



# #genre

Thomas Johnson

The Graduate Center, CUNY

Society for Music Theory Annual Conference

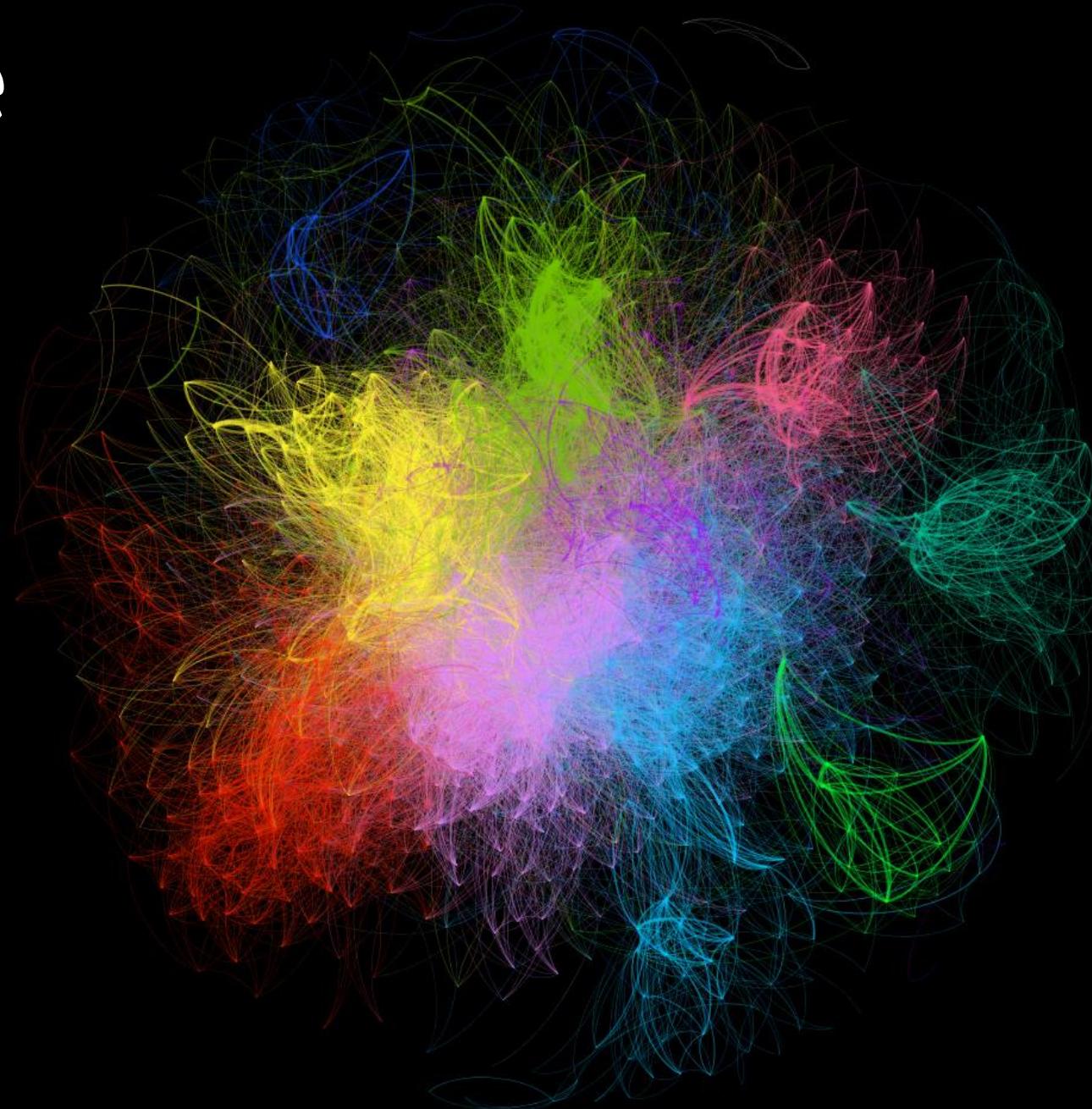
November 2, 2017 Arlington, VA

 @tgj505 

# #genre: HOW IS MUSIC CATEGORIZED?

- **Genre tags**
- **Related artists**
- **Playlists and recommendations**

# #genre



# #genre

- **What kind(s) of music do you study?**
- **Gjerdingen & Perrot (2008): recognition in 475ms**
- **Two examples: French House/Synthwave vs. Hip hop**

**Song A**

**Synth, 80s vocals, new-wavey**

**Song B**

**Rapping, percussive beat**

# #genre

## Kami

Rapper



Origin: Chicago, IL

Genre: Hip hop music

**Song A**

**Synth, 80s vocals, new-wavey**



*Kavinsky*

More images



## Kavinsky

French artist

Born: July 31, 1975 (age 42), Seine-Saint-Denis, France

Full name: Vincent Pierre Claude Belorgey

Genres: French house, Synthwave

**Song B**

**Rapping, percussive beat**

# #genre: is dead?



Mike Shinoda

@mikeshinoda

Genre is dead

RETWEETS  
1,380

LIKES  
2,895



Perry (2014): “What do such vague terms as Americana, metal (which has more subgenres than most of us have had hot dinners) or country mean? Do any of those genres convey anything about how the music sounds? Not really.”

