit from this new cultural category.

Previously in my findings, I have emphasized the creation of an innovative cultural product, that of the FWD>> sound, which was later distilled and codified by niche actors into dubstep. Understanding the growth of the FWD>> sound from a local innovation to a dominant niche genre is crucial if we want to understand how EDM came to the United States airwaves. The dubstep iteration of the FWD>> sound was the Trojan horse of electronic music. Dubstep and the post-FWD>> artists who produced the genre helped to bridge niche and mainstream

music, both in terms of appearance and identities as well as sonic capacities. The so-called genre of nu-dubstep would become the catalyst for the adoption of electronic music in America and the first step towards the conception of the EDM genre.

Dubstep: the aesthetic catalyst

I argue that dubstep was the catalyst that allowed for the explosion of EDM in North America. I refer to a catalyst, not as in Martin and Schouten's (2014: 866) sense of "actors that channel existing potential in a network so as to reorganize the network into a more stable configuration", but as it is referred to in chemistry, that is, an element that increase the rate of a reaction by increasing its speed and reducing the necessary energy to make it happen (see de Landa 2010). Catalysts "causes encounters that would not have taken place without it" (de Landa 1999: 11).

"The mid-range bass sound [of dubstep] just captured the attention of young people. It's like the high-pitched, aggravating sound of a guitar solo in the 70s. Something your parents are going to hate." (Drew Best in Reynolds 2012b)

Dubstep was one of the first ingredients in the recipe of what would become known as EDM. It reduced the energy required by niche actors to make the sound understandable to mainstream American audiences as it was aesthetically compatible with existing musical genres. Perhaps more important than its aesthetic compatibility with hip hop and R&B, the sound of dubstep was close to the existing mainstream genre of rock music: it was "intense and active, and more appealing to American teenagers raised on rock radio" (Gaerig 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the first radios to switch to an "all-EDM format" were the ones "broadcasting rock music", such as Boston's *WHBA*, which changed its name to *WEDX*

Evolution and its slogan to “All Things Dance” (Petridis 2014). Reynolds (2012b) similarly argues that dubstep moved in “to claim the space abandoned by rock ... the perennial demand for a tough, aggressive but forward-looking sound for the release of pent-up frustration”. He points to the example of Los Angeles dubstep events *Smog* which, after having some issues with the aggressive crowd of their shows which didn’t “fit” with the polished environment of “dress code and bottle service” associated with nightclubs, “went for dark, gritty basement bars”: the space of Los Angeles’s rock 'n' roll venues. This proximity with rock 'n' roll is also visible with the behavior of consumers’ behaviors at shows, which includes typical rock acts such as moshing and stage diving (Reynolds 2012b; Petridis 2014).

Because of its aesthetic compatibility with rock music, dubstep was a good fit with existing musical taste, reducing the required energy to diffuse the genre. Another aspect of a catalyst is that it accelerates the chemical reaction. Dubstep helped in accelerating the adoption of electronic music by the mainstream audiences by easing the social compatibility between consumers of mainstream music and electronic music. Cappetta et al. (2006: 1276) define social compatibility as “the attribute expressing the coherence of a system of social meanings used in the same social context.” In cultural innovations, socially compatible innovations will have a recognizable style. This recognizable style can be used by market actors to communicate to a specific community that the innovation is desirable to own and that consumers belong to the community consuming the innovation. As the innovation becomes desirable to own, it accelerates its diffusion: as “the obsession [with electronic music] spread like wildfire, and familiarity with electronic artists became a ready-made badge of cooler-than-thou” (Makarechi 2011).

If dubstep matched the sonic elements of rock, dubstep artists also borrowed several signifiers and practices associated with rock music. Skrillex, ex-singer in the rather successful punk-emo band From First to Last, who would become the poster boy of American dubstep and would feature heavily on the cover of magazines (see Figure 6) as well as in mainstream newspaper articles such as the *New York Times*, is perhaps the best example of this. Although dubstep artists were not the only ones in electronic music who were moving towards a more rock-like appearance, the superstar trio of Swedish House Mafia being another clear example, Skrillex was perhaps the most successful, starting a whole trend with his signature haircut and partnering with a number of brands for special editions collections, such as G-Star.

Figure 6. Magazine covers featuring Skrillex.



This departure of this new kind of electronic artist from the taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013) of electronic music facilitated the genre's social compatibility. Skrillex and other acts, such as Swedish House Mafia and Steve Aoki, came to represent a different identity than their electronic predecessors. Discussing the elements that facilitated the emergence of the genre in the United States, Kathryn Frazier, the press agent for Skrillex, and Dave Renee, the Interscope talent scout behind Zedd (a 25 years old Grammy award winner) mentioned:

“Kathryn Frazier: No offense to shiny shirt dance-y euro, but in America that didn't really fly.

Dave Renee: Yeah, [at the time EDM emerged] there started to really be some personality behind this music, some attitude, and not a gay one.” (In Ryce 2012)

As mentioned by Frazier and Renee, this new identity is a departure from the queer-ish identities associated with electronic music by North American. Artists like Skrillex and Krewella who bring “rock to the raves” (Udell 2013a) helped in instigating a rock-like vibe in EDM musicians and bridged pop music and electronic music through their aesthetic and social compatibilities.

The rock aesthetic that dubstep brought to electronic music was an ideal bridge to segue into mainstream pop. Yet, electronic music was still shunned by mainstream actors. I will next show how the work of niche entrepreneurs allowed EDM to emerge as strongly as it did.

Engineering a new cultural category

The architects of EDM were not the major labels, which is not surprising given both the existing literature on institutional entrepreneurship, which posits that the architects of change are usually peripheral market actors (Hardy and Maguire 2010), and the history of the music market, where major labels have usually lagged in terms of adopting the latest trends in business models (e.g., the digitalization of music [Giesler 2008]) or genres (e.g., the emergence of independent labels with rock music [Peterson 1990]). The architects of EDM were niche entrepreneurs and market actors located in markets intersecting with music. In this next section, I will show how these actors and entrepreneurs come to define a new label for electronic music that allows them to “break” electronic music to the masses.

As I have shown, in the late 2000s, pop artists were increasingly adopting and borrowing sonic elements from electronic music. Despite electronic music festivals experiencing a strong growth and major ones such as Electronic Daisy Carnival and Ultra each pulling in close to a hundred thousand festival goers per year and despite the success of electronic artists such as Skrillex and Swedish House Mafia, the yet-to-be-labeled genre of EDM had not achieved mainstream legitimation. Although dubstep artist Skrillex was an Internet sensation, electronic music was still not being played on the radio. Its artists were not awarded Grammy awards. It was not listed on the *Billboard* songs charts. At this point, electronic music was still an enthusiastic niche, rather than a music category recognized by most consumers.

This would all change with the creation of the EDM category, which would come to represent a rather loose-knit group of musical styles unified by their commercial and festival orientation. It includes a wide and ever-evolving range of electronic genres, such as dubstep, and progressive, big room, and tropical house. As such, it is a concept that very much resembles pop

music: it is a cultural category that regroups evolving music genres (see Lena and Peterson 2008) which could be likened to an epistemic consumption object (Knorr-Cetina 1997; Zwick and Dholakia 2006).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1997) identify four important themes of their categorization and labeling framework, two of which are of interest here. First, the labels associated with categories are arbitrary: they concern the imposition of meanings, rather than discovery. As such, I will show how niche entrepreneurs defined a very specific genre of electronic music to be categorized under EDM. Second, they carry evaluative connotations in the form of social identity and social status. This will create a scission between the niche of electronic music and EDM that will help mainstream consumers in identifying with EDM. At this stage in the development of the label, EDM becomes a full-fledged cultural category. These two aspects of labels are crucial in understanding how the creation of the EDM label facilitated the adoption of electronic music in the U.S.

Defining the EDM label

Although the first references of EDM are in the academic circuit in the early 2000s, the term now refers to a certain genre of festival-oriented electronic music for North American audiences (Garcia 2015). The first mention of the term in non-academic circles I have identified is from social media statements from American DJ Kaskade on the social media site Twitter, as well as a press release by Williams Morris Entertainment (WME) and Live Nation for their Identity festivals events. Kaskade was instrumental for the organization of these events: according to journalist Allison Stewart of The Washington Post, he “had a big hand in curating the Festival”. Kaskade mentions that:

“...they [Live Nation and WME] came early on, and I loved the idea ... it was a huge idea ... I wanted to make sure they understood the scene, the genre ... it’s just the controller I am, I guess” (Allison Stewart 2011).

