

Authenticity as viewed from the Producer

Understanding how artists view authenticity within the context of category spanning

Student Name: Joshua Christodoulou

Student Number: 626454

Supervisor: Pawan Bhansing

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2024

Word count: 17166

Authenticity as viewed from the Producer
Understanding how artists view authenticity in the context of category spanning

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to understand *how Netherlands based, African Electronic Dance Music artists perceive of authenticity in the context of category spanning*. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 7 expert respondents, each of which is a professional within the field of African Electronic Dance Music. By building on pre-existing literature surrounding the concepts of genre, niche, category spanning and authenticity. This research revealed new insights into how they apply to African electronic dance music and it's position in the Netherlands, showcasing the difference between each of their variations; how category spanning producers in the Netherlands formulate a 'sound colour' in order to prevent the backlash most often associated with the notion of category spanning; and finally how producers view authenticity from an intrinsic personal standpoint. This thesis builds on previous literature by taking the novel standpoint of viewing authenticity from the perspective of the producers themselves rather than from the perspective of audience members and critics. Firstly, African electronic dance music is split between the genres of amapiano, afrohouse and gqom. Each of these genres exist within their own spheres in terms of their development within the Netherlands yet share a variety of similarities in terms of competition and oversaturation within the marketplace. Alongside this, since these genres still consist within the electronic music world, they are able to be blended and developed with other genres of electronic dance music. The blending of these different genres encapsulates a producer's ability to category span. What has been most insightful with this ability to category span is the ease and frequency with which the artist in this study do it. This positions producers in this field as global leaders in category spanning as they intrinsically have an understanding of how properly category span that aligns with previous research. Where this thesis treads new grounds, is by examining authenticity with regards to these genres and ability to category span from the perspective of the producers themselves where all previous research has viewed this from an audience perspective. What has been discovered, is that producers hold the concept of authenticity close to their heart, as such, not relying on audiences and critics to validate their actions as authentic.

KEYWORDS: *African Electronic Dance Music, Authenticity, Category Spanning, Genre, Niche*

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ABSTRACT | 2 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Theoretical Framework | 8 |
| Niche and Genre | 8 |
| <i>Niche</i> | 8 |
| <i>Genre</i> | 9 |
| Category Spanning | 11 |
| <i>Producer vs Audience</i> | 12 |
| <i>Boundary Porousness</i> | 13 |
| Authenticity | 14 |
| <i>What is authenticity within Music?</i> | 14 |
| <i>How can authenticity be garnered when spanning categories?</i> | 16 |
| Methodology | 19 |
| General Description of the Research Design and the Methods Used | 19 |
| Sample & Sampling Methods..... | 20 |
| Operationalization | 21 |
| <i>Niche & Genre</i> | 21 |
| <i>Category Spanning</i> | 22 |
| <i>Authenticity</i> | 23 |
| Data Collection Process..... | 23 |
| <i>Data analysis</i> | 25 |
| Results | 27 |
| <i>AEDM in the Dutch Market</i> | 27 |
| <i>The foremost experts of category spanning</i> | 31 |
| <i>Authenticity in a world devoid of genre</i> | 35 |
| Conclusion | 40 |
| <i>Limitations and Future avenues for research</i> | 42 |
| References | 43 |
| Appendix A: Interview Guide | 46 |
| Appendix B: Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis | 50 |

Introduction

The rise of music globalisation through streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music created an ease of access and distribution for audiences and artists alike. With the increase of this ease of access, a variety of different concerns have arisen, from (Masasabi, 2022; Omari, 2021) to authenticity (Askin & Mol, 2018). The desire to define authenticity within the creative field, specifically that of music, is a deeply trodden path, as academics seek to examine the 'realness' behind artists music (Askin & Mol, 2018, p. 159). This quest for realness has become staple within the modern music industry, stemming from the rise of the commodification of the artform (Askin & Mol, 2018, p, 159). Through its commodification, the separation between the actors involved in distribution, production and consumption has decreased as music is seen no longer as a once off experience, and has instead turned to a product to be exchanged. To this end, authenticity remains as the primary factor that prevents this commodification, yet with mass global production, this concept is seeing an increase in its fragility (Askin & Mol, 2018, p. 160). Increasing technological advancements and the changing manifestations of authenticity representation in this field has resulted in dramatic and fundamental shifts with the use and meaning of genre (Askin & Mol, 2018, p, 160). As a result, there has been a rise of the 'cultural omnivore' whereby consumers and producers steer away for the exclusive consumption of a single culture and genre, instead developing a wide variety of eclectic tastes (DeNora, 1999; Tepper, 2009; Webster, 2019). Additionally, to meet supply and demand, novel advancements such as algorithms are used, without human intervention, further expanding tastes and spreading sounds on a global scale (Karakayali, 2018). This spread of information is bringing forth unprecedented connectedness whereby an artist or DJ is no longer limited to sounds and music native to their location but can instead span various global genres.

The vast recent spread of African music on a global level is an apt example of this globalization. Afrobeats (stemming from Ghana and Nigeria) saw a global rise in 2011 before a large increase within Amsterdam's club scene in 2018 (Koegler et al., 2019, p. 72). Comparable to finding a home in Amsterdam, it has also settled within other European cities Paris and London (Koegler et al., 2019, p. 63). Afrobeats emerging as an African led genre on the global scale lends itself to comparisons with the rise of other African genres thanks to the increase of globalisation. The comparison to be drawn here, is that of South African house music. Despite house being one of the most popular genres within South Africa and its eventual rise in global popularity, there is surprisingly little academic discourse on this subject (Simmert, 2015, p. 87; Joseph & Human, 2009). Despite originating in the United States, South Africa has adopted the genre of house music and developed it through the

infusion of cultural practices, repeatedly creating various recombination's of the genre resulting in a unique sound that can be considered a South African invention (Simmert, 2015, p. 90). Due to these vast recombination's, there is no single variation of South African house. Instead, overtime various sub genres such as Afrohouse, Afrotech, Amapiano, 3 Step and Gqom have developed. Colloquially, these various streams of South African house have become know as African Electronic Dance Music (AEDM). AEDM has seen a massive rise on the global scale throughout the decades, originally with Black Coffee, a prominent afrohouse artist, in the late 2000's and early 2010's, and more recently with the rise of Amapiano in the late 2010's and early 2020's (Simmert, 2015). An example of this explosion of AEDM can be seen through the case of Jeruselema. Jeruselema is an award-winning South African song that pivots itself between gqom and afrohouse. This song, ingrained with cultural expressions indigenous to South Africa saw a massive rise during the COVID pandemic (Idowu & Ogunnubi, 2021, p. 465). It spread to a transnational audience across the continents of Africa, Europe, South America and North America before finally peaking at number one in the following countries: SA, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Grenada, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland and France (Idowu & Ogunnubi, 2021, p. 466). Through the use of event spaces such a Paradiso (a prominent event space in Amsterdam) this globalisation has allowed for DJ's artists on a global scale to reproduce the sound (Delhaye & Van De Ven, 2014). However, with genres such as AEDM being so far away from their countries of origins, as well as being played and produced by artists that span multiple genres, questions of authenticity become more prevalent than ever.

By asking these questions of authenticity, scholars and producers alike are able to define and characterise dance music, a tough task on its own given the highly diverse range of different genres and styles that accompany it (Wiltsher, 2016, p. 416). Authenticity itself is a widely studied and subjective topic resulting a vast network of different ideas and understandings surrounding it (Nunes et al., 2021; Peterson, 2005). In defining authentic music, there are a variety of ideological and cultural factors that are linked towards it, and when examining the authenticity of its practitioners, questions of artists, performance, and notions of mainstream become prevalent (Jaimangal-Jones, 2018, p. 225; Wiltsher, 2016, p. 416). Manifestation of music can sound similar and can be authentically differentiated through questions of context and production, making this a tricky subject to tackle. With authenticity itself being a fluid concept, dependent on its assessors, this paper aims to contribute towards the literature by taking a different approach to its contextualisation. Majority of authenticity studies regarding music and its dissemination, are viewed almost exclusively from the perception of audiences and critics (Jaimangal-Jones, 2018; Moore,

2002; Strand, 2014; Askin & Mol, 2018).

I, myself, have seen this rapid rise of AEDM within the Netherlands and its spread globally. Working within the AEDM scene as both a producer and DJ, I have seen its spread amongst Netherlands based artists and have myself, questioned its authentic representation within the Netherlands. Witnessing events where this music is played alongside other genres such as hip hop, melodic house, techno and afrobeats, I questioned whether an artist that spans a variety of genres considers whether they themselves as well as the music they play, and produce can be considered authentic. I recognize that although culture plays a huge part in most literature regarding the authenticity of music and genre, for the scope and feasibility of this thesis, it will be omitted, and instead be looked at for further avenues of research within this topic. Instead, the concepts of genre and niche, category spanning, and authenticity will be used to tackle the central thesis question of: *how do Netherlands based, African Electronic Dance Music artists perceive of authenticity in the context of category spanning?* This research aims to study the rise of AEDM within the Netherlands due to the aforementioned globalisation and how the artists in the country that produce and DJ the music perceives both themselves, and the variety of genres they are involved in, within the context of authenticity. To this end, the concepts of niche and genre will determine the growth of AEDM within the Netherlands as well as examine the marketplace and competition that encapsulates it. By examining these concepts, a basis will be formed wherein we can analyse the current standing of AEDM as the Respondents see it, on top of which the rest of the research will follow. Following this, category spanning and its relationship to music and genre will be used to examine how and why producers choose to category span as well as the consequences of this spanning. Due to the rise of the 'cultural omnivore' alongside the ease of access to music resulting from globalization, category spanning artists are a natural side effect. This concept builds on top genre and niche as an examination into how these genres and niches (of AEDM) lend themselves towards category spanning. Examining this phenomenon of blending AEDM with a variety of other genres will help the further analysis of authenticity in this context, which then finally leads to the final concept of authenticity. Once again, due to its subjectiveness and vast academic nature, concepts of authenticity and its relation to both music and category spanning will be used. This will then be compared to the results to see how the findings of this paper relate to the existing literature.

Given how vast and complex the nature of authenticity is, this paper aims to fill in the most glaring gap surrounding authenticity and its relationship with music. This gap is associated with the subjects of study. In most previous literature, the study is conducted

from the view of the audience and from critics. There is little work surrounding how the artists themselves view authenticity, both in their work, as well as personally. Furthermore, how this view of authenticity relates back towards category spanning. Despite authenticity and category spanning having pre-existing literature (as will be seen later in the theoretical framework), this will be the first work where this relationship is viewed both from the eyes of the producers themselves, but also specifically within the context of AEDM. This leads to the next issue regarding gaps in academic literature: there is almost none surrounding the rise of AEDM on a global scale. Granted, this is a fairly new phenomenon, however, trying to find studies surrounding the spread and growth of African music transnationally is akin to looking for water in an arid desert. My hope is that this research will spark future literature surrounding this topic. Being South African and working within the music industry, this topic is close to my heart, and it pains me to see severe lack of study. From a societal standpoint, it is clear that authenticity is the linchpin of modern-day music commercialisation. Furthermore, as we begin to move towards a genre-less world, the concept of category spanning and music will increasingly gain popularity. Through this research, artists will be able to identify how their contemporaries view authenticity and can accordingly adjust their own methods and views to align with those of their peers. Given how interconnected the global music space is, it makes sense that artists will want to work with those that share similar values, and through this work they can see the range of these values. Additionally, category spanning is a concept that is not unique towards the music industry but is rather studied across a variety of professions. The same manner in which this paper uses literature from other professional fields, it should relate across various careers. By examining how producers navigate the complex world of category spanning, they have the possibility to draw inspiration to use within their own careers. Finally, audiences and critics will gain insight into how producers view authenticity within these contexts, opening up their own views on the matter.