Hyden (2013): “In 10 years, all pop music genre classifications will be obsolete. ... The more you hear, the less genres matter.”



GENRE IS DEAD!  
YOUR NEW FAVORITE MUSIC MAGAZINE

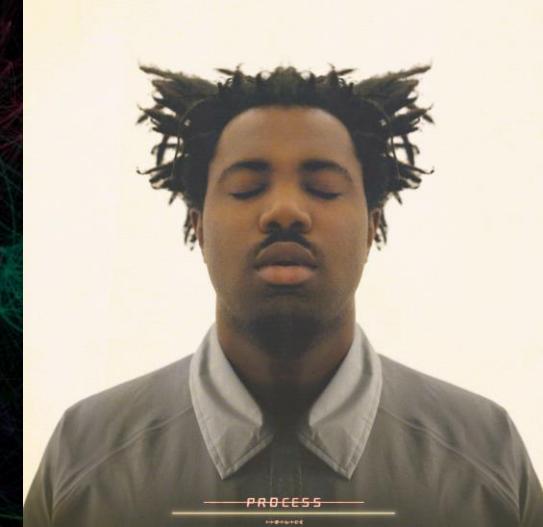
# #genre: dead *and* abundant

Current generic *episteme*  
and our experiences of it



“Vancouver(WA)-based country-rock-Americana-Western swing band.”

Sampha's *Process* (2017) is “a bit gospel, a bit R. & B.. There's some classic soul, made to feel modern with synthesizers; there's experimental electronica, made to feel classic ...” (Battan 2017)



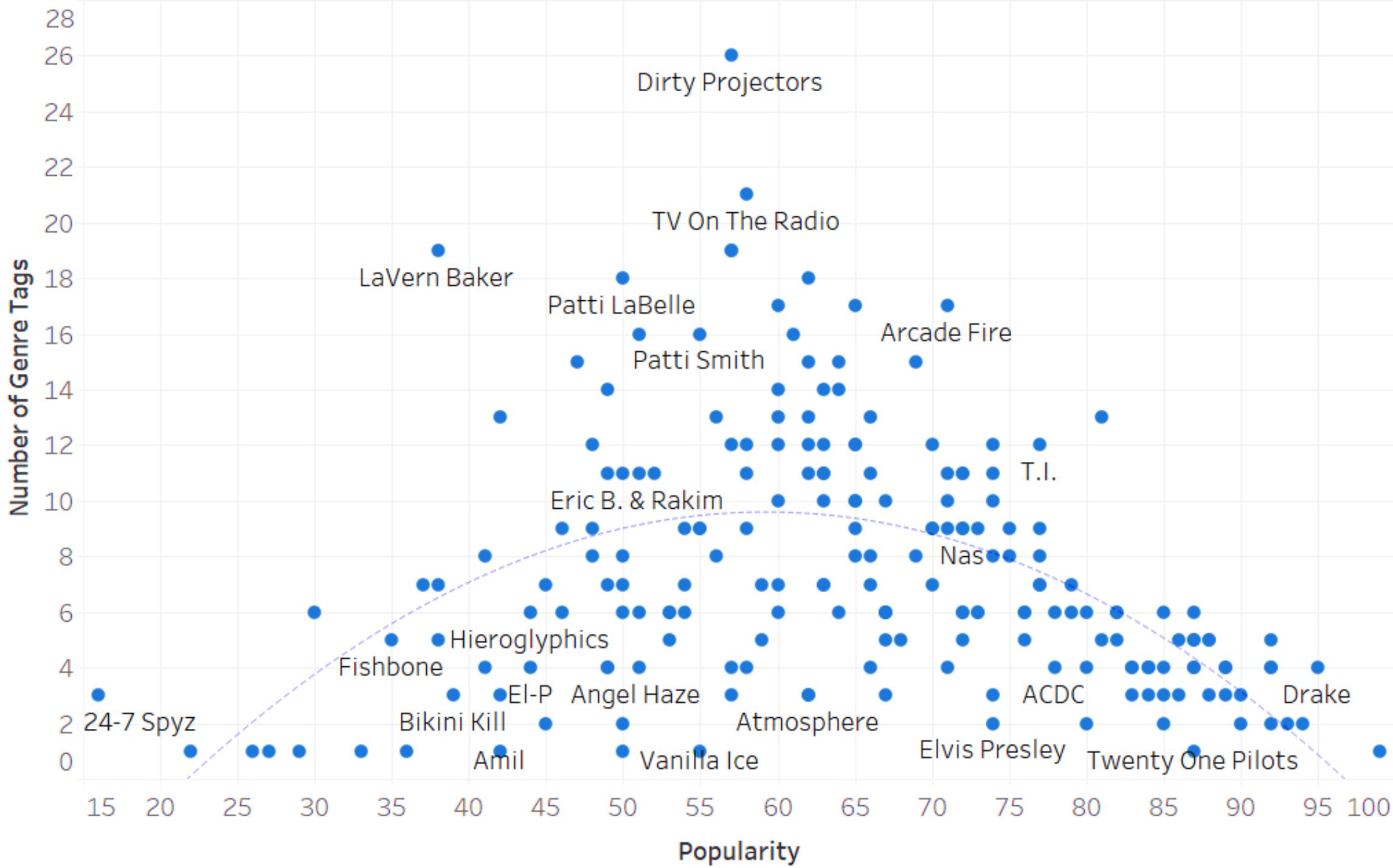
“We're a new wave, psych rock, dream pop and shoegaze Brooklyn band with nods to early 4AD sound and Factory Records.”