The mention of the term EDM by Kaskade in the press and on his twitter feed was accompanied in the same month by mentions of journal articles citing a press release from WME and Live Nation, as exemplified below:

“Curated and headlined by Kaskade, a popular American house DJ, the Identity Festival is a package concert tour stuffed with artists performing nothing but electronic dance music — or EDM. The bill spanned three outdoor stages and featured more than two dozen acts, including Rusko, DJ Shadow, Steve Aoki and the Crystal Method.” (Richards 2011)

Perhaps it was under Marc Geiger’s leadership, who was head of the music division at WME as well as a founder of Lollapalooza, one of the first traveling festivals in the late 90s (Sisaro 2012), or perhaps it was due to the efforts of Joel Zimmerman, head of the electronic division at the booking agency William Morris Entertainment, but the company:

“...ended up launching 20 festivals with Live Nation ... called Identity, which allowed kids that were on the fence about electronic music to have the opportunity to actually go out and experience something without sucking the life out of their bank accounts ... we reached 10 million people” (Parker-McClain 2011)

In other words, the Identity festival facilitated the trialability of the innovation (Rogers

1962) as well as of festival-oriented electronic music. More importantly, its greater influence would be the coining of the acronym and its definition through its description of electronic festival music and associated electronic acts. They did not use EDM to identify meanings, as the term was nonexistent in the popular press before their use of it. Rather, they used the term to arguably stamp a brand on a specific genre of electronic music. A genre that could benefit both players, as WME had an impressive and growing number of artists that corresponded with festival-oriented electronic music, and Live Nation was suffering from a shrinking concert market.

The aggressive strategy pursued by Zimmerman at WME was to “make our artists bigger and better and make this area of music more relevant” (Parker-McClain 2011). In 2012, the electronic music division of WME had a roster of 150 electronic acts represented by more than 40 agents. When the term EDM started to be diffused, WME was representing most of who would become the biggest EDM stars.

According to Zimmerman, they “knew that somewhere down the line there was going to be a time when everyone was going to want to legitimize [electronic music]” (Parker-McClain 2011). The Identity festivals were their “phase-two attack.” The festivals were an experiential, in-person EDM branding vehicle, touring 20 cities and “serving up ... a buffet of electronic artists, from piano-pop titan AVICII to British dubstep superstar Nero” (Lipsay 2011).

By December of that year, the term EDM had taken a life of its own. The *Hollywood Reporter* used it to talk about a New Year’s Eve party with Kaskade and Swedish House Mafia (“feature several big names from the EDM [electronic dance music] scene” [Amter 2011]), and *Billboard* used the term in a landmark article titled “The Beat Generation: Electronic Dance Music Emerges as the Sound of Young America” (Mason 2011). EDM had become the go-to

term to talk about electronic music festivals as well as electronic music more generally. Yet, its usage imposed a clear definition of what electronic music was. It was the music of the WME roster; big room, festival-oriented electronic music. The music of Kaskade, deadmau5, Skrillex, Nero, Swedish House Mafia, and AVICII. And it is these artists who would be the most heavily featured on the *Billboard* charts. Around the same time, electronic music act managers and press agents started to use the term to

“...pitch ... EDM stories to mainstream music editors who did not know about dance music, care about dance music, and were completely unaware of how big it was ... they didn't really know about it so that scene started to be called EDM [which] helped them make sense of it” (Frazier in Ryce 2012 [Frazier is Skrillex's manager and founding member of his label, OWSLA]).

This development at the press level is in line with existing accounts of the dynamics between emerging new market categories and the creation of a dramatized reality by the press, which guides public attention (Rindova, Pollock and Hayward 2006). Here, journalists seek out events to turn into news (Lippman 1922) and, in order to increase the attractiveness of their reports, offer dramatic narratives of the unfolding of events (Rindova et al. 2006). If these help create celebrity firms, as Rindova et al. (2006) propose, in this case, it helped elevating the status of the EDM label. Ultra president Patrick Moxey supports this assertion, mentioning that he gives “give credit to those key live promoters, Ultra Music Festival, Electric Daisy, Insomnia; and to the agents of the talent who market to Ultra Records for relentlessly pushing the music out to journalists” (in MusicWeek 2013).

Raising the profile of the EDM label arguably made it a more valuable commodity and increased the involvement of firms with it (mirroring the increased involvement of journalists with perceived ‘hot’ issues [Smiley 1971]). EDM became “a genre that ... labels ... are really working” and it was a practical term “for people who don’t understand dance music [as] you can’t have a complete list of different types of dance music. You have to put it all into one” (Rene in Ryce 2012). Yet, the “all” that was put in dance music had very similar characteristics. It was not the ambient type of electronic music of Luscifer or the experimental-verging-on-noise music of Andy Stott. It was not the earlier breakbeat oriented artists of the FWD>> sound. The definition of EDM came to privilege a specific group of niche actors, who had worked to make electronic music that was aesthetically and socially compatible with existing mainstream sounds and practices.

WME also started to work in “selling” its artists to the Las Vegas clubs. The close links with Las Vegas nightclubs and the electronic music festival circuit and the heavy use of the term by these two music-related markets led to the association of EDM with specific practices. For example, a major shift happened in the role of the DJ, as EDM artists departed from the traditional role of electronic DJs, who used to survey the energy of the crowd and live-mix songs in order to maximize their impact. In contrast, EDM artists come with a pre-prepared set synced to visuals (e.g., video material, pyrotechnics). This created the “button pusher” controversy: in 2012, EDM/house artist deadmau5 posts a message on his blog titled “we all hit play” to denounce this departure of the role of DJ to the role of button pusher for EDM artists:

“It’s no secret. When it comes to “live” performance of EDM... that’s about the most it seems you can do anyway. It’s not about performance art, it’s not about talent either (really it’s not) In fact, let me do you and the rest of the EDM world button pushers who

*fuckin hate me for telling you how it is, a favor and let you all know how it is... for
“unhooked” sets.. i just roll up with a laptop and a mini controller and “select” tracks 'n
hit a spacebar” (deadmau5 2012b)*

This departure from the role of DJ allowed EDM artists to produce bigger-than-reality live shows to rival the ones of pop and rock artists (whose shows in a similar fashion feature lip-syncing and backing tracks to allow artists to concentrate on other aspects, such as dance choreographies). It also allowed these artists to compete with the shows of pop megastars. In the previous model of DJing, the emphasis was on consumer participation with one another. Since the 1980s with disco, consumers had been dancing with one another, facing each other, developing dances such as jacking. As Thornton (1996: 71) points out, a difference in the 1990s between rock and dance music is that in rock “the gaze of the dancers is focused elsewhere ... the audience tends to face forward, eye fixed on the stage”. Yet, in comparison to the ethnographic notes of Thornton (1996), the audience in EDM shows the audience tends to face forward as they do in rock shows (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The main stage at EDC 2014.



This facing forward to the scene is facilitated by the offering by artists of:

“EDM shows ... laden with the kind of eye-popping more-is-more production values you’d associate with stadium rock: DJ booths on hydraulic platforms, pyrotechnics, umpteen video screens, and confetti cannons. They accordingly attract an audience that looks like, and sometimes acts like, the crowd at a rock show: more than one British dance music veteran has been discombobulated by the sight of American EDM fans moshing and stagediving.” (Petridis 2014)

At pricey bottle service clubs in Las Vegas, superstar DJs start experiencing the same treatment from crowds. These shows transformed the traditional clubbing and rave experiences as before both rave and clubbing were about participatory collective experiences that aimed at

bringing ravers together. Reynolds (2012a) and Silcott (1999) recount raves where ravers lived transfiguring collective experiences centered on consumer-to-consumer interactions. In EDM, though, accommodating the superstar DJ model demands to move the experience away from a communal and participatory dynamic to one where show goers consume the spectacle offered by the DJ. The center stage, in the EDM category, is the DJ and his show, rather than the consumer collective. Covering Electric Daisy Carnival in 2012, which is one of the two biggest electronic music festivals in the United States, L.A. Weekly critic Dennis Romero (2012) highlights this:

“EDC has taken rave culture beyond its edge and into the predictable realm of a stage show ... Where DJs once wove a night's narrative based on whim and their own sense of the crowd, EDC is a KROQ Weenie Roast of electronic music, a place where you can see your favorite heroes play your favorite songs from the radio ... framed by wall-to-wall supergraphics and light screens that blasted the words to Kaskade's songs, so you could sing along to the call-and-response.”

Along with the adoption of new identities and new practices, promoters and artists consciously worked to divorce the emerging cultural category from its past. This cleansing of EDM from its rave-era associations was mostly played at the festival-circuit level. From a historical perspective, raves were the most stigmatized aspect of electronic music: as I have briefly presented, these drug-fueled, hedonistic and mostly illegal events were often shut down by the authorities and led to “moral panic” throughout the history of electronic music, as Goulding et al. (2009: 762) note. Promoters worked to distance the new category of EDM from its less-mainstream appealing characteristics. A number of strategies were employed. First, rather than holding “raves”, promoters started to hold “electronic festivals.” Albeit this might seem like

a strictly rhetorical change, it was also accompanied by the legitimate practices associated with holding festivals as promoters

“... learned how to work with the system, going through the bureaucratic hoops required to get permits, and providing the level of intensive security, entrance searches and overall safety provisions that would give political cover to their local government enablers ... promoters deliberately sought out in-plain-sight sites: ultra-mainstream venues like sports stadiums and motor sports courses” (Reynolds 2012b).

An example of this is the major festival Electric Daisy Carnival, which in 2010 was held in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which had also hosted the Olympic Games in 1984. Other promoters, such as ULTRA festivals, HARD Events, and Diplo’s Mad Decent parties, banned rave-associated objects, such as glow-sticks, dummies, cuddly toys, and candies (Bein 2015; Furer 2014; HARD website 2015).