The layout of this paper will precede as follows. To begin, a theoretical framework that outlines the concepts of genre, niche, category spanning and authenticity will provide a groundwork on which the rest of the research shall be based; a methodological section, outlining why qualitative, semi-structured interviews was chosen; the sampling methods and criteria that were used in determining why the Respondents were chosen; the operationalization of the concepts outlined within the theoretical framework and how they are measured; the data collection process; and finally the data analysis process.

Theoretical Framework

Niche and Genre

To tackle the issue of how African Electronic Dance Music (AEDM) artists maintain authenticity whilst also integrating various cultural influences, it is important to first tackle the concepts of niche and genre. These concepts deal with the inner workings of music from their development and progression to the interplay between the producers and the space they occupy within the market. The creation of a niche and genre is due to external influence derived from creators that form new boundaries and standards, in the same breath, each new iteration of these concepts both allow and disallow further experimentation and reorganization into new niches and genres. To deal in AEDM is to deal with the result of a variety of different combination and recombination's of pre-existing culture. As such to examine how to remain authentic within this field, it is pertinent to first discuss how fields such as this come to be.

Niche

Simply defined, a niche is a producer-centric concept that explains a competitive market space created through producer action (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 390). Throughout literature, there are three main approaches to define the niche, organizational ecology, marketing, and economics. Organizational ecology defines niches as self-sufficient product that can sustain a given population (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p.390; Bagley et al., 2022, p. 428). The number of resources needed to sustain this population (niche width) is then measured against the amount of overlap in resource competition with competing niches (niche overlap). Naturally, generalist organizations require a larger number of resources and thus have a larger niche width, however, they also have a greater niche overlap when compared to those in the periphery. The marketing approach sees niche as customers and individuals with similar characteristics and needs operating within a small market (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p 390). Through this approach niches need to be profitable, with the potential to grow and through the accumulated goodwill of their audience, provide barriers to entry from competitors (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, 390). Finally, economists see niches as market participantss consisting of both producers and consumers that may or may not compete.

Bagley et al. (2022) incorporate elements from each of these three approaches, which all have producers at their centre, and build upon this concept by including the element of collaboration. Through a continuous process of variety integration, their definition of niche is the result of a final realisation of what works and what doesn't (Bagley et al., 2022, p.

429). Innovators in existing markets have new ideas from previous experience and the culmination of these ideas result in the niche. High creativity requires a wider breadth of knowledge acquisition through various social and geographic dimensions, which requires artists to deviate from existing methods. The culmination of these various collaborative and explorative actions encompasses the niche. Anand & Croidieu (2013) implicitly agree with this definition through their examination of the evolution of niches. As a market mainstream grows overtime, segments of their audience become alienated, thus opening up space for producers to cater to these emerging needs (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 331). The collaborative actions of the recombination of ideas, naturally positions itself for the participation of new producers.

The use of niche in this paper will be vital to understand how artists use and combine ideas from both AEDM and other cultural influences to create new niches. How they create and combine new ideas will also determine how far away they stray from the authenticity by which they measure AEDM.

Genre

As with niches, genre can be linked to three methodological approaches when looking for its definition, the sociological approach, humanities approach and musicology approach. The musicology approach is perhaps the simplest, merely seeing genre as classes of artwork that share common stylistic elements (Silver et al., 2016, p. 2). The humanities approach builds upon this definition by looking at the context in which genre is consumed and creates, seeing genre as pieces of art that share a distinctive musical language (Silver et al., 2016, p. 2). These two approaches culminate in the sociological approach that differentiates the elements of the art and classifies them into sociocultural contexts themselves (Silver et al., 2016, p. 2; Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 698). As perhaps the most widely used definition of genre, this removes various musical elements and instead focuses on expectations, interactions and conflict. This is not to say that sonic qualities play no part in the separation of genre, rather that genres can share structural similarities and differences with sonically unrelated genres, and that each genre exists relationally within a higher-order complex of diverse genre forms. As a result, genre is seen as the ‘social context of production, regulation, consumption, appreciation, and preservation of forms of cultural experiences’ (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 334). Whereas niches look solely at the role of the producer within its definition, genre includes the consumers, critics, performers and producers in its scope.

The concepts of niche and genre collide when talking about their evolution and differentiation. There are six key factors that shape genre: technological changes and advancements, changes in laws and regulation, the evolution of the industry, a mix of organisational structures within an industry, prior trajectories of those entering into an industry, and the emergence of new methods for market understanding (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 334 – 335). The differentiation of genres can exist both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal differentiation refers to the emergence of new genres from pre-existing ones, which results in constraints towards genre practitioners as each genre is inherently codified with implicit rules and regulations (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 336). Vertical differentiation on the other hand, focus less on consumption and more on the context of consumption creating distinction between high and low culture. The rise of new genres, whether through horizontal or vertical differentiation causes tensions as they begin to compete for various resources such as fans, capital and legitimacy (Lena & Peterson, 2008), p. 699). Over the course of time a ‘parent’ genre will eventually create a family of variants that retain cohesion through these shared resources, these sets of genres are referred to as ‘streams’ (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 699). AEDM for the purposes of this paper will be refer to the stream of genres encompassing amapiano, afrohouse, gqom and three step.

The magnitude of the differentiation of these genres give rise to their ability to transcend boundaries set by each other. Less differentiated fields tend to give birth to genres with a greater opposition that require more commitment. This is due to its proximity to its parent genre and can be deemed inauthentic by its practitioners (Silver et al., 2016, p.3). Conversely, larger differentiation gives rise to genres that need not respect previous existing boundaries. However, as the number of genres increases and theoretically approach infinity, their classifications become meaningless functionally erasing the boundaries and rules that constrain behaviour due to greater and lesser differentiated streams (Silver et al., 2016, p.3). This trend of increasing genres is due to dynamic density (Silver et al., 2016, p.4). The rise of technology is reducing distance between genres as international communication stimulates collaboration and communication between practitioners. As such, their point of reference for evaluating themselves slowly expand. The final result of this lends heavily towards the sociological approach to genre definitions as the breakdown of genre classifications are replaced by social indicators of personal taste and preference (Silver et al., 2016, p.4).

Genre classification is not without its uses. Artists and consumers alike use genre to help align resource allocation, identity formation, and personal relationships, whether they be for collaboration, advertising, or personal experience (Silver et al., 2016, p. 4)

. As such, genre can be divided into 4 forms: avant-garde, scene-based, industry based, and traditionalist (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p. 335; Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 702). Avant-garde is the first stage whereby small impromptu circles are formed for the sole purpose of experimentation and new music creation. Often short lived as the genre will either dissipate or members within will reach success branching off more successful variations of the genre (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 701). From here, the genre becomes scene based. In this form local scenes begin codifying technical innovations with the purpose to begin creating community. Attention is given to the codification style and much of the associated coverage is done within from the community itself. It is in this form where the genre name develops through the community and the media generated from it (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 703). The third form of industry occurs when the genre becomes an established field. Priority shifts away from innovation towards standardization. In this form the main goal of its practitioners is that of revenue production as the genre becomes market driven. It begins receiving national press coverage and its performance conventions are shaped through the industry (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p.703). As a genre ages it moves into the traditional form, whereby members' goals shift towards preservation. As such deviation from previous performance conventions are frowned upon and technological orthodoxy is preferred over advancement (Lena & Peterson, 2008, 704). Within the Netherlands, the stream of AEDM is largely scene-based, approaching that of industry-based. Although not covered through national press, the standardized conventions and technological requirements are firmly placed within the industry form.

Category Spanning

The act of category spanning as a producer entails the claim of membership across a variety of different categories and classifications (Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 252). These classification systems/categories are conceptual tools which audiences use to delineate a variety of different products into shared understandings (Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 685; Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 252; Shi et al., 2018, p. 2). In the field of music, these categories are called genres. As was discussed briefly in the previous sections, categories (genres) serve a variety of different purposes, from audience understanding, to an artist's identity. We have also discussed how through the spanning of these categories, there has been a rise of new and interesting genres. This section will elaborate on these concepts and examine the ease of which producers span categories as well as the effect of category spanning. It will entail an examination of categories and their boundaries, market effects, and how these apply to a

variety of different subfields. It will help develop this research by examining how AEDM producers span the variety of different genres within which they are based, why they span these categories and the different approaches used to avoid negative backlash when spanning these categories.

Producer vs Audience

The central finding among scholars when discussing category spanning is that producers who do so, almost always suffer some form of negative backlash (Shi et al., 2018, p. 2; Kovacs & Hanna, 2015, p. 256; Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684; Van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 1; Keuschnigg & Wimmer, 2017, p. 449). This is due to two mechanisms; the producer-side mechanism; and the audience-side mechanism (Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 255). The producer-side mechanism concerns itself with the skills and learning required for the various categories they exist within (the jack of all trades effect) (Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 255; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684). The act of category spanning has difficulties associated towards developing the required skills when compared to that of specialists within a single category, and producers rarely succeed in mastering both (Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 255). These operational difficulties run the risk of producing product of a lower quality across the various categories (Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684). Additionally, producers that do not neatly fall within conventional categories tend to confuse critics and audience members as they do not have a perceptual fit. This has been seen across multiple industries such as film, wine, books and cuisine (Shi et al, 2018, p. 2). The audience side mechanism relates to the audience perception of producers that span multiple categories. Firstly, relating to the jack of all trade's theory, despite best efforts and mastery by producers, they have difficulty convincing audience members of this and the 'master of none' rule trumps their actual ability (Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 256). Secondly, when objects span multiple categories, audiences struggle to make sense of said objects. These difficulties of interpretations impede the legitimacy of objects, could violate various cultural codes allowing for devaluation, and can manifest among audiences through the uncertainty of widely spread classification codes (ven Vanrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684; Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 255). These two factors do not exist in isolation and most likely co-occur. Genre that exists far apart from each other most likely require difficult skills to master, producers that attempt this most like do not succeed in the same way a specialist would, this affects audience perceptions and can cause confusion leading to

devaluation as they prefer easy to grasp objects (Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 256).

The sociological study of music provides additional reasons as to this negative backlash from category spanning. This study relates closely to the concepts addressed within genre. Systems of classification within music (genres) create various communities within which producers collaborate, and within which producers are limited due to various factors such as identity, social class and cultural attachments. Because of this audience within those genres have certain expectations which impose penalties to those that attempt to blend multiple genres together (Shi et al., 2018, p. 2). However, despite these penalizations, cross-category innovations have been the main driving force in the development of new genres. Creativity within the music field is highly valued by consumers and eclectic artists are praised by critics. For this reason, it is also likely that category spanning producers in the music field are not always penalized but rather rewarded. The distinction between penalization and reward is hard to determine, however, the distance between genres and fuzziness/porousness (aka category contrast) of the genres being spanning plays a large role in this differentiation.