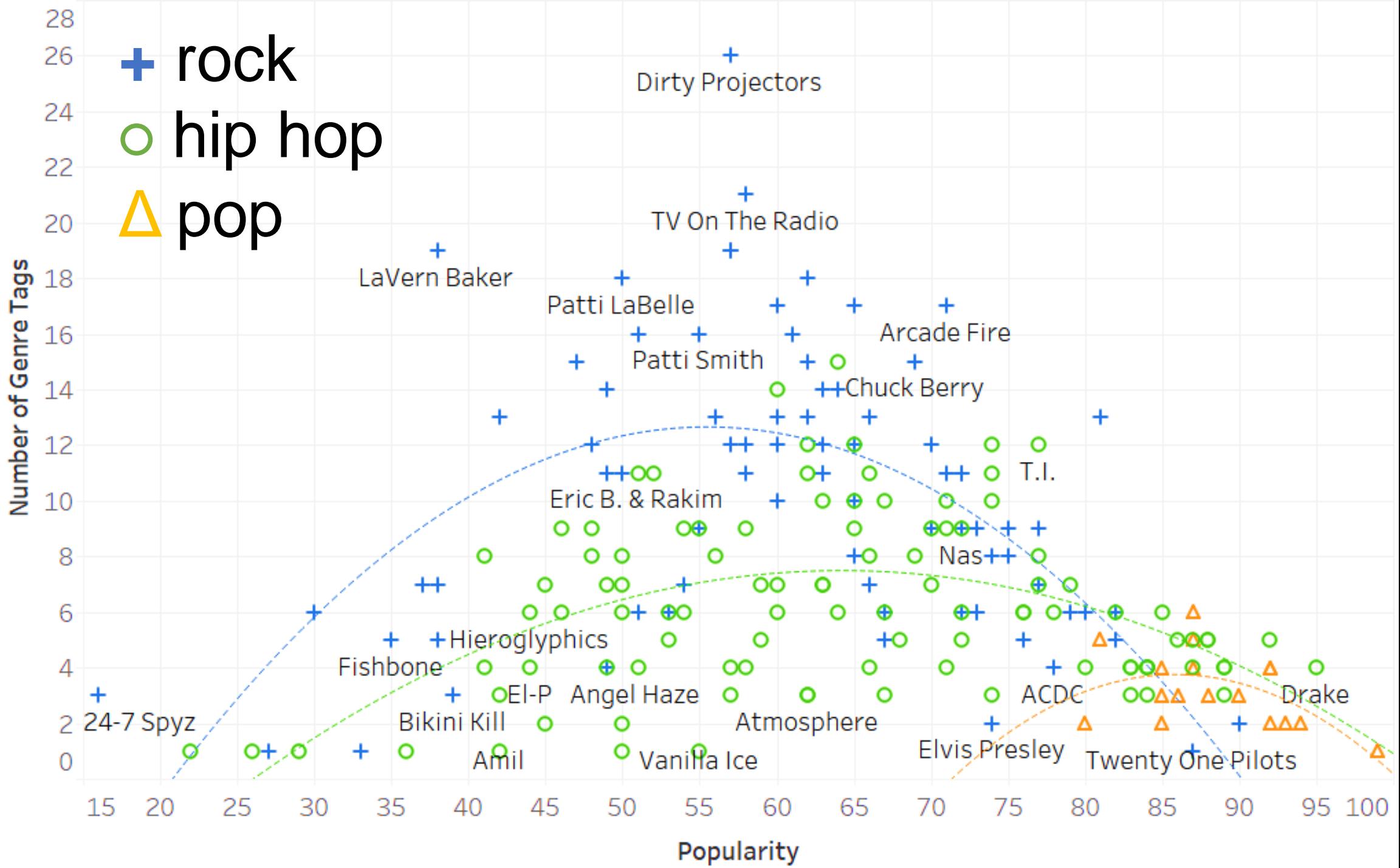


# #genre: SPOTIFY'S TAGS

- Spotify uses “*connections between artists* rather than individual songs or albums as a way of organizing the similarity relations on which the company’s taxonomies are based.” (McDonald, qtd in Brackett 2016, 325)