Perhaps even more telling of the movement of EDM towards greater societal acceptance especially given the history of electronic music was the public expression of EDM stars such as deadmau5 of their discontent towards drug use. A well-known feud between the EDM artist and Madonna exploded online when Madonna took the stage at Electric Daisy Carnival and asked festival goers “How many people have seen Molly?” (“Molly” is a colloquial term referring to the drug MDMA). As the following quote highlights, deadmau5 replied harshly to her remark. This event opposed a mainstream pop artist, evolving in a legitimate music category, and whose career like others in pop music has been partly built on calculated controversies and transgressions (Prieto-Arranz 2012; Rindova, Pollock and Hayward 2006) on the one hand, against a contender in a market category which growth had been limited by constant

stigmatization partly due to the association of the category with drugs and drug-related events. Albeit Madonna's presence at the festival was probably intended to showcase the cross-over of the genre into mainstream pop, her deliberate attempt to associate herself with the most stigmatized aspect of the emerging mainstream market category resulted into the following comment from the EDM star:

“very classy there madonna. “HUR DUR HAS ANYONE SEEN MOLLY???” such a great message for the young music lovers at ultra. quite the f’n philanthropist. but hey, at least yer HIP AND TRENDY! fucking cant smack my head hard enough right now. ...seriously, i giveth not a fucking single FUCK for slating on madonna for reaching an entirely NEW level of idiocy ... i can appreciate her meteoric career, and all good deeds done, but WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT? That’s your big contribution to EDM? Thats your big message to ultra attendies? (sic) hipsterspeak for looking for drugs? fuck off you fucking IDIOT. fuck.” (deadmau5 2012a)

This also serves as an interesting example of the interplay between status and legitimacy in shaping the space of possible actions for artists (or brands) and the kinds of actions that are anticipated to elicit a positive response from the public.

I have showed how both artists and niche entrepreneurs worked towards establishing a new term to talk about electronic music, associate a specific kind of electronic music to this term, leverage existing conventions in rock music, and distance the newly established term from the stigmatization association that hindered the mainstream development of electronic music. In the next section, I will analyze how the professional identity of the DJ evolved to contribute to these developments.

Social identity and social status

A second feature of labeling and categorization processes is the social identity and status that a label carries and that are assigned to the category members. Thus, as EDM was further defined by actors, the category members and consumers were assigned identity codes and a status hierarchy was established. I will examine at these in turn.

In both local innovation networks and niches, actors follow practices that are detached from normative mainstream ones. This allows them to protect these two levels from the influence of mainstream markets and to creatively rework institutional rules and practices. These local and niche practices might hinder the commercial development of niche actors, though (e.g., Martin and Schouten 2014). The first identity-related development from 2012 onward was the professionalization of the role of the electronic music artists. As mentioned by Wolbe in 2014: “if the EDMBiz conference confirmed anything, it’s that the genre is a business first, and an artistic endeavor second.” This adoption of the logic of commerce was highlighted by changes in the practices of DJs who transitioned from the electronic music scene to the mainstream EDM scene. This is exemplified by Laidback Luke in this interview excerpt:

“I quit drinking. Before that I’d drink at least two vodka Red Bulls during every set, but now I live like an athlete. I only drink water during shows, no after parties. It sounds boring, but there’s so much pressure and professionalism in my scene that I just can’t afford to do that anymore.” (In Friedman 2014)

These changes, as highlighted by Laidback Luke, can be read in two different ways. A first possible explanation is that these emerge from a normative isomorphic process (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). As the field professionalizes, members are pushed to conform to occupational

norms. The current discourse surrounding stars is often one of a healthy lifestyle, as exemplified by brands such as Jessica Alba's "Honest Company", Ellie Goulding's participation to Nike ads and own exercise regime, and websites such as "Pop Sugar" who link pop artists with fitness and proper dieting. Hence, the movement away from the "rock' n' roll" lifestyle can be read as one that follows the rather novel pattern of a healthy lifestyle for celebrities. An alternative explanation is that these discourses again aim at destigmatizing the nascent category under scrutiny by presenting artists as positive role models who have a demanding work ethic and make the appropriate lifestyle choices.

If DJs changed (or said they changed) their life habits, artist managers also changed how they market artists and artists how they market themselves. It used to be that being a DJ was a craft, a position that one would occupy for the love of music: "I remember when I booked DJs for a few hundred bucks ... they would crash on my couch", reminisces an electronic music event promoter I interviewed. The adoption of the logic of commerce by EDM actors led to a switch in the way electronic artists were marketed: as profitable products.

This is different from the transformation of the starving artist. In pop music, the myth of the starting artist (Filer 1986) is used to convey a rags-to-riches story echoing an underdog brand biography (Paharia et al. 2011). What is at work here is a change in the definition of the professional project and identity of being a DJ. In other words, the institutional identity (Glynn and Abzug 2002) of the DJ changed. I will provide two examples to support this. The first quote is from Jake Udell who is the artist manager for Krewella. His explanation of how he markets the band highlights his strong marketing focus. This professionalization of both artists and managers' practices has contributed to the perception that the genre could be profitable given the right market logic:

“You need to have a very consistent message across every single touchpoint. ... if you look at the acts that are really succeeding ... there’s very specific storyline features ... activating brands is not that different from activating recording artists.” (Udell 2013b)

This change in the professional identity of DJ and what it means to pursue a DJ career is also felt in how consumers approach the artistic role. If the role of the DJ started to professionalize in the early 2000s, with for example dedicated professional courses (Sanneh 2004), these courses concentrated on the practice of DJing. Lately, there has been an increase in the business-side of being a DJ: how to build a profitable business, how to market yourself as a DJ, and to create your own DJ brand. De la Calle’s documentary “Beatz” (2014) highlights this shift, where artist and DJ Tehcnasia mention that:

“...back in the 90ies you could be the most ugly guy on the planet and actually if you were really talented you could become famous, today you need have the tattoos, you need to have the good outfit, you need to be a DJ moving, shouting, putting your hands in the air ... nowadays who have a lot of DJs who are not music composers, they don’t do any music”

Another DJ mentions laments that

“...years ago it is used to be about the music ... that is one thing we have lost when it comes to our music and the DJs ... it’s a new generation, I understand that, but, at the same time, we have to understand where the basics of our scene came from, and it came from making the music first, not the DJ [brand]”.

This latter quote shows a departure from both the identity and the role of the DJ of yesterday, and the one that evolves in today's EDM world. This transformation has also been accompanied, as the following quote shows, with the development of branded personas for superstar DJs:

“the superstar DJs of the Nineties – Sasha, Paul Oakenfold, John Digweed et al – were rich and successful and had devoted fans, but they were also oddly anonymous, interchangeable figures, utterly devoid of any kind of charisma. The leading EDM figures seem more like traditional rock stars, which it's hard not to feel might be a big factor in their success in the US mainstream.” (Petridis 2014)

A possible explanation for these discourses around the perceived shift away from “producing music” to “making the DJ brand”, or the anonymity of yesterday's DJs could be as tropes that romanticize the past of electronic music and vilify today's EDM-turn. Viewed from this perspective, these comments can be analyzed as distancing strategies used by DJs abiding to the “old” logic underlying the professional identity of DJing against this new, overly professionalized one “which threatens the value of their field-dependent capital” (Arsel and Thompson 2011: 803). Hence, the reaction of these DJs and electronic artists points towards the creation of a new “identity myth” (Arsel 2007) around the DJ and against which some DJs are distinguishing themselves. That is, I take their romantic statements about the “better” role of the DJ before the advent of EDM as evidence of the emergence of a new identity myth, “an archetypal character [with] a certain lifestyle and cultural orientation” (Arsel 2007: 4) around the DJ.

This new identity myth, supported by the discursive acts of artists, critics, and journalists alike is organized around the development of DJs as “the new rock stars” (Greenburg 2012). I have shown earlier that dubstep borrowed several elements from rock music. EDM artists will continue this trend of the rock star DJ. Most of today’s stars, from deadmau5 to Afrojack to Krewella to Calvin Harris, have a carefully curated rock-star like persona. EDM #1 artist, Calvin Harris, has leveraged his own brand. He is the new face of Emporio Armani, joining other stars such as Rihanna, David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, Megan Fox, and Rafael Nadal. Krewella’s Yousaf sisters are sponsored by fashion brands Drop Dead and Young & Reckless. These carefully curated looks, teamed with bigger-than-life shows and record tickets sales, have distanced EDM artists from electronic music ones and elevated the status of the DJ like nothing else before. On this subject, Petridis (2014) mentions:

“Signs of the DJs’ celebrity are everywhere. When I speak to him, [Steve] Angello [of Swedish Mafia fame] is still reeling from the experience of being papped [followed by paparazzi] ... Meanwhile, before I’m permitted to interview ... Afrojack, one of his management team takes me aside and tells me I’m not allowed to ask him anything about money or his personal life. That itself tells you something about how famous Afrojack is: only the biggest stars get to dictate the terms of their interview in advance”.