Boundary Porousness

Since not all objects fall neatly into a single category, categories themselves do not have clearly defined boundaries, leading objects to have partial membership to various categories (van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 1). With this in mind, classification boundaries are rarely clearly defined and are constantly in flux (van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 685). The strength of these boundaries is referred to as boundary fuzziness/porousness. Continual spanning of objects tends to weaken the boundaries of their classifications leading to porous/fuzzy boundaries. Producers of objects between categories with porous boundaries tend to be less penalized than producers that span categories with strict boundaries and can be labelled and innovation, potentially giving rise to new categories (Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 254; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Schi et al., 2018, p. 4). On the other hand, producers in categories with low porous boundaries where producers tend not to traverse them, lead to a strong consensus as to what considered 'authentic' behaviour within that genre (Schi et al., 2018, p. 5). This distinction aligns with the difference between the various stages of genre development, with Avant Garde genres often being that with low porous boundaries which are often traversed vs Traditional genres whereby the customs and traditions have been ingrained leading to low porous boundaries and preservation of authenticity.

Despite boundary porousness, the distance between the categories (category contrast) also plays a big role as to which genres can be spanned. Categories with stronger codes have a higher grade of membership (GoM) whereby practitioners are seen as full-fledged members of said categories and have higher contrast within their boundaries (Schi et al., 2018, p. 3; van Venrooij & Schmutz, p. 3). The opposite reigns true with low contrast categories having low GoM and belonging to multiple categories. The penalty associated with spanning genres is higher for producers that exist within high contrast categories as they have strongly codified schema (patterns of attributes and social ties), and result in stronger code-clashes and confusion (Schi et al., 2018, p. 3; Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 256 – 257; van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2018, p. 3). This is why genres that are culturally distant or are highly institutionalized are rarely spanned. Conversely, low contrast genres are already ambiguous by nature, therefore spanning them adds less ambiguity and penalty from audiences. It is due to this contrast and existing schema that we are able to distinguish genre by sound, lyrics, class, and race. Members that span these high contrasting genres, are not granted full GoM into said genre due to lack of conformity to and are generally dismissed by audiences (Schi et al., 2018, p. 3).

Authenticity

Authenticity has no singular definition as authors in various different fields each give their own definitions and criteria towards the theory of authenticity resulting in a vast branching network of different ideas surrounding the topic (Nunes et al., 2021; Peterson, 2005). Due to this I will be presenting a variety of different interpretations of authenticity and how they relate towards music, genre and category spanning respectively. These ideas of authenticity interlink with one another in various ways and will be the cornerstone of this research. It will examine what is deemed as authentic within the music industry, as well as how authenticity can be portrayed and developed whilst category spanning. This is the culmination of the two above sections as it provides the most crucial concepts needed to answer the research question.

What is authenticity within Music?

To begin, we will first dissect the work done by Moore (2002) and Strand (2014) to understand the interplay between their work and its impact on the perceptions of authenticity with regards towards the music industry. Both authors agree that authenticity is not associated merely with combinations of musical sounds, but rather through interpretations

made by the stakeholders within the industry, whether they be producers themselves, critics, or consumers/audiences. This puts authenticity as a concept that is ascribed from cultural, historical, economic and social conditions and requires contextual judgements which results in the representation as to what is deemed authentic, more real than the reality of authenticity (Moore, 2002, p. 210; Strand, 2014, p. 60). This contextual background is further reinforced by Askin and Mol (2018), as they highlight the need for institutionalized boundaries to ground claims on whether or not something 'belongs' within said context, thus making it authentic (p. 179). Without these boundaries, there would be no need to social actors to maintain and uphold the measure of authenticity, making the entire process inconsequential on an economical, social and artistic level (Asking and Mol, 2018, p. 179). These social actors that confer authenticity towards an object is spread across multiple stakeholders within the industry, namely the artists themselves, critics and tastemakers, and audiences. Due to this variation in the responsibly of authenticity delineation, I will be discussing a number of different methods of authentication, each of which apply to a different stakeholder.

Strand (2014) developed a worth based approach to authenticity that provide a framework into which all the various different approaches to this topic can fall into. This approach is predicated on the development of a 'test' by which objects and performers need to pass in order to be deemed as authentic (Strand, 2014, p. 62). This test entails an open ended, genre specific set of criteria that pins domestic and inspiration worth against commercial worth (Strand, 2014, p. 63), with domestic worth referring to all things traditional and cultural; inspiration worth relating to emotion, passion in creation, and uniqueness; and finally commercial worth being monetary gain. Moore's (2002) seminal work on the three different distinctions of authenticity can then be applied to this domestic and inspiration vs commerce test. The first of which (first person authenticity), focuses on the idea of the audiences interpretations of artist (producer) expression (Moore, 2002, p. 214). This idea bases itself on the integrity of the producer with regards to their intention. Validation from this form of authenticity revolves around the distance between a current action and a relevant earlier authentic practice (Moore, 2002, p. 212), as well as their unwillingness to 'sell out' whether that be for commercial gain or to transform the sonic qualities of the music to appeal to a wider audience (p. 213). In this sense, audiences associate authenticity not only towards the actions themselves, but towards the practitioner of these actions. This element can be seen as the inspiration worth when compared to Strand's (2014) work.

The second aspect of domestic worth (Strand, 2014) can be compared to Moore's

(2002, p. 214-218) concept of third person authenticity. This subset of authenticity is achieved through a producer's ability to express the ideas, cultures, and traditions from which the genre originated, accurately within their performances and produced objects (Moore, 2002, p. 218). To accomplish this, producers are marked by social and subjective authenticity of audiences, by which the audience validates them through the judgement of their acts as legitimate within a particular category (Moore, 2002, p. 214). The most crucial aspect towards the attainment of this third person authenticity is that of the distance between their appropriation (global expressions) of the genre and that of local expressions of culture (Moore, 2002, p. 214). This is due to the fact that the producer does not act in isolation, instead, their production necessitates not only an audience, but also predecessors on which their contemporary practices are built. Authenticity in this form is closely linked towards first person authenticity as the relation between the producer and their audience allows their expression to be authenticated directly with that producer, linking them to community and tradition. Having a cultural, conceptual or historical point of origin makes the process of building third person authenticity possible (Moore, 2002, p. 216).

The final variation of authenticity is that of commerce worth (Strand, 2014) which is encapsulated by Moore (2002, p. 218 -220) as second person authenticity. By dealing with authentic vs commercial debate, both Moore and Strand come to the conclusion that having commerce worth is no less valuable than other forms of authentication. All mass-mediated music is subject to an audience and through those commercial incentives, thus deeming music that aims to be commercial as inauthentic redundant (Moore, 2002, p. 218). When looking at this aspect, authentication is given not based on the integrity of a producer, or their ties to a historical or cultural paradigm, but rather in their ability to articulate to their listeners (Moore, 2002, p. 218). This articulation can be in the forms of a sense of belonging, or in the ability to be able to separate someone from other cultural forms due to hegemonic groupings. It allows audiences the sense of cultural identity as it (according to said audiences) has no apparent history (Moore, 2002, p. 219). Authentication in this form is strongest when a producer can validate their audiences experience of life.

How can authenticity be garnered when spanning categories?

The above analysis of authenticity relates solely to producers that exist within single genres. When the complexity of category spanning is introduced, there are additional factors that come into play affecting the understanding of authenticity. As has been established, categories provide a set of collectively agreed upon normative values and rules by which the

producers within are judged. Through this an audience member is able to classify producers into categories based on their set of core features. Certain categories have stronger rules by which producers have to adhere to in order to be deemed authentic and as such, producers that span multiple categories have the adverse effect of being perceived as inauthentic. Within music however, this penalty for category spanning and innovation is not always as harsh when compared to other industries. The following section aims to explain why this phenomenon occurs.

First and foremost, producers that span multiple categories (hereafter hybrid producers) have the ability to shape their narrative by grounding them in categorical logics (Alexiou, 2024, p. 2). By virtue of being a hybrid producer and combining various categorical logics, it logically follows that they may have conflicting audience expectations as well as be constrained by the varying values and norms of the categories they exist in. By strategically positioning themselves, hybrid producers can adopt the narrative that they are both a legitimate member of a dominant categorical logic, while at the same time differentiate themselves from their competition (Alexiou, 2024, p. 3). Through this process, the hybrid category that they exist in can eventually become institutionalized thus granting them authenticity. This process, however, is delicate and revolves around varying stages of authentication such and has categorical obstacles that may prevent its success.

The first obstacle encountered by hybrid producer is type authenticity (Alexiou, 2024, p. 4; Mattsson et al., 2010, p. 1358). This authenticity revolves around the strictness by which producers align with existing practices and values within a category (Mattsson et al., 2010, p. 1358). Since hybrid producers aim to exist within multiple categories they have audience perception issues towards their authenticity. To circumvent this issue, hybrid producers begin by determining a dominant category and emulating their schema to determine legitimacy (Alexiou, 2024, p. 4). After this legitimization is complete, they will begin adding elements from the other categories of which they wish to span, leading audiences to believe that other members within this dominant category will also exhibit these traits of hybridization. Through the introduction of these new elements, they will also set themselves apart from their competition, displaying a distinctiveness that brings about legitimacy in and of itself (Alexiou, 2024, p. 4). By going down this route, hybrid producers prime cognitive legitimacy from their audiences. This type of legitimacy is a passive undertaking from audiences, which allow them to categorize producers based on the audience's pre-existing knowledge. This cannot be done if hybrid-producers begin by immediately positioning themselves within two distinct dominant categories as audience have no frame of reference in which to place the producer (Alexiou, 2023, p. 5). Audiences

need familiarity, and it is easier for a hybrid producer to be deemed authentic when this authenticity spills over into their hybridization from dominant categorical institutions. This can also be achieved through third party platforms such as critics and tastemakers.

Should this fail, the second obstacle arises, whereby audiences engage in an active evaluation of authenticity, whereby they measure a hybrid producers pragmatic and moral legitimacy before granting them authentication (Alexiou, 2024, p. 5; Mattson et al., 2010, p. 1359). These forms of authentication look at a producer's actions and whether they are acting in the interest of their audiences (Pragmatic authenticity), or whether their action align with an underlying moral justification as to what is desirable, appropriate, or simple just 'the right thing to do' within that given context (Alexious, 2024, p. 5; Mattsson et al., 2010, p. 1539). Whereas pragmatic authenticity focuses on audiences' self-interest, moral authenticity incorporates cultural values and a producers conformity to those values. As can be seen, this relates closely with Moore's (2002) concept of first person and third person authenticity, however, in the context of hybrid producers, it only occurs should the passive assessment of cognitive authenticity not be valid. Should a hybrid producer be easily categorised audiences forego this step of authentication. The ability to build both pragmatic and moral authenticity is crucial for hybrid producers in overcoming the penalties of category spanning as overtime these active processes of authentication lead towards the implementation of cognitive legitimacy.