<b>Rihanna</b> dance pop, pop, r&b, urban contemporary	<b>Sam Hunt</b> contemporary country
<b>Taylor Swift</b> dance pop, pop, post-teen pop	<b>Esperanza Spalding</b> contemporary jazz, contemporary post-bop, cool jazz, indie r&b, jazz, jazz fusion, neo soul, soul, vocal jazz
<b>Kendrick Lamar</b> hip hop, rap, west coast rap	<b>The Beatles</b> british invasion, classic rock, merseybeat, protopunk, psychedelic rock, rock
<b>Dirty Projectors</b> alternative dance, alternative rock, anti-folk, brooklyn indie, chamber pop, chamber psych, chillwave, dance-punk, dream pop, escape room, folk-pop, freak folk, indie folk, indie pop, indie r&b, indie rock, indietronica, lo-fi, neo-psychadelic, new rave, noise pop, noise rock, shimmer pop, singer-songwriter, stomp and holler	<b>Dr. John</b> acoustic blues, blues, blues-rock, boogie-woogie, british blues, chicago blues, classic funk rock, classic rock, country blues, country rock, deep funk, delta blues, electric blues, folk, folk rock, funk, jam band, jazz, jazz blues, louisiana blues, mellow gold, memphis blues, memphis soul, modern blues, new orleans blues, piano blues, psychedelic rock, rock, rock-and-roll, roots rock





# #genre: SPOTIFY'S TAGS

- **Group 1: “australian alternative rock, indie pop, indie rock, indietronica, neo-psychadelic, and psychedelic rock”**
  - **Tame Impala: “New Person, Same Old Mistakes”**
- **Group 2: “dance pop, pop, r&b, and urban contemporary.”**
  - **Rihanna: “Same Ol' Mistakes”**

# #genre: SPOTIFY'S TAGS



Tame Impala - New Person, Same Old Mistakes (nameisniles video ...   
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK6Gvee-ri4>

**Lyrics:** I can just hear them now / "How could you let us down?" / But they don't know what I felt / Or see it from this way around... [Full lyrics on Google Play Music](#)

**Artist:** Tame Impala

**Album:** Currents

**Released:** 2015

**Genre:** Disco



Rihanna - Same Ol' Mistakes (Audio) - YouTube   
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x57ZM02NhF0>

**Lyrics:** Feel like a brand new person / (But you make the same old mistakes) / Well, I don't care I'm in love / (Stop before it's too late)... [Full lyrics on Google Play Music](#)

**Artist:** Rihanna

**Album:** Anti

**Released:** 2016

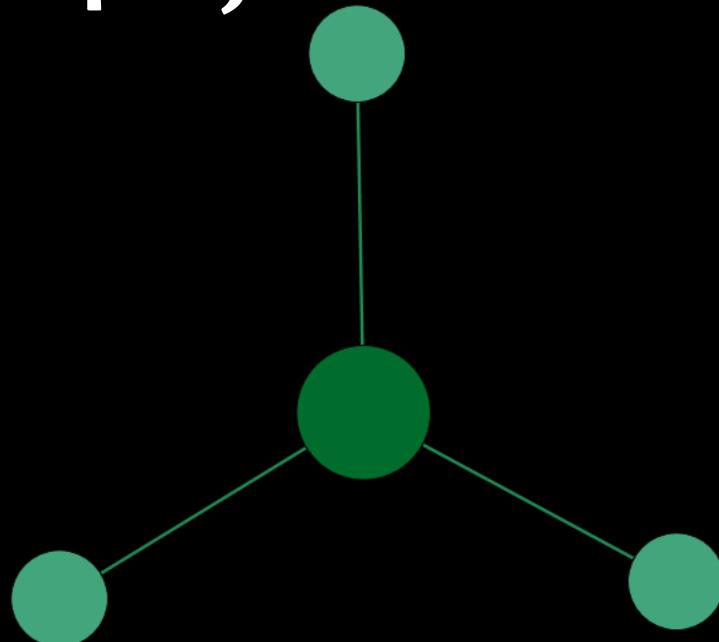
**Genres:** Contemporary R&B, Pop

# #genre: ARTIST CLUSTERS IN SPOTIFY

- $n = 3$  (10 in later examples)