As the category attributes gain salience (i.e., these attributes are well-known and diffused both within and outside the category), the evaluation of category members is increasingly performed against a stable code that defines behaviors and features (Philips and Zuckerman 2001). As a result of the definition of the DJ and consumer identities, a status hierarchy is established. Since the inception of Forbes’ top-paid DJs list, there have been very few changes in

who takes the top spots. It is at this stage that pressure is put on category members towards isomorphism, as artists either try to follow a tried-and-true recipe or are becoming increasingly limited by emerging artistic conventions (Becker 1982). This leads to what deadmau5 has called “carbon copy cookie cutter” (see Baroni 2014), or artists such as A-Trak (2012) and journalists such as Hyden (2014) have termed the “hair metal”¹⁷ phase of EDM: DJ playlists that are “frighteningly similar” (A-Trak 2012) and songs that are “simple [with] ringtone-like keyboard hooks and rocket-launch dynamic” (Hyden 2014). According to these critics, this results in catchy songs that are devoid of soul and personality and “risks devaluing a culture that has waited for its big break for 30 years” (A-Trak 2012).

If, with the advent of EDM, a boundary was erected between niche and mainstream artists, it has also led to a scission between consumers of the niche and those of mainstream music categories. The definition (and sound) of EDM as commercial and festival-oriented music and the departure from the taste regime of electronic music as well as from the traditional DJ role will divide the niche of electronic music and the mainstream-in-becoming EDM. Arsel and Thompson (2011: 791) explained that consumers work to “insulate their acquired field-dependent social and cultural capital from devaluation” with their aesthetic interests are perceived as being trivialized. In this case, niche electronic music consumers looked to distance themselves from a mainstream crowd that increasingly came to represent different values and tastes. They looked to distance themselves from the different social identity that the EDM label carried. These differences will lead to some clashes in established websites catering to the niche, such as Resident Advisor:

¹⁷ Hair metal, or glam metal, is referred to in these contexts as an example of the “selling out” of a genre.

“... it’s probably best for our culture if RA [Resident Advisor, a well-known web magazine] does not choose to combine these worlds ... Yes, that scene helps introduce electronic music to new ears, but really-just wait until they start digging and developing their palette, and they will end up here ... where the discerning fan resides ... The real fact is, these two sub-cultures have nothing to do with each other and they are simply two separate but similar cultures based around using technology to make dance music” (RA user, 2012).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1997: 51) mention that in social identity theory “the meaning of categories is relational and comparative in that meaning derives in part from comparisons between categories.” Thus, although probably far from the intent of the shunning of mainstream consumers from niche communities, the actions of these niche consumers facilitated the definition of EDM ones. That is, the work of niche consumers to protect their field-specific cultural capital from the arrival of “scenesters”, i.e., consumers who are unable to understand the value of such field-specific cultural capital, facilitated the definition of both segments. It helped, on the one hand, the distinction sought by niche consumers and, on the other hand, the affiliation sought by mainstream consumers.

Although in the electronic music world of Thornton (1996) the knowledge of styles and dances had a key role in objectifying cultural capital, this knowledge is readily accessible for EDM consumers. It is probable that this information is widely diffused so as to facilitate the goal of affiliation of mainstream consumers. There are a large number of resources that teach them exactly how to dress, act, and dance. For example, the whole festival experience is codified, and these codes are readily accessible. From “post-festival” videos, created and put online by

festivals such as EDC and Ultra, to blog posts on how to dress for Electric Daisy Carnival (e.g., “Stand Out to Fit In: What to Wear to EDC Vegas 2014”; “EDC ideas on Pinterest”), to YouTube videos (“AMIClubwear: What 2 Wear 2 EDC”), to forum discussions (e.g., “Electric Daisy Pro tips”), to laundry lists of what *not* to do (e.g., “The 10 worst people you’ll meet at Ultra”), the list of resources is ever-expanding and never-ending. There even exists a whole website dedicated to the proper EDC experience: howtoedc.com.

I have shown how a social identity and related social status comes to be defined in this emerging mainstream market category. The last theme explores how niche actors partner with actors from intersecting markets, as well as mainstream ones, to facilitate the diffusion of the EDM category.

Partnering with intersecting actors

In this last section, I will show how niche entrepreneurs partnered with actors from intersecting markets to by-pass established institutional actors and find alternative ways to diffuse EDM songs and showcase EDM artists. I will finally explain how these partnerships led to the creation of dynamic capabilities that made these niche entrepreneurs and intersecting market actors more competitive in the marketplace.

Bypassing traditional channels

Was the cultural category EDM created to address a slowdown in the concert industry? In 2010, gross revenues from shows in the U.S. were down by US\$ 400 million, close to a 10% decrease. The revenues from the top 50 U.S. tours were down 15%. Gary Bongiovanni, editor of the concert trade magazine *PollStar* reflected that

“...the concert business has been fueled by the baby-boomer generation going to see acts that broke in the Sixties and Seventies ... At some point, these ‘evergreen’ acts are going to fade away, and there doesn’t seem to be a huge group of acts waiting in the wings to replace them” (cited in Edgecliffe-Johnson 2010).

A report from Edison Research (2010) mentioned that the industry’s audience was graying, that the 12 to 24-year-olds went to half the concerts they used to a decade ago, and that companies Live Nation and William Morris Endeavour would be the most affected. As mentioned earlier, one year later, these two companies join together to launch the first EDM-stamped festival.

This partnership between Live Nation and WME might have been a necessary endeavor, as the established institutional actors such as major labels and radio channels were not involved in promoting the genre in the late 2000s and early 2010s. These two actors saw the potential of electronic music in benefiting their respective markets, yet, individually, they did not possess the institutional power or support to push the genre to consumers.

The partnering of WME with Live Nation, of WME with Las Vegas clubs, of Ultra records and promoters, and of niche artists and music streaming services provide an interesting case to study the opening of markets in strongly institutionalized industries such as the music industry. In the record industry, four companies control about 80% of the market share. The radio industry, which controls the major mean of diffusion of music, is also highly consolidated. According to Percival (2011: 455) “music radio hold[s] the dominant position in the relationship between itself and the record industry” which “has important consequences for the record industry A&R practices”. Major labels are greatly encouraged to “produce records that meet

music radio programmers' perceptions of what will sound good on their network" (Percival 2011: 470). Hence, if music programmers are uninterested in a certain genre such as electronic music, it becomes hard for artists to be signed onto major labels, and hard for niche labels to diffuse electronic music on mainstream radio programs.

The use of Las Vegas and festivals as a channel for the promotion of artists and of the genre as a whole allowed WME and Live Nation to bypass existing institutional arrangements of power and produce a demand large enough to warrant the attention of established institutional players. As Kathryn Frazier puts it, "it was the numbers [of festivals and nightclubs] that sort of piqued their interest" (in Ryce 2012). Peripheral and niche players were able to introduce EDM to both audiences and to create enough demand to recruit major actors to their project through cooperation, or what Dorado (2005: 386) terms convening, "a process of institutional change jumpstarted by the creation of collaborative arrangements."

In this section, I discuss two main aspects of the cooperation that took place and led to the creation of the EDM category. I now show how niche and peripheral actors leverage each other's core competencies and create dynamic capabilities through the arrangements of specific resources.

Creating networked dynamic capabilities

Dynamic capabilities are defined as "specific strategic and organizational processes ... that create value for firms within dynamic markets by manipulating resources into new value-creating strategies" (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000: 1106). The same authors argue that, since dynamic capabilities can be likened to "best practices", they are likely to be reproduced. Hence, their value for competitive advantages resides in the "resource configuration they create", rather

than in the capabilities themselves. Dynamic capabilities are frequently used for such a purpose, or what Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) term a “logic of opportunity.”

I argue that in highly dynamic markets in transition such as the music market and the concert market, multiple actors with different core competencies can collaborate and produce competitive advantages resulting from new resource configurations, or networked dynamic capabilities. As such, the combination of organizations peripheral to the music market, such as a booking agency and a concert or nightclub promoter, or the combination of a niche and a mainstream actor, such as a niche and a mainstream label, can create specific assets that can be leveraged towards value-creating strategies.

As I have mentioned, the concert industry was affected by a significant downturn at the turn of the 2000s. Similarly, Las Vegas was experiencing difficulties following the deregulation in Macau, the emergence of “racinos” (the combination of race track and casino) which heightened competition, as well as the financial crisis of the late 2000s, which lowered the number of gamblers. It was at this time that WME started to push for a residency-based model¹⁸ for hotel clubs.

WME was able to recruit concert promoter Live Nation, as well as Las Vegas nightclub owners, which served as a platform for the promotion of EDM and EDM (and WME) artists. WME was instrumental in developing the Las Vegas market. The agency represented about 75% of the DJs in this market in 2011. According to Adam Stewart (2011), Zimmerman of WME “is the man who many point to as a key player behind Vegas dance-music explosion and the high-end talent that has been brought in.” It is a strategic partnership that provides both types of actors, the nightclubs on the one hand and the purveyor of talent for nightclub music on the

¹⁸ A residency model entails that a DJ becomes a “resident” of a nightclub, playing, for example, every Friday evening for a season.

other, with important benefits: The deal between artists and Las Vegas club has been called a “symbiosis” (Mason 2012), where artists are viewed as partners. Jesse Waits, the co-owner and managing partner of Las Vegas giant clubs XS and Tryst, says:

“We invest in these artists in building their brand, marketing them, and providing unique press opportunities. In return, our clubs are allowed to be associated with talent of the highest caliber. They help us gain recognition in new markets by sharing details of their sets, photos and videos shot in the venues, with their hundreds of thousands of fans worldwide. It really helps to build enthusiasts for our clubs.” (In Mason 2012)

At EDMBiz 2012, Las Vegas was called “EDM’s strongest promotional platform” (Sisario 2012). The role of Vegas as a tourist hub is particularly conducive to its use as a promotional platform “because new tourists constantly arrive in Las Vegas [and artists] can perform there dozens of times a year and sell out every time” (Mason 2012).