Methodology

General Description of the Research Design and the Methods Used

Where quantitative research has a focus on being systematic, precise and accurate to determine objective causal relationships between variables, qualitative research instead focuses on the use of language to interpret and understand peoples' experiences and place it in the larger theoretical realm of academia (Brennen, 2017, p, 4). With a focus on 'meaningful relationships to be interpreted' this form of research is better suited to tackle the topic of this research. Given that the concepts used are highly up to individual interpretation, qualitative research allows an in depth understanding of how AEDM artists experiencing in tackling the highly interpretable concept of authenticity in their careers. Given that reality is largely a social construction, the idea of what people deem as authentic varies wildly between individuals as can be seen within this research. With no availability to an objective truth, quantitative research will not be able to provide a full understanding of this topic in the same way qualitative research can. These above reasons will allow the facilitation of conversation between the researcher and Respondents, to gain an understanding of their worldviews and day to day struggles in their approach to authenticity in its relation to category spanning.

To facilitate the use of qualitative research, the use of semi-structured interviews will be used. Using interviews over focus groups and content analysis allows for the gathering of large amounts of in-depth, relevant information (Brennen, 2017, p. 28). This will allow for the understanding of more nuanced topics within the context of the Respondents individual experiences. Differences in experiences between each of the Respondents is the primary reason why semi structured interviews has been selected for this research. A strict interview guide will not allow for the catering towards each individual experience. Instead, a rough outline of questions aimed to target the main points identified in research will be used. Once each Respondent begun speaking on their experiences, probing was used to gently extract information. The biggest concern regarding this process has been my own influence and knowledge on the topic, given that I myself work within the AEDM scene as an artist. Being a double-edged blade, this also meant that I had to avoid not asking question I would have previous biases and assumptions on, and instead focusing entirely on the experience of the Respondents from the ground up.

Why did I opt for my data analysis method? (to be completed following the full analysis of data – currently leaning towards thematic analysis but also considering grounded theory)

Sample & Sampling Methods

This research was founded on expert interviews from industry professionals in the Netherlands. Each of the Respondents collected for this sample had to be living in the Netherlands and had to have their musical foundation in AEDM. This alone was not enough, each artist had to be involved in at least one other genre (either another AEDM stream genre or a genre that lies outside this spectrum). If they were only involved within one genre they were disqualified as there would be no way to measure the category spanning aspect of the research and how authenticity relates to this. Furthermore, given issues of feasibility, no other factors such as age, education level, nationality, and organization were considered. There are not many artists in the Netherlands that meet these requirements and each of the Respondents gathered for this research are at the peak of their career and experts within this field. Many potential Respondents have been eliminated from this study due to being unable to meet the aforementioned criteria.

To collect the Respondents for interviews, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling entails strict evaluation from the researcher in order to find Respondents that would be best suited to fit the corresponding research (Emmel, 2013). Used specifically when information rich cases are needed to facilitate in depth research, cases are chosen on their ability to fit the purpose of the study (Emmel, 2013). Alongside this, it is deemed the most viable option, given research whereby Respondents are not easily found and therefore have to be handpicked. Given my inexperience as a researcher, I have gone above and beyond to ensure that I overly saturate my interviewee list to ensure that the final Respondents used for this study are the most credible for this research. Hence, Respondents that I have deemed inefficient were eventually cut from the list of Respondents. The selection process was in-depth, and additional factors such as whether or not their category spanning of genres was sufficient, whether they were involved in different enough genres to be able to give insight into their experience, as well as their experience in the field, were taken into consideration to ensure the highest quality of data.

The size of the data set totalled seven Respondents each of which live within the Netherlands and play a variety of different sounds with their main focus being that of AEDM. The list of Respondents and their information are compiled within the table below. There were several practical limitations that came up during the collection of Respondents. The first limitation is the sample population of people that meet the criteria are very low. Most people that play AEDM generally stick to a single genre and had to be eliminated from the sample. Secondly, not everyone that was originally scouted had enough experience to provide reliable information for this study. With these two limitations in mind, these

Respondents would be classified as experts within their field and this category of research. Additionally, due to the large range of alternative genres that exist within the AEDM stream, some leniencies had to be applied. Due to this, the research also shifts across the various streams of AEDM and how they interplay with other genres and themselves with regards to category spanning. Given the rare selection of AEDM artists in the Netherlands currently, this attributes towards the limitations to this research, but opens up the idea of more specialized research in the future, should these genres continue to grow.

| Respondent | Age | AEDM Genres | Genre Spanning | City of Residence |
|--------------|-----|---|--|--------------------------|
| Respondent 1 | 30 | Amapiano, South African Deep house, Afrohouse, Afrotech, Three Step | Techno | Rotterdam, Netherlands |
| Respondent 2 | 36 | Gqom, Afrohouse, Afrotech | Baile Funk, underground, global electronic | Amsterdam, Netherlands |
| Respondent 3 | 34 | Afro House, Afrotech, Amapiano | Melodic House, Melodic Techno | Rotterdam, Netherlands |
| Respondent 4 | 40 | Gqom, Amapiano, Afrotech, Afrohouse | hip hop, dancehall, reggae, ambient | Amsterdam, Netherlands |
| Respondent 5 | 33 | Amapiano, Afrohouse, Afrotech | Melodic House | Hellendoorn, Netherlands |
| Respondent 6 | 40 | Afrohouse, Afrotech, | Techno, Melodic House, Ambient | Rotterdam, Netherlands |
| Respondent 7 | 29 | Amapiano, Afrohouse, Three Step, Gqom | Hip hop, Baile Funk, House, Trap | Heemstede, Netherlands |

Operationalization

Niche & Genre

Niche and genre are crucial to understanding the latter concept category spanning.

Niche provides us with a competitive marketplace by which the Respondents will place themselves, leading towards to the overlaps between their contemporaries across the various genres with which they associate themselves. When looking into understanding the Respondents reflection of their competition and who they deem as non-competitors, an insight into the various niche widths and overlap will develop. Furthermore, we will be able to see whether they believe the niches they exist within are profitable and sustainable, as well as various collaborative endeavours that help grow and support their niche.

Genre on the other hand lends itself directly towards the concept of category spanning. Having insights into how the Respondents regard the genres they play/produce, as well as how they see the progression and difference between various genres will contribute towards the understanding of how they traverse these genres. Additionally, given the large range of AEDM, by exploring the group of genres associated with that label, Respondents can provide insights into its development. By looking into the position of AEDM according to the spectrum provided by (INSERT REFERENCE), we will be able to place this stream within context as to what the focus of the Respondents are and how it aligns with the genre's growth. These two topics are vital to the research as they are the foundation on which category spanning and authenticity are built.

Category Spanning

Niche and genre provide the introduction to categories and allows this section to be dedicated towards why and how the Respondents choose to span these categories. This will require introspective questioning which will allow the Respondents to discuss how they think they exist within each genre and how they navigate branching between these genres. The biggest finding regarding negative backlash from traversing various genres will be at the centre of the questioning and whether Respondents feel that this is true within their careers. Following questions will revolve around whether they believe this comes from their ability to exist within all these categories, or whether audience perceptions disallow them from doing this, thus covering both the producer-side and audience-side mechanisms outlined in the theoretical framework.

Category contrast and distance will also be discussed through the relationship between the genres within which they exist, whether they believe audiences allow them to traverse these genres, and the ease of which they are able to accomplish category spanning within their field. Their perception of sonic and cultural qualities that are shared between the genres they exist in will give insights into understanding the genre fuzziness and when coupled with category contrast and distance, a full overview of category spanning will

slowly be developed. The greatest difficulty in this section is the fact that category spanning mostly focuses on an audience perception. Therefore, the interviews will have to be focused on how these artists view themselves through their audience engagement and interactions and through that the various different strategies they employ to traverse this complicated topic.

Authenticity

Authenticity suffers from the same problems as category spanning in the sense that it is widely researched from the perspective of consumers and audiences. To tackle this issue, the same mindset will be used as with category spanning, in the sense that the questions will have to be catered around how the Respondents view authenticity in their own regard, and how these perceptions and strategies might align with those of the audience. The key concepts needed to be covered revolve around whom within authenticity lies, as well as the measures Respondents take to ensure their authenticity (if they deem it necessary). Once again, the strategies which the Respondents use to ensure audience perspectives are aligned with their own will be a big topic of conversation. How cognitive authenticity applies to them and how they navigate ensuring moral and pragmatic authenticity will provide us insights into whether they think first, second, or third person, authenticity is more important.

Alongside these questions the revolve around authenticity in the very nature of category spanning were crucial. How they are able to navigate various genres, as hybrid producers and their understanding of the risks and rewards associated with this. Type and pragmatic authenticity regarding their strategies to imbue the audience with the sense of their own legitimacy and how they navigate between genres to ensure they do not come across or are plagued with feelings of inauthenticity was critical to this study. The questions following this section were focused on audience response and engagement, their perceptions on how their contemporaries display authenticity in their work and how this relates back to the Respondents own ideals on authenticity, cultural understandings of the music they play and how this factors into authenticity, differences in authenticity between the various genres they explore, and strategies used to hamper negatively perceived effects.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process involved identifying the relevant Respondents, setting a date and time for the interview, then after the online interview conducted via zoom, a transcription of the interview via otter.ai, and the analysis process began shortly after. There were a variety of technical and organizational issues that were managed to allow for this

process. Firstly, since it was done over zoom, many interviewees did not have their camera on, meaning that body language, hand gestures, and associated nuances of conversation could not be taken into account. They had to be explicit in the way they spoke and the questions that were asked. Not all Respondents had Zoom, so it was imperative to ensure each of them had no issues downloading the app and making sure they were comfortable using it. A stable internet connection was critical. There were moments where the call would drop, and we needed to backtrack the interview a couple of sentences to ensure everything was captured. This brought about the unfortunate effect of some Respondents losing their train of thought.

However, having the interviews conducted this way meant more flexibility for the Respondents. With all of them working over weekends and in the evenings, their schedules were full, and they didn't always want to meet face to face. This flexibility and comfort to conduct the interviews in their homes and personal spaces allowed for a more colloquial style of interviews. Additionally, given my own position in the AEDM scene, a lot of the Respondents I would consider co-workers and colleagues, resulting in a double-edged blade. On one hand, they were extremely comfortable talking to me about the nuances of the research, however, on the other hand, I needed to ensure that they didn't skip any important information on the basis that I have a pre-existing, in depth knowledge of the topic. So, although I was able to probe more on topics due to my understanding, I had to be extremely reflexive in my questioning to ensure that the topic was covered from the ground up.

Prior to each interview, Respondents were briefed on the aim of the research. They were told that it is regarding the authenticity of AEDM within the Netherlands and how the relationship between this authenticity and the spanning of various genres. Each interview began by asking the Respondents for the consent to record the interview and use their responses within this research, as well as basic information such as age, city of residence and genre associations. The goal of each interview was to get the Respondents unique views on the current status of AEDM in the Netherlands in term of the niche within which they exist, how they interplay with each other in terms of genre and the 'external' genres they play and produce, how each Respondent navigates the spanning of these different genres and how they maintain authenticity within this endeavour.

The interview questions followed this method as it was the most efficient way to go about the interview. By first understanding the space and competition (niche), followed by the differences and similarities between the genres (genre), how they blend these genres (category spanning), and finally how authenticity is portrayed across all of these different fields (authenticity). To accommodate each area, questions were specifically catered to the

Respondents. The semi-structured interview guide has been attached as an appendix to this paper, with each line of questioning laid plainly under the concept they relate to. A lot of the questions were open questions and in-depth probing was done. Each question was asked slightly different compared to each Respondent to build off previous answers and experiences.