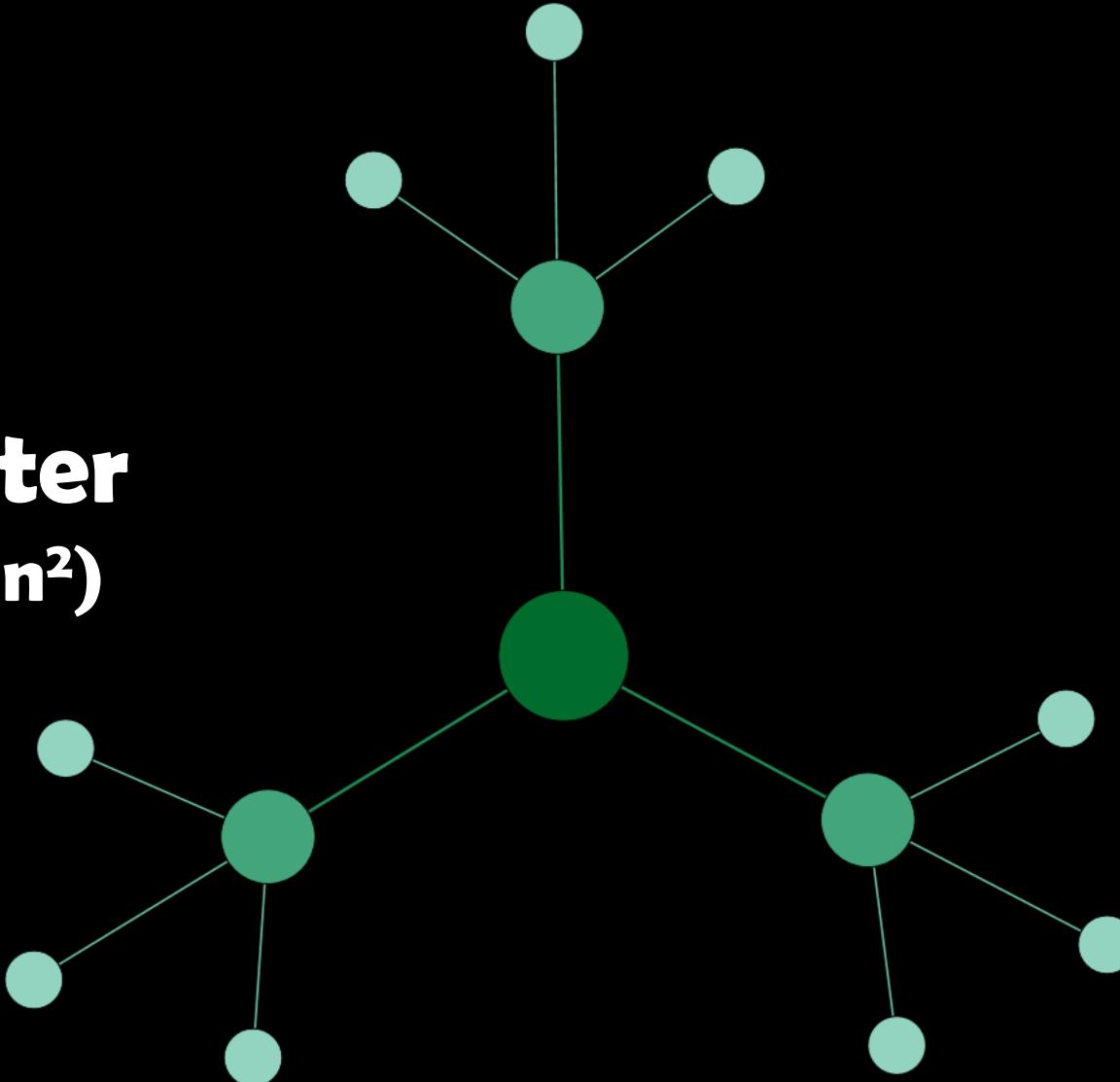
- First Cluster

- $\text{size}_{\max} = (1 + n)$



- **n = 3**

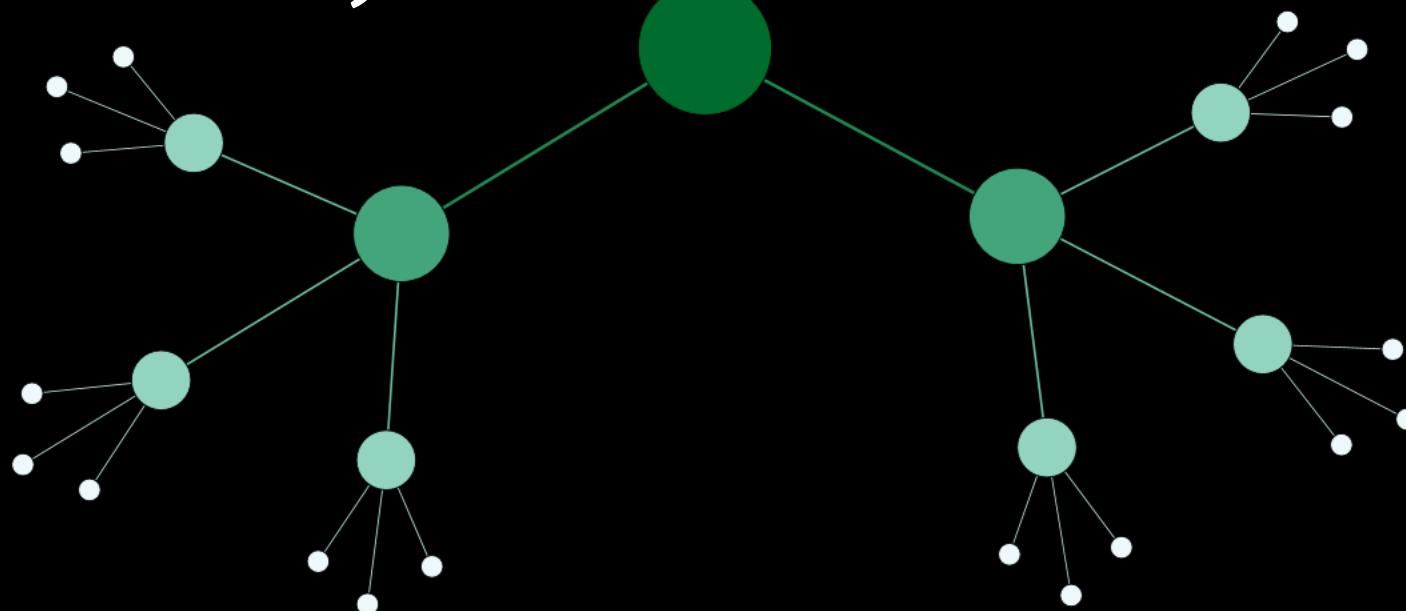
- **Second Cluster**