If Las Vegas has been an important driver for the diffusion of EDM, EDM has also helped the city’s finances. Not only do festivals like Electric Daisy Carnival brings in hundreds of thousands of people, they also create tremendous economic opportunity. For example, EDC brought in US\$337.8 million dollars in revenues for the city in 2015 (Domanick 2015). More, the clubbing market in Las Vegas has become such that, at the Wynn, “the clubs’ combined revenue last year was a hundred and eighty million dollars, which was more than the slot machines earned. ...“Half of Steve Wynn’s profit comes from the nightclubs ... Gambling is an amenity now” (Eells 2013). In the next section, I will discuss the implications of these findings in regard to existing research on the creation of markets and institutions.

Discussion

My analysis of the creation of a mainstream cultural category highlights dynamics wherein the local work of consumers and producers leads to the construction of an innovative new cultural product, in this case, a novel sound. This sound is brought to a mainstream market by the bridging work of niche actors. Although established mainstream actors help to diffuse the new sound, the role of niche and peripheral mainstream market actors is also important, as they engineer a new mainstream cultural category.

The research in this dissertation contributes to extant theories of innovation and market creation in the four following ways: first, I introduced a general framework that addresses actors at multiple levels of a market and that explains the roles of each actor in the innovation of a new cultural product, its diffusion into a niche, and its use as the basis for the creation of a new mainstream market category. This new framework extends existing perspectives on market creation by emphasizing the institutional performances of an array of market actors operating at different levels. It also contributes the rigor of definitional clarity in the service of a novel theoretical vocabulary for the study of multi-level market phenomenon.

Second, the relevance and importance of local networks of consumers and producers is highlighted. My analysis shows how their work leads to the creation of innovative new cultural products. This work complements existing approaches investigating the role of consumers in the creation of new products (Baldwin, Hienerth and Von Hippel 2006; Hienerth 2006; Von Hippel 2005) by emphasizing the centrality of local places in structuring local innovation networks. The physical, cultural and institutional aspects of places all contribute to the construction and structuring of LINs by serving as a geographical hub that fosters the networking of a number of actors, as well as organizing and diffusing shared aesthetic norms and influences. If these local

places are important, so is the work of local actors in the creation and transmission of tacit knowledge, as well as the organization and curation of an emerging new sound.

Third, my analysis shows how conceptualizing niches as part of a greater market system, rather than an end market, emphasizes previously obscured dynamics of transference, translation, and transformation of innovations and the knowledge associated with innovative LINs. This novel perspective on niche and niche actors brings to the forefront the work of niche actors in creating a boundary infrastructure that spans the boundaries separating LIN from niche, and niche from mainstream markets. This approach highlights how niche actors can facilitate the movement of a cultural innovation by crossing three increasingly complex knowledge-based boundaries: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

Finally, my findings show that the creation of a new cultural mainstream category is the result of the work of three main types of actors: established market actors, peripheral mass market actors, and niche entrepreneurs. My research contributes to existing accounts of market creation by institutional heroes (Hardy and Maguire 2010) and powerful established market actors (Giesler 2012) by highlight how these two actors can concomitantly contribute to the creation of a new cultural mainstream category. In the process I presented, the established market actors help to diffuse an innovative new cultural product and the peripheral and niche ones work towards the creation of a new cultural category that works to their advantage.

Taken as a whole, this process highlights the importance of these three market levels in the dynamics of markets, as well as how each level contributes to the creation of a new cultural market category differently when they are not considered simply as end markets.

This research raises several questions regarding existing theories of market systems, the diffusion of cultural innovation, and the acquisition of power by market actors. A first question

this works addresses looks at the importance of a multi-level perspective when studying market systems. Looking at multiple levels helps to extend and develop extant uni-level approaches because it enhances the general understanding of market systems. The multi-level approach demonstrates how niche markets are not merely end markets in and of themselves but are also actors in a dynamic system of market development with underdetermined yet also path-dependent relations to the mainstream. In what follows, I exemplify how a multi-level approach benefits our understanding of the focal phenomenon of market development.

On theory

The importance of a multi-level approach

Perhaps because of the stated importance of choosing contexts of study that bring to the foreground aspects of phenomena in which researchers are interested in (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006), current marketing scholarship has preferred the study of niche markets (e.g., Giesler 2012; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Ustuner 2015) in comparison to mass markets. The study of such markets has been most beneficial in elucidating a number of problematics, such as doppelgänger brand management (Giesler 2012), consumers' efforts to garner market acceptance (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), and strategies for cultural de-marginalization (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2013). Yet, this concentration of studies at the niche level has also led to issues regarding the role of niches in market systems, and has often taken niches as either end markets (Giesler 2012; Martin and Schouten 2014), or as being opposed to mainstream markets (Sandicki and Ger 2010; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013). Viewing markets from a multi-level, systemic perspectives allows for the analysis of each of the levels in and of themselves as

well as the relationships between these levels. This positioning of niches as one of three market levels in turn allows for a different view of marketing-related phenomena. I will now develop on this point.

When can we expect hybrid economies to emerge? Scaraboto (2015) provides an enlightening and much-needed account of the hybridization of markets, i.e., the combined use of market-based logic, organized around economic exchanges and profit maximization, and gift-giving exchanges, organized around mutuality and reciprocity. I will now explain how a multi-level perspective can help to conceptualize hybrid economies as a niche phenomenon and why this matters for the study of hybrid economies.

First, a multi-level perspective helps to identify at which level communal or market logics emerge. Reframing Scaraboto's (2015) findings through a multi-level perspective points to the logics underlying the functioning of each level (i.e., communal logic for LINs, market logic for mainstream markets, and hybrid logic for niche markets), and indicates that hybrid economies are less likely to happen outside of niche markets. As I have conceptualized in my theoretical framework, local innovation networks and niche markets both operate (at least partly) on communal logics. Through my data, I have shown that, in the case of the local innovation network organized around the Big Apple store, logics of mutuality and reciprocity were central to the development of the sound. As the innovation moved towards a mainstream market, these logics were replaced by a market logic. Hence, the niche level is where we would expect communal and market logics to evolve concomitantly.

Second, Scaraboto (2015) argues that part of the reason why hybrid economies are possible is because actors are not assuming that the collaboration between consumers and producers "will inevitably become stable and more similar to a market or non-market economy"

(Scaraboto 2015: 154). In other words, the logic governing the market has yet to be fully institutionalized. This lack of institutionalization is again characteristic of LIN and niche market levels.

Third, the examples Scaraboto (2015) draws from, such as WarHammer (Cova and White 2010), Harley Davison in the 1990s (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the running community (Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013), the mini-moto market (Martin and Schouten 2014), fatshionistas (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), and her context of study, geocaching, are all examples of niche markets.

If as I suggest hybrid economies are a niche phenomenon, then, studying niche markets to evaluate when and why hybrid economies emerge or not would provide an interesting research avenue brought about by the multi-level perspective on market systems. Another possible research avenues would be the study of niche segments of consumers within mainstream markets (e.g., Ikea hackers) to see if hybrid economies are possible within these niches, and if so, why. I would suggest that some sort of protection exists (examples include geographical isolation and anonymity as in this research; active resistance such as in Hietanen and Rokka 2015; and stigmas such as in Sandicki and Ger 2010) shielding the niche consumers within a mainstream market from the commercial and institutional influences of such markets. Finally, such a perspective highlights the tensions that emerge when products or actors move from one level to the next (e.g., “selling out”), and how the underlying logics of each level affect these.

Also, the multi-level perspective I presented, combined with my analysis of the emergence of EDM, provides insights into the ways new markets are created. In their recent article on consumer-driven market emergence (CMDE), Martin and Schouten (2014) present how a group of consumers, motivated to create a new product for fun and because existing ones

did not correspond to their needs, led to the creation of a niche market. They oppose their model of CDME to a firm-driven model of market development (FDMD), where firms invest significant amounts of capital in efforts to create innovative products addressing yet unproven consumer needs. Table 3 below, taken from Martin and Schouten (2014), summarizes the main differences between both types of market development/emergence.