Data analysis

A combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews. Thematic analysis, which is often ubiquitous with qualitative research, was chosen as it most aptly allows for the discovery of emerging patterns of behaviour and the generation of theories around that behaviour (Bailey, 2018, p. 2). An understanding of the complex behaviour of AEDM artists is critical for this research and to provide thick descriptions of meaning making activities, thematic analysis fits best. The use of deductive analysis was done initially to compare the actions and thoughts of the Respondents with that of the pre-existing literature covered in the theoretical framework. The previous research analysed was done in accordance with the view on genre and popular music category spanning. Given that the interview questions were also generated according to the previous literature, it seems intuitive that there would be similarities in the lines of thinking of the Respondents and what is contained in the theoretical framework. However, outside of these commonalities, it can also be presumed that, because the previous literature is focused almost exclusively from the perspective of the audience, the Respondents themselves might have different experiences in this context. Due to this, inductive analysis was also completed after the fact, to accommodate and discover new, underlying theories. This combination of both deductive and inductive analysis allowed me to both reconcile the research with that of previous scholars, as well as discover new understandings of the topic that have not been previously thought of or discussed.

Following the transcription of the interviews, each of them was loading into Atlas.ti which is the program that was used for the coding process. The coding process closely followed that recommended by Bailey (2018). In this process, the goal was to identify two different sets of themes: topical themes and conceptual themes. Topical themes consist of those that are easily identified based on recurring events discussed by multiple Respondents, whereas contextual themes encompass those that are not explicitly stated by the Respondents and could be considered 'underlying' or 'overarching' themes (Bailey, 2018, p. 3).

To begin the analysis process, deductive analysis was conducted initially. This was done as the concepts and themes have already been identified and just needed to be placed in

the context of the research. Following this inductive analysis was done to find and highlight new emerging themes. The coding process for each were starkly different from one another. For example, for the deductive analysis, the overall concepts of niche, genre, category spanning, and authenticity were identified in the data and coded. Once the bulk of the data was organised into these various codes, each of them was then sub-divided into further axial codes, such as niche width, genre contrast, category spanning strategies, and first-person authenticity. Follow this axial coding, codes were cross referenced against each other to find similarities and differences within each other to determine which codes can concepts can be grouped into the themes that are discussed in the results section. This process is perhaps less traditional than the regular process whereby you begin with large amounts of open codes then condense them through the axial and selective coding process. However, given that it was deductive, and it was used to compare the current research with that of previous literature, it felt necessary to do it in this manner.

For inductive analysis on the other hand, there was no pre-existing literature to determine how to begin this coding process. Instead, the process followed more traditional coding, whereby thoughts and ideas were jotted down alongside the data, resulting in far more codes for the open coding process. These thoughts and ideas were then corralled into like groups, and outliers were identified. Like groups then became the foundation for the axial coding process where the groups were given more appropriate codes for cleaner organization. This also allowed the selective coding process to begin. Each axial code was cross referenced against each other to determine which codes would be best suited into a single theme. Since this process was inductive, it took far longer and more complicated than the deductive analysis.

The entire process took several readings of the data, and upon each reading new codes and themes began to emerge. It was an extremely reflexive process, and oftentimes when the selective coding had been completed, on successive readings, new open and axial codes were identified, causing a backtrack to begin the process again with the new codes in mind. Atlas.ti came in handy during this process as I was able to clearly see what segments of the data were coded into the various codes, it also allowed me ease of use when cross-referencing the various codes against each other and against the different Respondents. Despite the ease of use, special attention was given to the data and responses from the Respondents to figure out how to divide the codes and what qualified for each theme.

Results

The data collected from the interviews have given rise to three main themes. The first theme is the ‘Space for AEDM within the Dutch Market’. This theme revolves around the developments of the genre through their integration within the Dutch market. An analysis of the Niche within which AEDM occupies, considering the competition and competing markets. It also examines as to why this occurs by looking into the relationship between the artists and the promoters of the events at which they showcase their work. The second theme is ‘the foremost experts on category spanning’.

AEDM in the Dutch Market

The first set of results that have come from the data relate almost exclusively to AEDM in terms of genre and niche. What has been observed here is mainly the competition in which Netherlands based artists find themselves, as well as the relationship between the various genres that they play. There are multiple lines of thought that have emerged from the data, each of which is heavily dependent on the various forms of AEDM used by the Respondents. This was a foreseen limitation, having included all the various streams of AEDM in this research as well as lack of producers in the Netherlands that fit the sampling criteria. Each of the Respondents, although seeing a relationship between the streams of AEDM, whether that be sonically or culturally, still see them as independent genres within the Netherlands, each with their own interpretations of dance, creation, and audience participation¹. To accommodate for this, an overview of results will be split between what has emerged as the ‘big three’ in terms of AEDM: amapiano, afrohouse (which includes afrotech, afrohouse and three step), and gqom.

Amapiano is perhaps the most divided of these three. Four respondents state that the market is oversaturated, and competition is rife within the genre. The constant influx of new DJ’s and events means that there is no longer any space to thrive. Here we see an example where the audience that is needed for this niche to exist is not sufficient to satisfy the niche width itself (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, p 390). Respondent 5 claims that amapiano has opened a lot of space for the other genres in the AEDM scene to thrive and grow, however, since it has become a ‘hype’ many people have decided to join this hype resulting in oversaturation by stating:

¹ Although each of the participants talk about each stream of AEDM as though they are separate genres, later in the interviews, a large majority of the participants then adjust their views when talking about their own performances and productions, moving towards a stance whereby they think genre does not exist or play a large role.

I do feel like there's competition [...] especially in the city of Amsterdam, where people like to jump on hype, sometimes you'll have three or four similar events happening in the same weekend, especially in regard to amapiano [...] that might make it more difficult for everyone.

A significant number of respondents expressed their concerns regarding the difficulty that arises from an oversaturated market, all of which revolve around a lack of desired bookings. Respondents three and six, attribute this lack of booking directly towards the other DJs within the AEDM sphere with respondent three claiming that "this year [redacted] literally took my spot at DGTL." The rest of the respondents were more delicate when expressing their concerns using more general language as when respondent 7 explained, "[there are] very few large events where a lot of DJs want to play". Despite these grievances with an oversaturated market and lack of bookings, the respondents unanimously agree that there is still room for growth, not only for amapiano but AEDM as a whole.

Amapiano is entering the stage of industry, as the main practitioners are less focused on the cultural growth and instead now leaning towards revenue production (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 703). Additionally, there is very little cultural growth and innovation stemming from the Netherlands based practitioners (with very few notable exceptions), rather they focus on upholding the standardization set by the South African originators. This sentiment resonates further when the Respondents compare the differences in the interpretation of the genre in the Netherlands, with that of South Africa. Four respondents agree on the fact that the Dutch audience wants music that is 'harder' with deeper and more intense basslines and drums. Two of these respondents' attribute this to cultural differences whereby audiences in the Netherlands leisurely partake in drug use. Due to this the music is accommodated to the audience both in its presentation on the night, as well as in its production. This cultural difference has raised many concerns with authenticity which will be tackled later. For now, these differences manifest themselves sonically in the genre itself and has opened gateways towards the development of new sounds within the genre. Respondents are split on whether this is a positive outcome for the genre. Respondent four enjoys this development of the genre, highlighting that, "[redacted] Sranapiano is an example of that [...] amapiano with Surinamese influences. I don't think that could have been done anywhere else in the world." Contrasting this opinion, respondent 5 has qualms with European producers of amapiano, believing that, "I think that how European DJs are producing it, they are taking out the spirituality of the music." Although some might argue

that the production of the music to cater towards Dutch audiences constitute innovation, majority of the respondents disagree, believing instead that there is no cultural or sonic innovation, and rather that it represents a watered-down version of the original.

This is an interesting analogy when juxtaposed against that of Afrohouse. Four respondents discuss how afrohouse has been in the Netherlands longer and has had more time to solidify itself within the marketspace, yet it remains largely unchanged in its production and presentation. These respondents agree that the longevity of Afrohouse is because the sound is already close enough to other existing genres that are enjoyed within the Dutch market, such as melodic house and techno. This is due to BPM range and the overall style of Afrohouse more closely resembling melodic house and techno. Audiences then, understandably, have a greater appreciation and are able to easily adapt to the music, meaning that its own niche overlap with other genres in the electronic music space is greater than both that of amapiano and gqom. Where in amapiano, a genre that has ‘blown up’ over COVID lockdown through social media, afrohouse has had a solid footing in the industry for over a decade. Audiences in amapiano are still focused on the trends within the genre limiting the creativity of artists, as they are forced to play the hits to keep the crowds engaged. Whereas in afrohouse, they are free to explore and experiment with the understanding that the audience is more open to the interpretation of the music. Yet despite this, Respondent six notes that there is very little innovation coming from Netherlands producers within this genre when compared to that of South Africa by stating, “definitely not. I left, came back, I still do the same thing, meaning that there’s no innovation [...] South Africa, they innovate every time.” This positions afrohouse in the Netherlands between industry-based and traditional-based as the genre is both market driven as well as focused on preservation (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 704).

Gqom is the biggest outlier when comparing its position with that of that other AEDM streams. Gqom is firmly within the scene-based category. This is in large part due to the oversaturation of amapiano. Audiences are now looking for new sounds to enjoy and are finding that solace within gqom. As such, with this genre gaining popularity, the biggest focus is that of community building as well as the gradual codification of the genre norms themselves. Whereas amapiano and afrohouse share audiences with more commercial genres, gqom is seen as being firmly in the global underground, further cementing its position as a scene-based genre. Finally, due to this, the biggest experimentation and genre spanning happens within gqom.

With all of this in mind, the music within the AEDM is still seen as electronic music in the eyes of the Respondents, and as such, all share to some extent an audience with other

electronic music. Because of this, many of them look to expand these genres outside of what has been deemed 'the afro circle'. This is a series of events where only AEDM is played, whether it be a single genre on its own (such as amapiano nights) or a mixture of all three genres throughout the evening (such as TRIBES). Respondents are looking to represent these genres in spaces where electronic music in its entirety is played, yet AEDM is underrepresented. Respondent 3 has the most succinct understanding of why this is the case, stating that, "what I see in other countries [...] DJ's have a solo career, but are all a part of a tribe." This tribe is a collection of artists that push their genres together in a subliminal way, without explicitly stating they are a group. He finds that the competition in the Netherlands, is preventing the genres themselves from growing and finding bigger, restricting both the genre and the niche to the periphery of the greater electronic music space. A sentiment shared by Respondent one, who believes that additional work is required outside of event spaces to allow the sound to resonate further with audiences. To this end, he recommends the production of online mixes from Netherlands based AEDM artists.