- **size<sub>max</sub> = (1 + n + n<sup>2</sup>)**



- $n = 3$

- **Third Cluster**

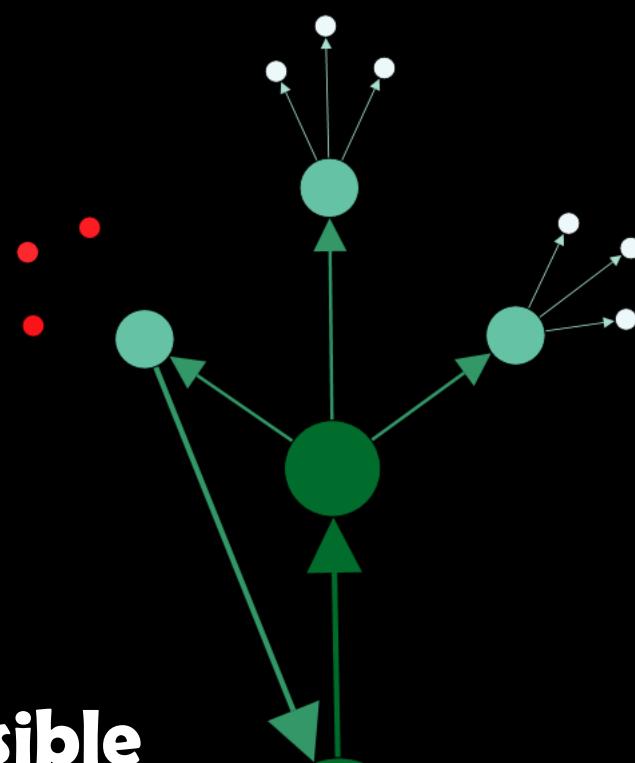
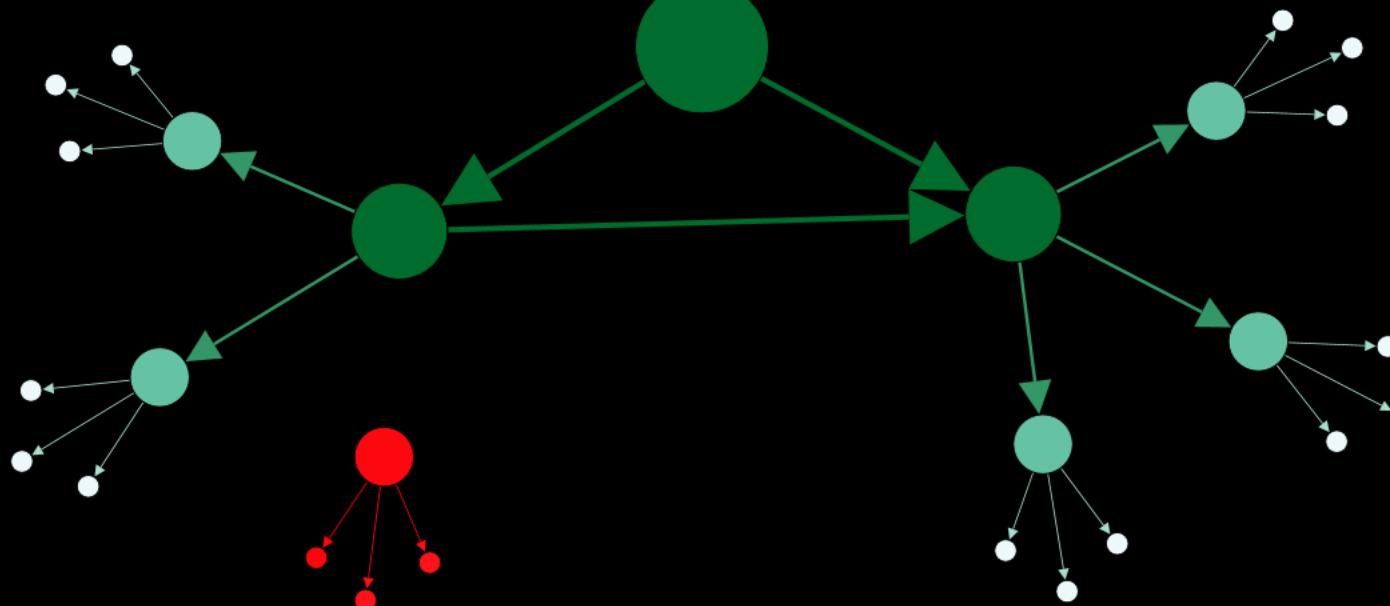
- $\text{size}_{\max} = (1 + n + n^2 + n^3)$