Table 3. Key differences between firm-driven market development (FDMD) and consumption-driven market emergence (CDME) (from Martin and Schouten 2014)

	FDMD	CDME
Industry stance	Proactive	Passive
Consumer needs	Unproven	Systemic, self-manifesting
Locus of innovation	Centralized within firms	Distributed among embedded entrepreneurs
Drivers of innovation	Extrinsic motivation, profit	Intrinsic motivation, fun
Nature of diffusion	Pushed by firms, marketing-driven	Organic, community-driven
Market structures	Top-down, built or existing	Bottom-up, emergent
Nature of investment	High, up-front, borne by firms	Incremental, distributed
Risk of failure	High	Low

Albeit this dichotomizing of market creation processes is insightful, the multi-level perspective brings to the forefront a more complex process where both consumers and producers at three market levels intervene. This is in line with research which posits that consumers, even in FDMD, play an important role in developing new products and practices (e.g., Ansari and Phillips 2011). Examples abound of innovations started by consumers that were then appropriated by firms, refined through in-firm research and development efforts, and then pushed by firms to mainstream consumers (such as mountain biking and snowboarding [in Von Hippel 2005]), or developed by firms and then made commercially possible through the innovations of consumers (e.g., Ansari and Phillips 2011).

Yet, some cases of innovation are indeed more oriented towards one of these two market development processes. The mini-moto market (Martin and Schouten 2014), as well as the market for rodeo kayaking (Baldwin, Hienerth and Von Hippel 2006) are examples of CMDE-oriented cases. But, in the words of Von Hippel (2005: 177), this process is more likely not to be

supported by market development efforts from firms when “user-innovators ... discover that ... manufacturers ... are unwilling to manufacture what they want, and so are driven to become manufacturers themselves.” Hence, CDME is the result of a lack of commercial interest for the LIN innovation. Other innovations lean more towards firm-oriented development processes, the pharmaceutical industry being a prime example. What seems to group these developments at the firm level is the required technical knowledge and financial capital necessary to develop an innovation and a heavy reliance of law-based protections (e.g., copyrights) to prevent the appropriation of an innovation (Von Hippel 2005).

The case I have presented is a hybrid between CDME and FDMD processes. To account for my findings, I propose conceptualizing the relationship between FDMD and CDME as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. This does not preclude the creation of market strictly by firms but it highlights a hybrid process where both firms and consumers participate in the creation of a market category. In such a continuum, processes of CDME are located at the LIN and niche levels, and processes of FDMD then take over to translate the LIN innovation into a product that can be marketed to a mainstream public (see Shah 2000).

The multi-level perspective then becomes crucial to understand how the process evolves from being consumer-driven to being firm-driven, as it provides a heuristic device to identify the phase at which a market is in its development as well as cues to analyze the specifics of each phase. More, my findings show how each market level contributes to this hybrid process of market development. Table 4 summarizes how this integrative perspective joins both processes and how the key differences identified by Martin and Schouten (2014)¹⁹ as well as the ones I

¹⁹ Since Martin and Schouten (2014) presented two ideal types of market development processes, I revised some of their initial characteristics so that this new model account for this hybrid process of market development.

have identified throughout this research, change as the market evolves from one market level to the next.

The three processes below represent ideal types of each phase during the emergence of a market, from a consumer-driven one, to a hybrid one, to a firm-driven one. These should be seen as a continuum as expressed by the arrow below. For example, firms move from being passive in the CDME process to reacting to what consumers do in the CDME phase during the HPMD process, to actively acting to create a new market category in the last phase of market category creation, such as I have exemplified in this research.

existing accounts of the progression of genres in the field of music by explaining how a musical innovation moves from a small group of local innovators to the mass market. My explanation of such a progression of a musical innovation emphasizes the knowledge-based structure required to link different actors located at different levels. This builds upon existing work in the sociology of music (Lena and Peterson 2006, 2008; Lena 2012) and explains on what the movements of genres relies when they move from one “pattern” (e.g., in the vocabulary of Lena [2012], from the avant-garde to the industry) to the next, what kind of actors are involved in this process, and how their work contributes to these movements. As I draw from categorization studies, my theorization also attributes more weight to heroes, exemplars, and prototypes, such as artists and specific songs, in structuring the development of local sounds into genres and the development of genres into categories, than previously acknowledged. This is especially true in contrast to the work of Lena (2012) where such an omission had been pointed out as a shortcoming (see Harkness 2013). I also emphasize market-making tactics, such as labeling, defining a social identity for the artists of a newly created market category, and creating network dynamic capabilities between peripheral market actors, which were overlooked by existing accounts of the development of genres (e.g., Peterson 1990; Geels 2007; Lena and Peterson 2006, 2008; Lena 2012).

Beyond music, my work is also of interest for other aesthetic markets. For example, I contribute to existing processes explaining the diffusion of cultural innovation in fashion in the following ways. A salient characteristic in the processes explaining the diffusion of style in fashion is the reliance on a “heroes” model to explain the chain of influence. By this, I mean that the diffusion of fashion is often thought of as the result of the work of a few powerful actors (see Crane [1999] for a comprehensive review in fashion; McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips [2013] for

a consumer-based perspective; McCracken [1986] for a more general perspective on the transfer of cultural meanings). When groups of consumers are considered in this process, it is usually as the creators of innovative fashion styles. These styles, though, are then appropriated and diffused by more powerful market actors. Even when a single consumer is viewed as a stylistic innovator, the diffusion of his style relies on his symbolic power, which allows him to garner the cooperation of other market actors (McQuarrie et al. 2013). The logic goes that it is these market actors, such as powerful bloggers, fashion forecasters, cool hunters, fashion editors, department stores, and designers, who are responsible for the diffusion of new styles (e.g., Crane 1999; McQuarrie et al. 2013; Nancarrow, Nancarrow and Page 2001).

Yet, as my analysis shows and as I have argued in previous work (Dolbec and Fischer 2015), the reality is more complex and consumer-to-consumer dynamics as well as the dynamics between groups of niche consumers have an important role to play in the diffusion process. More specifically, my work departs from existing accounts in the following way: first, although small groups of local consumers *and* producers are responsible for cultural innovation, it is when this cultural innovation moves to the niche that the possibility for it to be recognized by mainstream actors materializes. The niche, which acts as a bridge between the local and the mainstream, is a necessary step that both facilitates the recognition of emerging cultural innovations by codifying and distilling them and supports the territorializing dimensions of geographic isolation and anonymity associated with local innovation networks. The latter is particularly important since these territorializing dimensions are necessary for local groups of innovators to evolve outside market norms and innovate. This perspective provides a novel lens to study phenomenon such as cool hunting and co-optation. Second, my account also favors an approach where niche producers turned institutional entrepreneurs are central in the diffusion of a cultural innovation.

This contributes to the list of powerful actors responsible for the diffusion of new genres by adding a new category of actors. These actors emerge from the niche and collaborate with peripheral-yet-established market actors to diffuse a new genre (or fashion). My approach thus extends previous findings through these two novel perspectives on the diffusion of new styles.

Categories and market-level changes

As with the multi-level perspective, approaching the study of markets through the lens of market categories and categorization has a number of implications. As I have previously mentioned, research on markets has assumed that marketers worked towards the creation of whole markets, e.g. “brand-mediation market creation process” (Giesler 2012: 56) or “the emergence of a new market within the motorcycle industry” (Martin and Schouten 2014: 855). Exploring developments in markets through the lens of market categories not only offers a better representation of the phenomena but it also opens the door to a number of new theoretical avenues. I will provide a few examples to illustrate this point.

In the first example, I highlight how a categorization approach to market dynamics could shed light on the link between categories and institutional logics. Even though market categories convey cultural norms and expectations such as those associated with institutional logics (Jones et al. 2012), they are not subsumed by them (Vergne and Wry 2014). Categories in markets can borrow from several institutional logics (Jones et al. 2012). Two examples in the existing literature are Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) and Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015). Albeit their focus was on the strategies used by consumers to mold a space for themselves in an existing market, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) hint at the interplay between institutional logics and market categories and how adhering to the prevalent logics in a market might be a prerequisite for category acceptance. In their case, the market category of fatshionista was facing hurdles to

its acceptance because it opposed a prevalent logic of the market of fashion. Hence, future research could inquire about the role of institutional logics in the competitiveness of market categories. Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015) have paved the way by explicating how companies can leverage competing logics in a market, yet the mention of categories is absent in their work. Bringing in market categories (e.g., fitness yoga vs. spiritual yoga) could complement their discussion on how different brands of yoga were created through the combination of existing field logics and further their market creation line of argument.

A second advantage of a market category approach is the theoretical borrowing from existing work on categories and categorization that could complement existing institutional approaches in marketing. Existing work on category stretching and category bridging could be useful to understand how market categories become legitimate. The work of Giesler (2012) on Botox provides a good context to exemplify this. Giesler's (2012) insightful work explained the emergence of doppelgänger brand images through the tension emerging from the schism between oppositional ideological discourses surrounding technology. A categorization lens would enable the study of the same phenomenon through the bridging of two different categories with their own discourses and logics. Perhaps because of its invasive techniques and the surrounding medical discourses, Botox has one foot within the category of aesthetic surgery and another foot in the cosmetic one. Unsurprisingly, the discourses around which the doppelgänger brand is articulated (i.e., "poison", "frozen", "Frankenstein", and "junkie") are reminiscent of those associated with the aesthetic surgery market category (e.g., "Frankenstein boobs" was used in an episode of the Kardashians, "beauty junkies" is used in Kuczynski [2006]), while the campaign messages of Botox ("For me, myself, and I"; "Your personal best") are reminiscing of slogans from the cosmetic industry ("Because I'm worth it" [L'Oréal]; "Bringing the best to everyone

we touch” [Estee Lauder]). Hence, the case of Botox cosmetics can be read both as a case of a company responding to the emergence of doppelgänger brands but also as one where the positioning of a product benefits from its distancing from an existing, somewhat stigmatized market category, and its incorporation into another legitimate one. Hence, a categorization perspective would bring conceptual tools and processes, such as category prototypes, category attributes, and category stretching and bridging, to the analysis of such market legitimization dynamics.