The final considerations towards the niche and genre of AEDM relates to the relationships between the Respondents and the promoters (organizers) as well as the variety of different events at which they have the availability to play at. This promoter-artist relationship is a big factor in the development of the both the genre in the Netherlands as well as the contribution towards the niche width and overlap. A significant number of respondents highlight the importance of developing a relationship with the promoters of events to ensure that they are able to display their craft at the highest level. Due to this, promoters continue to book the same artists in perpetuity. As such respondents aim to please promoters over the audience but still cater towards both within their own individual style. Seemingly the biggest reason for competition stems from the whims of the promoters and their booking tendencies rather than competition between the artists themselves. These bookings and events vary greatly between each other showing the potential for growth within the AEDM streams by overlapping AEDM audience, with those in the greater electronic spectrum exists (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013, 390). Respondent one succinctly demonstrates this rationale by stating, "[artists] are only playing the African electronic stages [...] they are limiting themselves [...] it's not even about the money, it's about a bigger reach." This links back to Respondent three's sentiment about developing a 'tribe' to help push the music further. He believes that he one of the few people actively engaging in developing this reach and desires his peers to share his burden. He believes the process is underway, but still in its early stages.

The biggest outlier that exists within this segment, and lays an interesting

groundwork for potential future research, is Respondent 6's use of record labels. When producing a body of work, Respondent 6 will contact various labels in a variety of different genres to release their work. This takes pressure off him in finding the correct audience for his sound. Instead, he leverages the position of the label and their audience, opening opportunities to new events and promoters.

The foremost experts of category spanning

With these niche and genre distinctions made, we can now move to how the Respondents navigate the struggles and benefits of spanning these genres. Within this section, an analysis will be done of both spanning the different streams of AEDM as well as how the respondents span AEDM with genres that lie outside of this stream. Whereas in the previous section which split the results into the different streams of AEDM, this section will instead analyse them all in unity as the ideas and concepts are shared across the genre variations.

As can be seen in 'space for AEDM in the Dutch market', there is a significant overlap between audiences within AEDM and other genres in the electronic music space as well as between the genres within AEDM itself. This is a point that resonates across the Respondents used in this study. Even though the streams of AEDM might not align sonically with themselves, nor with external genres, artists in this study have created a unique way to bridge these gaps through what Respondent 1 has aptly named 'sound colour'. The crux of this notion revolves around the idea that despite the differences in the genres themselves, there exist elements within them that give similarities to the music. These similarities can vary whether they be sonic alignments, to energy levels, cultural similarities, tempo ranges. and the 'feeling' of the music. Using sound colour, artists essentially establish their style and give a single 'vibration' to the evening. This sound colour can gradually change throughout the evening, slightly altering the mood and intended effect of the night through the palette that the artist has chosen to paint with. If done correctly, many artists feel that the audience won't even notice changes in the genre. Participant 1 outlines this process and development of sound colour as follows:

Even though you don't play songs that they know, it feels and sounds familiar. So basically, the vibration of the night is just one colour even though you're jumping between genres [...] If you are aware of the sound color, everything feels the same for them.

The rationale behind this process aligns with the most agreed upon statement in the literature surrounding category spanning: artists that span categories often suffer negative backlash (Shi et al., 2018, p. 2; Kovacs & Hanna, 2015, p. 256; Negro & Leung, 2013, p. 684; Van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 1; Keuschnigg & Wimmer, 2017, p. 449). The respondents intuitively circumvent this issue by allowing audiences to make sense of the genre spanning music by drawing comparisons between them. This reduces the uncertainty from audiences minimizing the risk of facing negative backlash. By keeping the sound colour within their work, they allow the genre spanning to be easy to grasp for audiences.

Respondents in this study are all hyper aware of audience perceptions and have taken time to understand why this negative backlash occurs. All of them use the same term of 'familiarity' when talking about this concept. People like what they know. They enjoy familiarity and the Respondents take this into consideration. Hence the creation of 'sound colour'. When spanning the various categories of genre, artists intuitively consider the category contrast, and the porousness of category boundaries (Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 254; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Schi et al., 2018, p. 4). They reflect this sentiment in a variety of different ways. Respondent 2 states that "to me, all music is African [...] they are culturally different, but not musically different for me" and through that he identifies sonic elements in the music to help bridge all the leaps he takes in crossing genre. Respondent 2 takes a different approach whereby he identifies the struggle of connecting the music sonically but draws on cultural likeness to span the gap between genres from different continents. Respondent 4 bases his song selection on the 'deepness' of the music and has a style that resonates across any genre he incorporates into his sets. Despite all these variations in execution, the principle remains the same. What is interesting about these different approaches to building familiarity, is that they indicate the porousness of the category boundaries (Kovacs & Hannan, 2015, p. 254; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Schi et al., 2018, p. 4). All respondents not only blend different genres within AEDM together, they also combine genres within the greater electronic music spectrum. This shows that electronic music in general have porous boundaries allowing for them to be spanned. Respondents do note occasional difficulties when doing so and exhibit care in their approach, but the fact that they each have individual styles in their ability to span these genres, highlight the porousness that exists within the genres.

This concept is taken even further through the Respondents apparent understanding of human nature and drive. Despite the sonic and cultural differences between the continents, there is an understanding that their audiences want different things on a personal

level, however, these personal differences resonate across countries. For example, Respondent 4 highlighted that:

You have different moods, and it translates into a different expression depending on where in the world you are. So, if you're in Germany you might be going to Berghain to a techno party but if you born in Durban you will end up at the gqom party.

Despite the vast contrast between these genres and cultures, the desire is identical. This understanding shared by majority of Respondents and is what allows them to bridge this genre gaps and provide an experience that resonates across their audiences. There seems to be a greater importance placed on the music and how it satisfies the audiences desire, rather than on specific genres themselves. This is also the reason why many Respondents have stated that genre for them, isn't important, or rather boldly, doesn't exist for them.

Now of course, all of this takes place within context. Audiences differ, tastes differ, time and place differ. There are inherent expectations that exist which come from many different angles. Expectations from promoters, audiences, monetary goals, peers, and internal expectations from the artists themselves. All of these factors are taken into considerations when determining the colour of their sets and music. Artists understand that audience members buy tickets for an event catered around a specific sound and idea which needs to be reflected within their sets. To allocate for this, they take a variety of different precautions, such as other artists on the line up or with which they collaborate, the event promoters' expectations in booking them, the size and energy of the crowd as well as time and place. Some instances this process of curation is easier than others. For example, in the afro circle or events that cater towards a single genre, artists have an easier time providing this sound colour. On the other hand, when placed in larger spaces that cater towards the larger electronic music scene, artists often struggle to appease everyone. There is more care dedicated to ensuring that the flow of the evening is done correctly. In these cases, the backlash from audiences doesn't come from the inability to span genres, but rather from the lack of familiarity that has previously been built up by the artist themselves. Therefore, when spanning genres, producers build up a sense of familiarity through the use of sound colour. This can take an audience member who initially engages in an active evaluation of authenticity and place them within cognitive authenticity. Once in this cognitive authenticity, producers use their sound colour to keep them in this phase. When correctly spanning genres that all share the same 'colour' audience members do not need to undergo additional active evaluations thus they do not struggle with authenticating a producer that

engages in category spanning. Aligning with the work of Alexiou (2023), all Respondents have an innate understanding of this process, making them the foremost experts on category spanning.

Respondents are split in their careers when it comes to category spanning. Some Respondents began their journey of category spanning at the start of their careers or have been doing it for several years, whereas others have only recently begun. Their experiences stand in stark contrast to one another. For those that have built up the idea that they are genre bending artists have had the time to establish this fact in the minds of their audiences. Due to this, when they span categories at appropriate moments, they don't receive backlash from their audience. The only exception is if they spend too much time playing in spaces that accommodate a single genre (like the afro circuit), then branch out to other genres. The accumulation of new audience members through the afro circuit doesn't give said audience the time to understand that the artist does more than what they have experienced, so when something new is presented to them, they lack the cognitive authenticity understanding and have to then make active judgments of the artists (Alexiou, 2024, p. 4). On the other hand, artists that have existed as single genre DJs then later decide to span categories have to shift this audience understanding for their entire fan base, rather than just the newcomers. The effect of having to build an audience understanding of a producer's genre spanning could be the result of the 'jack of all trades effect' (Kovac & Hannan, 2015, p. 255; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018, p. 3; Nego & Leung, 2013, p. 684). Majority of Respondents note that by splitting themselves across a variety of genres, they might not meet the same levels of excellence when compared to those that invest their time solely in a single genre, aligning with the work done by Kovac & Hannan (2015), van Venrooij & Schmutz (2018) and Nego & Leung (2013). However, the other side of the coin shows that through category spanning, the Respondents are able to differentiate themselves from competition as is also noted by Alexiou (2024).

To help with this audience understanding, some Respondents have taken to social media to set a narrative surrounding their styles and sound colour in category spanning. Respondents all note the importance of various apps such as tik tok and Instagram in the production and growth of not only the music, but as a marketing tool for themselves. Respondent 1 noted that he has deleted all of his content that revolves around him being a mono-genre DJ and has set a new precedent through social media to indicate that he now category spans. Respondent 3 on the other hand, will balance his content on social media to reflect the variety of different genres that he plays to ensure that his audience understands that although one week he might be in the afro-circuit, this is not his entire identity. This

narrative helps set audience expectations and allow the respondents to span genres that may have greater codified schema, thus increasing their grade of membership across the genres that they are involved in. Through this, respondents can span genres that have a higher category contrast boundaries (Schi et al., 2018, p. 3; van Venrooij & Schmutz, p. 3).

Authenticity in a world devoid of genre

It is clear from the above section that the Respondents have an intrinsic understanding of audience perceptions within the context of category spanning. They are aware of the steps needed to foster positive audience reactions. Despite each of the Respondents having their own select ways to achieve this, each of them unknowingly follows the work outlined by Alexiou, K. (2024). By developing a sound colour, they are able to span genres fluidly and seamlessly, negating the negative backlash generally associated with category spanning. Through the slow integration of additional elements and evolution of their sound colour, the Respondents build familiarity with the audience across the genres, thereby alleviating the pressures of conforming with the genre norms and standards as highlighted by Alexiou (2024) and Mattson et al. (2010). Additionally, by having similar elements throughout their work, they keep the audience in a constant state of cognitive legitimacy. Without leaving this state, audiences never have to make active evaluations of the Respondents, allowing them to seamlessly span categories throughout their work. However, with such complexities surrounding authenticity itself as a concept, as well as with the spread of genre and individual ability to span categories, how do artists view authenticity in this endeavour? I propose a new understanding of the term based around the data from the Respondents in this study. There are similarities that are drawn with previous research, however, having conducted this study from the artist perspective, there are new grounds to be tread within this field. As with the differentiation regarding genre and niche, this section will be split. The first segment will deal with authenticity as it relates to AEDM, and finally the last segment will encapsulate the overall thoughts of authenticity in regards as to how the Respondents view it in relation to themselves and category spanning.

To begin with amapiano, I will be drawing comparisons between type authenticity, third person authenticity and the data given by the Respondents. Type and third person authenticity revolves around the closeness to which artists align with existing practices within a category and the distance between their expression compared to that with the expression of the culture on which it is based (Alexiou, 2024, p. 4; Mattsson et al., 2010, p. 1358; Strand, 2014; Moore, 2002, p. 214-218). When looking at amapiano especially, this version of authenticity is deemed the most important. The common gripe of the current

culture and understanding of amapiano by audiences and artists alike, is that there is a stark difference in its portrayal in the Netherlands versus that of South Africa. Within this genre, certain Respondent in this study try and position themselves as ‘educators’ of the genre. To this end, their sound colour will often mimic that of the South African originators. half the respondents agree that visiting South Africa to develop an understanding of how the culture and music is produced and appreciated in its indigenous form can play a crucial role in building this first-person authenticity through closeness to the original culture with Respondent 7 encapsulating this ideas by stating, “your roots to the music can be very interesting to talk about because I do feel that only a very small group of people can be very good at the music without having the cultural background to African electronic dance music” before later following this sentiment up by stating that going to South Africa to learn from the originators can help develop these roots to the music.