In general,  $\text{size}_{\max} = \sum_{c=0}^3 n^c$   
 $c = \text{cluster level}$

- $n = 3$

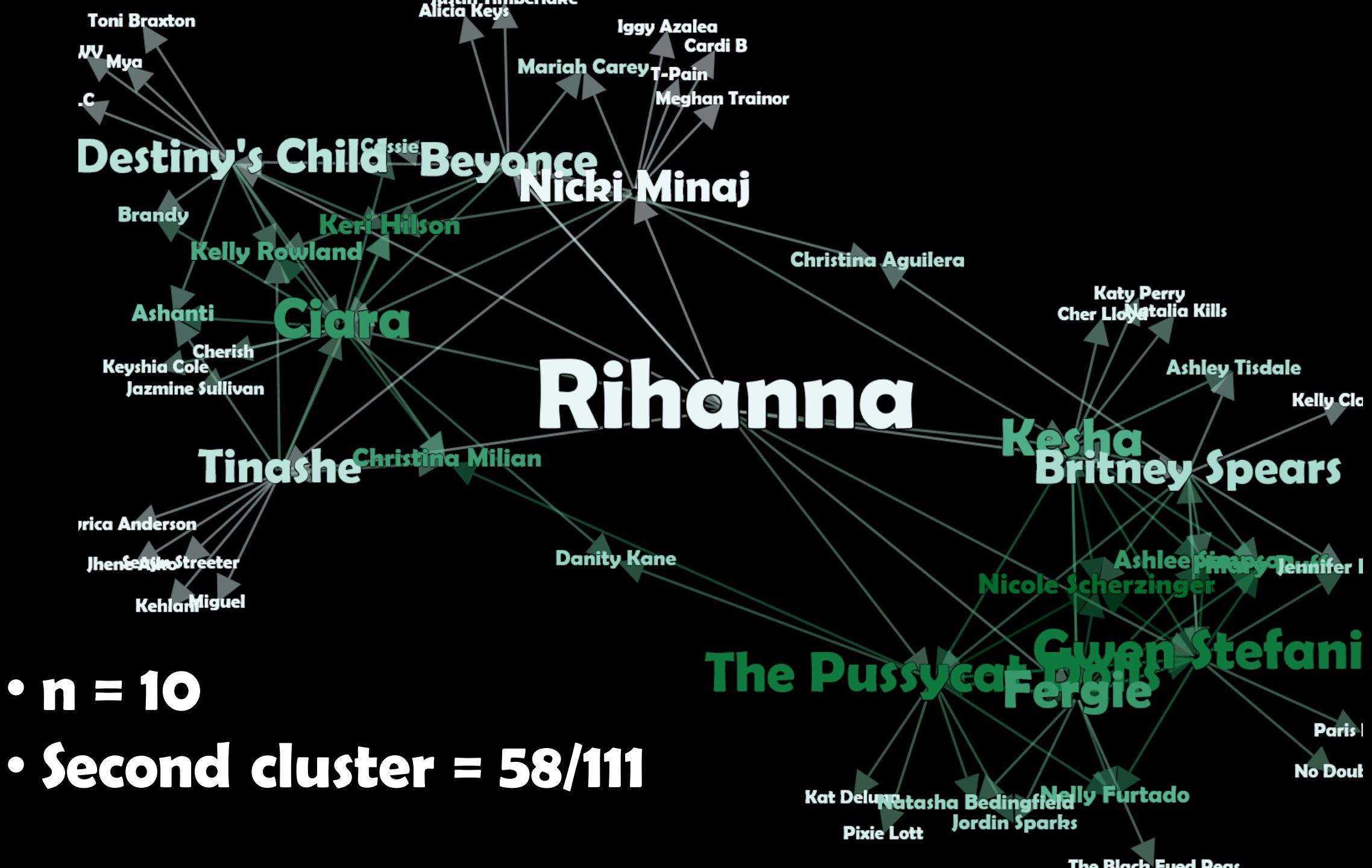
- **Third Cluster**
- **size = 33 out of 40 possible**