The last benefit of examining markets through market categories is the reframing of the theorization of market evolution. When taking a category-based perspective, the evolution of markets can be seen as a succession of new disruptive market categories. The introduction to the market of these disruptive categories should not be equated with the creation of new markets, but rather, a change in what defines the category, such as different products (e.g., Apple’s smartphone and the cell phone), business models (Dell’s made to order computer and the personal computer market), or distribution systems (e.g., Amazon’s online marketplace and the book market). This conceptual distinction is important if we want to understand how markets change. In these cases, the introduction of these new categories demands that companies cater to existing consumers of a market and compete with already established firms within an existing institution (i.e., logics, boundaries, actors). It will also carry a legacy from existing market categories. For example, Benner and Tripsas (2012) show how the conceptualization of an innovative product and product category is influenced by previous industry affiliations. This opens several avenues of research where interested researchers could inquire about changes in pricing strategies, distribution strategies, or promotion strategies following the introduction of a new market category, or how a new market categories, such as EDM, can foster change at the

strategic level (e.g., bring about new business models or create new relationships between market actors).

Now that I have discussed the theoretical implications of my findings, I will move on to talk about the managerial implications of my research.

On practice

On selling out: How to cross the niche to mainstream boundary?

In cultural fields, the crossing of products and actors from a niche to a cultural market is usually perceived as a negative endeavor. In such a strategic move, artists, artistic products, labels, and so on, are seen as “selling out”, and exchanging their cultural capital, integrity, authenticity, and creative freedom for economic capital (Dowling 2009). Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli’s (2015) reflection on plural logics in markets addresses this conflict. They mention that “specialists [niche actors] differentiate themselves from generalists [mainstream actors] by concentrating their resources on a narrow segment of the market” and “must combine a select few field logics while remaining detached from commercial logic” (55). According to this line of thought, actors operating at the niche level should benefit from an exclusive coupling strategy, i.e., associating themselves with, for example, a “spiritual” logic, while mainstream actors should engage in a populist coupling strategy, combining the most popular logics with a commercial logic. They preclude niche actors from engaging with a commercial logic as this might lead to the emergence of a doppelgänger brand. This reifies the typical niche vs. mainstream dichotomy (e.g., Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2007; Holt 2002; Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel 2006). Yet, this strategy is less ideal when niche actors, such as LIN or niche entrepreneurs, want to either engineer a new mainstream cultural category or cross the niche-level boundary. How can

artists and labels, in the world of music, cross this boundary, i.e., “sell out”? In the following paragraph, I open a reflection based on the framework I have presented, existing studies, and cases of efficient crossing in the EDM market.

I argue that products and actors can successfully move from a specialist to a generalist strategy, effectively “selling out”. This is counter-intuitive, as the normal view in marketing suggest that niche producers actively resist cross over to the mainstream and selling out (Hietanen and Rokka 2015), and niche consumers resist new entrants when their field becomes mythologized by the mainstream (Arsel and Thompson 2011). Yet, there is evidence in the marketplace that this represents a viable marketing strategy. I propose that marketers ask the following three questions to evaluate a successful “selling out” strategy.

What is the referent category? The evaluation of authenticity is partly based on the perception of a link between of a product or actor and the “real thing” (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Often, this “real thing” is the result of a carefully constructed discourse (Peterson 2005). For example, the iconic Chicago blues clubs targeted at tourists are not representative of (indexical) authentic (Grayson and Martinec 2004) blues clubs but rather of what the expectations of tourists are regarding these clubs (Grazian 2004). Other examples of such fabrications in tourism (Graham 2001) and wine (Ulin 1995) show that authenticity is not inherent to the product or actor but that it is socially constructed around a specific referent (Peterson 2005) and often carefully planned. Hence, when moving from niche to mainstream markets, the referent on which authenticity is evaluated changes (or can be created). In the vocabulary of categorization studies, the category prototype (or the “implicit template of the authentic” [Peterson 2005: 1093]) against which the category member is evaluated changes. Hence, it is still possible to be an authentic EDM artist despite being considered as a sell out by

the electronic niche and vice versa. For example, a number of comments by EDM consumers about a song posted by Skrillex on his Facebook page from lauded underground artist Aphex Twin asked “where’s the drop” (a defining characteristic of EDM), exemplifies that despite being a legend in the underground, not abiding to the EDM referent made Aphex Twin an outsider to EDM. Yet, it is also possible to be authentic in both niche and mainstream markets. Some rap artists, such as Eminem (Harkness 2013) and Jay-Z (Grealy 2008) between others, have maintained mainstream appeal while enjoying positive perceptions from niche and underground rap market actors. Preserving authenticity in both markets would imply that the products or actors stay aligned with both category prototypes concomitantly through careful boundary work (Harkness 2013). That is, artists or products would adhere to characteristics of both “implicit template” of the niche and mainstream markets. A strategy proposed by Harkness (2013: 296) is for artists to uphold the “normative cluster of conditions that govern authenticity [in the niche market], while demonstrating how they are an exception [in the mainstream market].” Grealy (2008: 858, 863) identifies the continuation of an artist “spatialized history”, i.e., maintaining an artist “localized ... identity concurrent to achieving commercial success” as a possible avenue to maintain its authenticity.

Who is the target market? The evaluation of an authentic product or actor is also dependent on the experiences of consumers and the goals they have in relation to their consumption experiences (Beverland and Farrelly 2009). These authors mention that “when consumers have different goals they seek authenticity in different kinds of experiences” (Beverland and Farrelly 2009: 853). This echoes an emerging research trend in categorization studies which argues that the evaluation of a category member can be goal-dependent, where a category member can be evaluated as more legitimate depending on the goals of the perceiver

(Kennedy and Fiss 2013). I have argued that mainstream audiences have been shown to have different goals than niche ones (distinction vs. affiliation). In the words of a niche consumer I have interviewed, “I might know the most obscure Pakistani electronic acts, but I still go to big ass festivals to party.” An implication for the authenticity of products or actors who aim at crossing the niche to mainstream boundary is that to preserve their authenticity they have to efficiently answer to the goals of their new target consumers. Here again, it is possible to consider a mainstream product or actor that could answer to the goals of both niche and mainstream consumers. An example that comes to mind is electronic artist Richie Hawtin who toured the “CNTRL: Beyond EDM”—an educational event combined with a “low-ticket” gig showcasing “the deeper side of electronic music” (Sherburne 2012)—and stopped by SXSW on March 13th, 2013, and then did a DJ set at the 2013 ULTRA festival—with an attendance of 330,000 festival goers—on March 15th of the same year, effectively addressing both types of audiences with different events targeted at fulfilling different goals.

A final question that marketers should ask is: can a doppelgänger brand be used productively? The doppelgänger brand image is a consumer-driven response to emotional marketing efforts, “a family of disparaging images and meanings about a brand that circulate throughout popular culture” (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006: 50) which can undermine the authenticity of a brand, its narrative, and its identity. Giesler (2012) has shown how brands can evolve in concert with the evolution of a doppelgänger brand, where a company is constantly distancing itself from the new evolution of the doppelgänger. Yet, actors and products can productively embrace a doppelgänger brand. An example of this in EDM is the emergence of the term brostep. The term combines the colloquial term “bro” (a colloquial term that characterizes “a young man, especially one who socializes primarily with his male peers and enjoys lively,

unintellectual pursuits” (Oxford 2015) and step, to create the portmanteau brostep. Similar to the term scenesters (Arsel and Thompson 2011), brostep was a rather pejorative term used by dubstep consumers to qualify the Americanized version of dubstep music and its new audience. It aesthetically discriminated between niche and mainstream consumers. According to Giesler’s (2012) model, the course of action for Skrillex (the poster boy of American dubstep) and other American dubstep/brostep artists should have been to distance themselves from the doppelgänger brand. Yet, according to several of my interviewees, the actual market for American dubstep was the college crowd, which aligned with the term brostep. Hence, distancing from the acronym could have been equally damaging. Skrillex responded on his album “Recess” by titling the opening track “All is Fair in Love and Brostep”²⁰. This points to a possible research avenue, namely the addressing of when and how a doppelgänger brand should be dealt with through appropriation and correspondence. Albeit there exists an important stream of literature that deals with market co-optation from the perspective of niche consumers and producers (e.g., Arsel and Thompson 2011; Hietanen and Rokka 2015; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), exactly how mainstream marketers can address cultural backlash or minimize the negative consequences following market co-optation is still under-researched (but see Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel 2006).