Although seeming counter-intuitive to the category spanning results where each night and moment is catered towards the context in which it is played, when it comes to amapiano, this seems to be a superseding concept. The artists in this study place a heavier weight on playing music that is deemed authentic by the standards of like culture rather than try and appease the crowd. Authenticity in this regard seems to stem from the fact that amapiano is genre surrounded by ‘hype’ and social media, which the Respondents think has a watered-down the genre and culture. They would rather try and bring a different understanding of the music to audience to essentially ‘teach’ them the ‘correct’ way to enjoy it. Often times this has the negative effect of not aligning with the goals of the promoters and event organisers, with resulting backlash in the form of less bookings. The most interesting factor at play in this context, is that in trying to develop third person authenticity, artists run the risk of being further alienated from an authentic portrayal of the genre. An example of this, is given by Respondent 1 which notes as the development of the dutch amapiano sound. This is sound is laced with harder hitting drums and basslines a previously stated, however, in an attempt to develop type and third person authenticity, Dutch artists would commission a song South African Amapiano producers. For this commission, a track is requested in a certain style and tone that resonates with the Dutch audience, creating the unexpected effect of further pushing the sound away from type and third person authenticity. The irony is not lost here. By contacting and using south African producers to try and bridge the cultural gap, instead they drive the wedge further in by commissioning sounds that would not naturally be made by South Africans themselves. To contrast this, respondent 4 when talking about trips to south Africa to build third person authenticity, states the following:

I respect that and I love that. Sometimes I've struggled with people that don't do that. And they just create their own interpretation without ever researching where it's coming from, but I don't think that's the way either. I just feel if you go in there to research and to authentically be able to make it, in a way you're copying also.

He sees this closeness to the South African sound and culture as an inhibitor towards first person authenticity. By adopting the sound, artists limit their own intention with their craft and instead 'copy' what has been previously done. This can be in the style of mixing, producing, the various plugins and programs used in their production, and just overall playing a caricature of someone else. Instead, by creating a new sound of the genre that caters towards their audience, surrounding, and style of play, they not only contribute towards the development of the genre into new avenues that might not have previously existed, but they also overtime develop first person authenticity (Moore, 2002, p. 214). Wherein the literature, Strand (2014) and Askin & Mol (2018), emphasize that the variations in authenticity do not act in isolation, but instead all have an interplay between them. It is interesting to note through the development of one facet of authenticity, producers run the risk of negatively affecting another, raising questions of hierarchy between the different variations of authenticity. This is common however, in genre development, as the development of new genres from their parent genres can be seen as inauthentic by its practitioners (Silver et al., 2016). It is still however, far too early to distinguish whether the new Dutch sound will constitute a split within the genre itself.

In Afrohouse, the questions of authenticity become far less charged. Due to its prolonged existence within the Netherlands, it has had time to cement its norms within the Netherlands and as such, ideas surrounding authenticity revolve less around the culture and more around the sound. Therefore, bringing up similar concerns to the above-mentioned points regarding similarity to the culture resulting in less authentic performances.

All these factors regarding authenticity surrounding the genres become moot when Respondents were asked about their own ideas regarding individual authenticity. Universal agreements across Respondents as to their interpretation of authenticity is centred around first person authenticity, with the only variations being in the weight placed on third person authenticity (as mentioned above). The tests as outlined by Strand (2014) when used by the Respondents focuses exclusively on an artist being 'true to themselves' and 'consistency'. This aligns with Moore's (2002) work where they stated that first person authenticity aligns with a prior authentic practice. Majority Respondents note that being your authentic self is not sufficient, instead you need to be your authentic self continuously and consistently.

This is perhaps where the greatest deviation is found from the literature. Within the literature, producers that vary from their first-person authenticity and ‘sell out’ are almost always deemed as inauthentic (Moore, 2002, p. 212). Despite Strand (2014) and Moore (2002) arguing that commercial worth has its own variation of authenticity (second person authenticity), and that this seeking commercial success has its value in its ability to articulate a sense of belonging and community to their listeners, the Respondents did not share the same sentiments. Although yes, they believe that an artist that seeks commercial success and ‘sells out’ in whatever variation that might be, whether diluting the sound and culture, or capitalizing off a ‘hype’, or even when appropriating a culture that is not their own, the Respondents state that these actions themselves can be authentic depending on the practitioner.

As we can see, the reasoning and rationale behind the idea of selling out is what makes the action itself authentic, linking back once again towards first person authenticity. In all previous literature that discusses the concept of selling out, the rationale behind the concept is always denoted as negative. I believe that this is due to previous literature placing the audience as the gatekeepers who decide what is and isn’t authentic practice. From this external viewpoint, there is greater ease in determining a producer to be inauthentic through their actions, despite not knowing the rationale behind said actions. A sentiment that can be further seen when examining both the career paths taken by certain Respondents, as well as in their own self identity in terms of the variety of different genres that they span. Firstly, most Respondents did not begin their careers within the AEDM scope. Many of them began spinning different genres outside of the AEDM spectrum before finally settling and finding their main audience through these African genres. When questioned on whether they believed themselves to be inauthentic during these initial phases, none of them believed they were. This stays true to their current positions where they span multiple genres. The Respondents believe that they are authentic across the spectrum of genres that they involve themselves in as they resonate directly with each genre. Furthermore, many of the Respondents believe that the genres themselves are irrelevant and for some, don’t even exist. Instead, what makes them authentic is their interpretations of the sound and how they are able to blend them together through their own palette and sound colour. This can also stem from cultural upbringing and previous experiences, closely linking towards principles of self-identity within the music itself. Ideas of self-identity through music is outside the scope of this research, however, it leaves an opening for future research.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that this research makes towards the study of authenticity in music, is that by viewing authenticity from the producers themselves, we can

see that amongst them, authenticity is so intrinsic to an individual that no one else can deem them inauthentic, becoming clear that there is a greater concern with an artist's own interpretation of first-person authenticity. The integrity they hold towards their own intention outweighs that of the perceptions of their audience, focusing rather on their own peace of mind in knowing that what they do, they do it true to themselves. Of course, a nuanced concept that cannot be considered within isolation. The Respondents understand the aforementioned expectations that need to be met from both their audience as well as promoters, however, as long as in meeting these expectations, they do it within the boundaries of their own versions of self-authenticity, they are satisfied with the outcome. This version of authenticity is so highly dependent on the artists own morals and values, and changes on a case-by-case basis. For example, Respondent 2, who blends the continentally different genres of gqom (South Africa) and baile funk (Brazil), holds his authenticity in the fact that when he does so, he makes sure his is culturally aware of what is happening in both genres to ensure an honest representation of each. Respondent 4, also a genre bending artist, puts value in his authenticity in ensuring that respect and acknowledgment is given to the artists and the genres that he combines. Each Respondent have innate personal values to which they hold themselves authentic, and only deem themselves inauthentic should they break these values by which they hold themselves. To them, they are not only the distributors of their own authenticity, but also do not pay heed to authenticity thrust onto them from their audiences and critics.

Conclusion

This research set out to examine how Netherlands based AEDM artists perceive authenticity in the context of category spanning. To accomplish this, semi-structure interviews were conducted with 7 industry professionals based in the Netherlands. These professionals are all actively involved within the AEDM sphere of the Netherlands and each of them involve themselves within category spanning by mixing the genres of AEDM with those of the great electronic music sphere. Through a thematic analysis of these interviews a variety of themes were uncovered. These themes aligned with the literature outline within the theoretical framework. However, given that this research was done from the perspective of producers rather than from the perspective of audiences and critics, these themes needed to be contextualized within the previous literature in order to answer the central research question due to a lack of literature surrounding authenticity and its relationship towards category spanning from this perspective. Having used this perspective of the producers for this research, although the results showed that the thought process surrounding authenticity between audience members, critics, and producers have elements that are shared, there is still a large gap that can be filled through further research of authenticity from the perspective of the producer. As such, this research substantiated the pre-existing literature whilst indicated that there are new lines of thoughts to be explored. To this end, the answer to the research question is a complicated matter whereby AEDM producers view authenticity as a deeply personal an introspective concept whereby only they themselves can determine what is an isn't authentic within their practices of category spanning. The use of category spanning helped position these views of authenticity as it provided a backdrop on which to draw comparisons.

Reaching this answer required a variety of different concepts in order to frame the ideas of authenticity. Firstly, the position of AEDM both as a genre and niche was examined to set the backdrop for this topic. The concept of a niche encompasses the marketspace as it exists through producer action, whether that be competitive or collaborative, as well as how much space within the overall market they occupy (Anand & Croidieu, n.d., 2013; Bagley et al., 2022). The result of this is an oversaturated market whereby AEDM exists within the periphery of electronic dance music. Despite this, there is still as niche overlap between AEDM and other electronic dance music genres in terms of resources needed to sustain said niches. This can be seen through the shared audiences that AEDM has with other genres. Which brings the next issue of genre into focus. By examining genre in terms of its development and differentiation (Silver et al., 2016; Lena & Peterson, 2008), an analysis was able to be conducted on the current state of the various forms of AEDM within the

Netherlands. The findings were split according to the various subsections of AEDM, those being Amapiano, Afrohouse and Gqom. Amapiano showcased a highly oversaturated market whereby the niche cannot be supported by the currently available resources, resulting in negative consequences for the artists involved. Additionally, its introduction into the Netherlands has opened up various paths for the development of the genre. Contrarily, Afrohouse has had more time to develop itself in the Netherlands in terms of both niche and genre. Due to this, we see very little development in either area. Lastly, gqom is seen as an outlier, as it is firmly in the underground scene, still developing its initial footing in terms of both its niche and genre within the Netherlands.

Once establishing the position of the producers and the AEDM genres within the Netherlands, the focus was turned towards how then, these producers are able to span these genres not only with themselves, but with other genres within the electronic dance music space. Two crucial factors were brought forth through existing academic literature when tackling this concept. First, category spanning is almost always met with negative backlash due to producers not being skilled enough to become experts in the variety of categories they span, as well as audiences having worse perceptions of category spanning artists due to a lack of understanding (Kovac & Hannan, 2015; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018; Nego & Leung, 2013). Secondly, the codification of norms and stage of development of a particular genre influence how easy they are to be spanned (Schi et al., 2018; van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018). The findings here show that although artists might have insecurities surrounding their skill level due to genre spanning, they have been able to create a narrative through social media to minimize audience uncertainty. Thus, minimizing the negative backlash associated with category spanning. More interestingly, is how producers form what has been dubbed by the respondents as: sound colour, to help expertly navigate category boundaries. This sound colour revolves around producers individual interpretations of finding similarities between genres and niches to keep audiences in familiar territory, thus further eliminating negative backlash associated with category spanning.

Through the findings of these two primary concepts, an analysis of authenticity and its relationship to these concepts gave rise to new understandings within this field. Previous literature done by Moore (2002) and Strand (2014) was used to view authenticity and its relationship to music. These scholars outlined three versions of authenticity in terms of music, those being first person authenticity (the intentions of the producer), second person authenticity (commercial authenticity) and finally third person authenticity (cultural distance from origins) (Moore, 2002; Strand, 2014). Interestingly, the views of producers can fit somewhere within the spectrum of these three versions of authenticity. However, what has

been seen is that producers are the only stakeholders in validating this authenticity. This is where the greatest difference between previous literature and this thesis exists. Producers do not seem to seek external validation from their audience but instead put value on holding themselves to their own standards. These standards being ‘consistently true to yourself.’

What has stood out from this research is how producers' views towards their audience differ depending on the context. Within category spanning the opinions and perceptions of their audience is given great value. Producers seek to find a ‘sound colour’ to ensure that when spanning these categories the audience is pleased. However, in terms of authenticity, the views and opinions of their audience become mute.

Limitations and Future avenues for research

This research has not been without its limitations. Firstly, the spectrum of AEDM had to be broadened in order to fulfil the thesis requirements. This is due to the incredible nuance of this thesis. I do believe that within time, more artists in this field will arise within the Netherlands, and through that can be more narrowly examined, perhaps with a single genre from the stream of AEDM. With an original respondent list of 13 people, 6 were cut due to either scheduling conflicts, or because they did not meet the sample requirements. A second limitation to this research, is that all of the respondents were male. The industry within which this research takes place is heavily dominated by men. Originally 3 women were selected for research, however, as previously stated, they had to be cut from the sample. Additionally due to the limited sample population, a variety of different factors such as cultural backgrounds and age could not be specified within the research. These limitations create concerns for both reliability and validity.

The avenues for future research that do not stem from its limitations are numerous. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the gap in literature surrounding African music and its global dissemination needs to be addressed. The studies of western music and its influence on academic floods the bookshelves. With the incredible rise of both Afrobeats and Amapiano over the last decades, there are multiple gaps that need to be addressed. Secondly, as previously stated, more specialized research into perhaps a single genre from AEDM such as Amapiano or Gqom to further examine the intricacies of how these genres and producers view this topic. In this research the various sub-genres were split, once again due to the limitations. The use of independent record labels and its ability to develop an audience as was highlighted by respondent 6, particularly within the context of authenticity would furthermore be an interesting avenue for future research.

References

- Alexiou, K. (2024). Legitimate incongruity: Strategic positioning within hybrid categories. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 39, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2024.106402>
- Anand, N., & Croidieu, G. (n.d.). (2013). Niches, Genres, and Classifications in the Creative Industries. *The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries*, 327-348. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199603510.013.017>
- Askin, N., & Mol, J. (2018). Institutionalizing Authenticity in the Digitized World of Music. In C. Jones & M. Maoret (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 55, 159–202. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20180000055007>
- Bagley, M. J. O., Gifford, E., & McKelvey, M. (2022). The evolution of niche: Variety in knowledge networks in the global music industry. *Industry and Innovation*, 29(3), 425–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2021.2007758>
- Delhaye, C., & Van De Ven, V. (2014). ‘A commitment to cultural pluralism’. Diversity practices in two Amsterdam venues: Paradiso and De Meervaart. *Identities*, 21(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2013.828621>
- DeNora, T. (1999). Music as a technology of the self. *Poetics*, 27(1), 31-56. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(99\)00002-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00002-2)
- Jaimangal-Jones, D. (2018). Analysing the media discourses surrounding DJs as authentic performers and artists within electronic dance music culture magazines. *Leisure Studies*, 37(2), 223–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2017.1339731>
- Joseph, D., & Human, R. (2009). African music: Negotiating a space in contemporary society. *Intercultural Education*, 20(4), 359–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903351995>
- Karakayali, N. (2018). Recommendation systems as technologies of the self: Algorithmic control and the formation of music taste. *Big Data & Society*, 5(2), 2053951718797347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951718797347>
- Keuschnigg, M., & Wimmer, T. (2017). Is Category Spanning Truly Disadvantageous? New Evidence from Primary and Secondary Movie Markets. *Social Forces*, 96(1), 449–479. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sox043>
- Koegler, C., Nyangulu, D., & Stein, M. U. (2019). *Locating African European Studies: Interventions, Intersections, Conversations* (F. E. Garrido, Ed.; 1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429491092>
- Kovacs, B., & Hannan, M. (2015). Conceptual Spaces and the Consequences of Category Spanning. *Sociological Science*, 2, 252–286. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v2.a13>
- Lena, J. C., & Peterson, R. A. (2008). Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres. *American Sociological Review*, 73(5), 697–718.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300501>

- Masasabi, N. and Kususiya, F. (2022). The globalisation of african musical instruments: a case of the adeudeu of teso community in kenya. *African Musicology Online*, 11(1), 85-99.
<https://doi.org/10.58721/amo.v11i1.79>
- Mattsson, J. T., Peltoniemi, M., & Parvinen, P. M. T. (2010). Genre-deviating artist entry: The role of authenticity and fuzziness. *Management Decision*, 48(9), 1355–1364.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741011082107>
- Moore, A. (2002). Authenticity as authentication. *Popular Music*, 21(2), 209–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143002002131>
- Negro, G., & Leung, M. D. (2013). “Actual” and Perceptual Effects of Category Spanning. *Organization Science*, 24(3), 684–696. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0764>
- Omari, J. (2021). Copyright: from historical roots to regulating the contemporary complexities of human creativity. *Polar Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 44(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12404>
- Shi, Y., Lim, Y., & Suh, C. S. (2018). Innovation or deviation? The relationship between boundary crossing and audience evaluation in the music field. *PLOS ONE*, 13(10), e0203065. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203065>
- Silver, D., Lee, M., & Childress, C. C. (2016). Genre Complexes in Popular Music. *PLOS ONE*, 11(5), e0155471. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155471>
- Simmert, T. (2015). Media and mobility in South African House music. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 7(1), 87–99. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.7.1.87_1
- Strand, M. (2014). Authenticity as a form of worth. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 18(1), 60–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2013.851833>
- Tepper, S. J. (2009). Pathways to music exploration in a digital age. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 10(12). <https://doi.org/10.18113/P8ijea10n12>
- Van Venrooij, A., & Schmutz, V. (2018). Categorical ambiguity in cultural fields: The effects of genre fuzziness in popular music. *Poetics*, 66, 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.02.001>
- Volgsten, U. (2014). Music, Culture, Politics—Communicating Identity, Authenticity and Quality in the 21st Century. *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift*, 17(1), 114–131.
<https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN2000-8325-2014-01-07>
- Webster, J. (2019). Music on-demand: A commentary on the changing relationship between music taste, consumption and class in the streaming age. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 616-622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318810733>
- Wiltsher, N. (2016). The Aesthetics of Electronic Dance Music, Part I: History, Genre, Scenes,

Identity, Blackness. *Philosophy Compass*, 11(8), 415–425.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12333>

Nunes, J. C., Ordanini, A., & Giambastiani, G. (2021). The Concept of Authenticity: What It Means to Consumers. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(4), 1–20.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921997081>

Peterson, R. A. (2005). In Search of Authenticity*. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1083–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00533.x>

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Basic Questions:

- Consent?
- Name, age, city location, stage name, genres that you DJ/produce?

Niche

- How do you feel the competition is within the various genres that you DJ?
- Do you think the market has enough space for all the DJ's to exist in?
- Do you think the audience is big enough to sustain the amount of producers and performers in the NL?
- Which other genres and communities do you think you compete with?
- Do you think there is room for growth within the genres that you exist (in terms of audience size and income)?
- Do you think that there is innovation by yourself or your competitors within the genres that you DJ?

Genre

- How similar are the genres that you DJ in relation to one another?
 - o What elements do they share?
 - o What makes them different from one another?
 - o How similar/different are the audiences of your genre?
 - o How are they different or alike?
- Have you adopted any new genres recently?
 - o What made to adopt them?
 - o Is it difficult branching between these two genres?
 - If not why not and vis versa
- How culturally similar are the genres that you DJ?
 - o What makes them similar/different?
 - o Would you say that you are adding to the cultural development of the genre?
 - Or are you following pre-existing cultural practices that have been set?
 - o Would you say that the genres you DJ have a priority of generating money in the NL?

- Or is the focus on the development of culture?
- Or is the focus on preserving traditions that have already been set?

Category Spanning

- Do you think that your audience differs greatly between the different genres that you play?
 - Do you think your audience judges you harshly when you play a combination of different genres?
 - If yes, why? If no, why no?
- Do you have different methods of performing when you play different genres?
 - Why?
- Do you often combine these genres when you play or do you just stick to one?
 - If you combine them, are they difficult to combine (why or why not)?
 - Why do you think your audience appreciates / doesn't like it when you do(nt) combine the various genres that you play?
- In the different genres that you play/produce, do you think you have similar levels of abilities when compared to other DJ's in your competition that DJ only the one specific genre?
 - Do you think that by playing a multitude of genres you don't have the time to learn them to the same depth as someone who only plays a single genre?
 - Why or why not?
- Do you have issues whereby your audience might expect a certain genre from you but you play something else?
 - What are some factors that might influence this audience perception?
- Does your competition also play the genres that you play, or are you the only person that plays these genres?
- Do they have a larger community that is based on one of the genres that they DJ?
 - What do they think is preventing audiences from the other genres they DJ and producer from becoming part of their larger audience?
- Did you start in just a single genre then expand, or come out of the gates existing within multiple genres?
 - Why did you choose the approach that you did?
-

Authenticity

- What do you determine as authentic in the music that you produce?
 - o Is it the sound?
 - o Is it the manner in which it is produced?
- Do you think you are authentic across the different genres that you play?
 - o Does the authenticity across the different genres that you play align with each other?
 - Are there different standards as to what is deemed authentic across your different genres?
- How can someone who you don't think is authentic (such as a competitor) build up their authenticity?
 - This should give me insights into the test of each Respondent, I need to prod a lot to get as much out of them so I can see what factors they think are important for authentic behaviour.
 - Some topics to try and cover:
 - First person, 2nd person, and 3rd person authenticity
 - Cognitive authenticity
 - Moral authenticity
 - Pragmatic authenticity
 - It's difficult to set questions to directly cover this section but I know the concepts well enough to prod the answers out of my Respondents.
 - o Who do you think gives someone authenticity?
 - Audience?
 - Competition?
 - News articles (third parties)
 - Peers in the industry?
- Do you think that someone who is trying to capitalize on the genres that you produce can be authentic in their approach?
 - Why/why not
 - o What if the person doesn't meet certain cultural requirements?
- If they exist within multiple genres:
 - o How easy was it for them to think of themselves as authentic, and why?
 - o What was the process leading towards this?
 - o Do they get positive responses from the audience?
 - o What do they think would make someone in their position be deemed as inauthentic?

Appendix B: Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Joshua Christodoulou

Student ID: 626454

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Pawan Bhansing

Date: 27/06/2024

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Name of the AI Tool(s) or Framework(s) Used], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:

Joshua Christodoulou

Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Date of Signature: 27/06/2024

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and

academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]