An alternative strategy to the direct crossing of the boundary between niche and mainstream markets involves loose coupling with other market actors. Rather than separating themselves from a commercial logic as proposed by Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015), niche actors could engage in strategic partnerships with commercial actors or create a different entity

²⁰ The song also addressed the developments between Zomboy “Terror Squad” (2013) song which arguably had similar (and/or copy) elements to a Skrillex unreleased song which aired on BBC Essential Mix (2013) some months before. Skrillex addressed this by copying elements of the “Terror Squad” song on his song “All is fair...” hence the first part of the title.

to handle their commercial endeavors. Alvarez et al. (2005) propose that the partnership between film directors and producers can facilitate the loose coupling (Orton and Weick 1990) of art and business, where each member concentrates on one logic (i.e., business or art). This also allows niche actors to be shielded from the pressure of creating profits. In institutional theory, the compliance of actors to institutional norms and rules is a central aspect of their legitimacy. The collaboration between niche and mainstream actors in the construction of a new cultural category contributes to the protection of an allure of authenticity for artists and festivals, and the possibility for actors to concentrate on their core role.

In the market of electronic music, artists and promotion companies have done exactly this. I will explain how this loose coupling can help to shield artists from the stigma associated with addressing a mainstream market with the following examples. A first example looks at the establishment of vanity labels. Vanity record labels, such as Skrillex's OWSLA, are record labels which are fully or partially owned by another larger established record label as a subsidiary for an artist (other examples include Frank Zappa's Bizarre Records; Kraftwerk's Kling Klang and Dr. Dre's Aftermath). This allows an artist not only to divorce herself from the established commercial actor, which arguably helps in shielding her from being associated with a mainstream actor, but also often times allows for a greater creative freedom while benefitting from the financial and logistic support of the established commercial actor (Alvarez et al. 2005). A second example is a partnership between a conglomerate and a more creatively oriented company. The acquisition of major festivals, such as Tomorrow Land (by SFX Entertainment) and HARD Events (by Live Nation) are perhaps the most prominent examples in EDM. Both founders have gone on record stating that their acquisition by an established market actor was ideal for them, as they were then able to concentrate on what they were good at, such as curating

the artists who are presented during the festival, and orchestrating the festival's environment and atmosphere, and relegating the business-related activities of the endeavor to their larger commercial partner. Gary Richards of HARD Events mentioned that his partnership with Live Nation has been "amazing because I was a one-man show and a couple of people on my team, dealing with production, ticketing, marketing, booking, finance, taxes, legal, it's such a huge thing to put on these festivals, and now having Live Nation behind me, it enables me to do what I'm good at [...] they're not getting involved in my programming [...] they are just a strong backbone for me to just make my thing stronger and better" (Richards in Francis et al. 2012).

Power in market: ANT translations vs. boundary objects

The inquiry into relationships of power between market actors is a growing stream of research in marketing and market systems studies. The study of how actors can acquire power within a market has been of particular interest. Existing studies have inquired about how market actors can try to gain power in a market by appealing to institutional logics (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), enhancing the value of field-specific cultural capital (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013), and translating other market actors to the project of a focal actor (Giesler 2012; Giesler and Veresiu 2014). Of these previous studies, two of them inquired about actors with little existing power within a market (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013 and Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013). Yet, in these studies, the results of the actions of these actors were mitigated. The two other studies (Giesler 2012 and Giesler and Veresiu 2014) looked at powerful market actors using what has been described as a Machiavellian approach to network construction (Amsterdamska 1990; Fujimura 1992; Latour 1999) overly focused on one-way translation at the benefits of a dominant actor (Star 1988, Star and Griesemer 1989). Notwithstanding the possible theoretical debate, the current strategies offered by ANT-inspired work are arguably less likely to

yield beneficial results for actors with little power to leverage (Star 1999). These strategies are also less likely to be able to deal with multiple translations processes from multiple market actors (Star 1988; Star and Griesemer 1989). Hence, we are left with a set of studies that provides little strategic orientation for LIN and niche actors who want to gain power within a market.

The concept of boundary object was devised to address what happens in networks with multiple translation processes where actors do not possess as much power as in the cases of Botox (Giesler 2012) or the Davos forum (Giesler and Veresiu 2014). Albeit it is aimed at analyzing democratic participation between communities, when combined with theories on categorization, it can be used to discuss how actors can acquire power within a network. As Bowker and Star (2000: 319) note “classifications are powerful technologies.” In a cultural field such as music, classification and categories orient the efforts of a number of actors, from label executives to radio DJs to artists (Ahlkvist and Fischer 2000). A strategy that comes to the forefront of this research project to acquire power within an emerging market is to define boundary objects. Attempts to engineer boundary objects are present at all stages of this research: Hatcha and Lockhart and the FWD>> sound; Caspa, Rusko and *Fabric* and dubstep; Live Nation and William Morris and EDM. Efforts to define a category prototype can be beneficial for its creator, as market actors evaluate category members based on these (Kennedy, Lo and Lounsbury 2010). Translated in the language of institutional theory, being typical can facilitate legitimation, i.e., resembling the category prototype facilitates cognitive legitimacy (in so far as the category is a legitimate one).

Limitations

Drawing from the multi-level perspective and theories from geography, management, and categorization studies, this research explains how the cultural innovations from a small group of

consumers and producers can end up as the basis of a new cultural mainstream category over a period of time.

The strengths of this research are the novel explanations provided for creation of market categories as well as the theorization of market-level processes as complex multi-level ones. Despite contributing to our understanding of market-level phenomena and the creation of new market categories in existing markets, this research is also bounded by certain limitations.

First, this research is located within a single site of study: music. Albeit its theoretical groundings come from a wide range of literature, from technology studies to the study of art worlds, and although the proposed model seems appropriate in other cultural fields such as fashion (Crane 1999), advertising and design (Lloyd 2004), further research is warranted to inquire about whether the proposed mechanisms hold throughout markets.

Second, the qualitative approach at the heart of this research limits the possibility of analyzing the creation of the market category through well-established market-level theories such as evolutionary economics and organizational ecology as well as the formation of falsifiable hypotheses. Hence, future research could complement the framework I have established here by exploring, for example, how the density of actors at each of the market-level facilitates or hinders the development of cultural innovations, or how inter-firm partnerships emerge in more or less dense market levels. Second, the role of previous innovations, such as in Benner and Tripsas (2012), and the constitution of development paths in local and global cultural markets, such as in Leslie and Rantisi (2011), also provide complimentary explanations as to why certain categories emerge over others. The combination of these approaches with a multi-level, culturally informed perspective could further our understanding of the different aspects of the processes underlying the creation of new market categories.

This research sits at the junction of many worlds: art and technology; local and global; market and categories; innovation and co-optation. It has been argued that it is at the intersection of multiple worlds that creative theory building occurs (Zahra and Newey 2009). It is my hope that the bridging of the boundaries between these worlds will help future researchers in their study of complex, multi-sited, and multi-level market phenomena.

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Appendix

Appendix A

2-step: a sub-genre of UK garage; “a general rubric for all kinds of jittery, irregular rhythms that don't conform to [UK] garage’s traditional four-on-the-floor pulse” (Reynolds 2008)

Acid house: a sub-genre of house music, characterized by the electronic squelch of the Roland TB-303 (Dummy 2012)

BPM: Beats per minute; a measure of tempo

Breakbeat: A genre characterized by a kick drum on 1st and 3rd beats and a snare on the 2nd and 4th beats (albeit variations exist) (Thomas 2012)

Breakbeat garage: Also called breakstep; a sub-genre of UK garage characterized by influences from drum and bass basslines and the irregular rhythms of 2-step for regular breakbeats (McDonnell 2008)

Disco: A genre of music emerging in the late 1960s, characterized by a four-on-the-floor beat, a syncopated bass line, and influences from funk, soul, and salsa genres. (Mattera 2012; Shapiro 2007)

Drum and bass: An electronic music genre that emerged in the early 1990s, characterized by rapid breakbeats (between 150 and 180 BPM), heavy bass, and sub-bass lines (Noys 1995)

Dubstep: An electronic music genre that emerged in the late 1990s, characterized by a syncopated drum, and heavy sub-bass lines (Walmsley 2009)

Four-on-the-floor: (or four-to-the-floor) a drum pattern in 4/4 time with a kick drum on every beat (1, 2, 3, and 4) in common time.

FWD>>: A series of club nights emphasizing emerging electronic genres (Yates 2011)

FWD>> sound: A mix of 2-step, four-to-the-floor beats, breakbeat garage, proto-grime, and proto-dubstep played at FWD>> (Clark 2006a)

Grime: An electronic music genre that emerged in the early 2000s, characterized by “gruff rapping, stiff electro-influenced beats, and raucous aggression” (Reynolds 2009: 77).

Hardcore: An electronic music genre emerging from the European rave scene in the early 1990s, characterized by a faster BPM than house and acid house (140 to 150BPM), heavy reliance on breakbeats, and speed up vocals (Reynolds 1992)

House: Arguably the first genre of electronic music that emerged in post-disco Chicago in the early 1980s. It is characterized by a 4/4 beat rhythm and off-beat hi-hat cymbals or snare drum (Test 2014)

Jungle: See drum and bass

UK Garage: A genre of electronic music that emerged in the UK in the early 1990s. It is characterized by a syncopated 4/4 beat rhythm, beat-skipping kick drums, and “skippy, snappy, syncopated snares and busy, bustling hi-hats” (Reynolds 1999b)