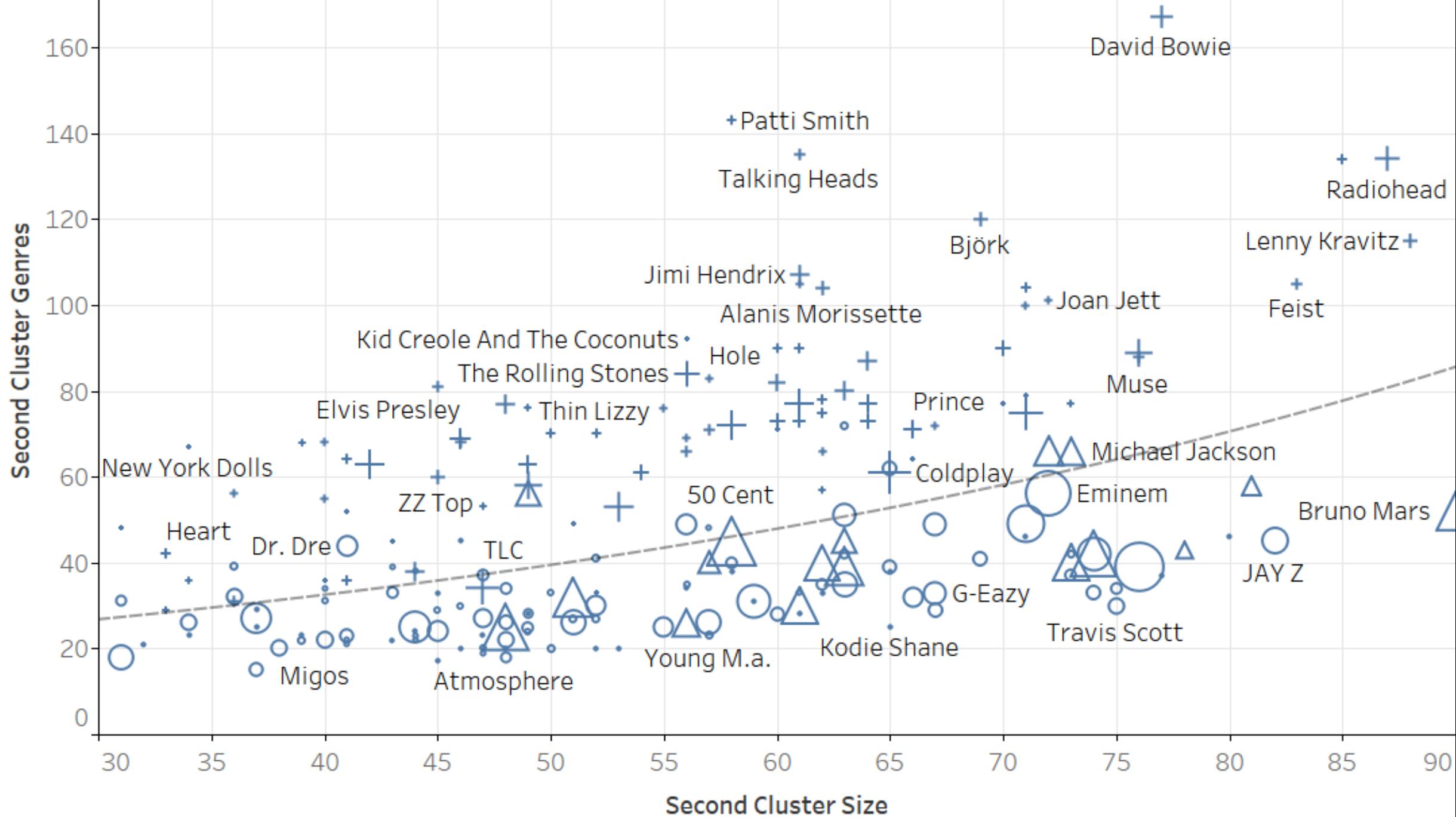


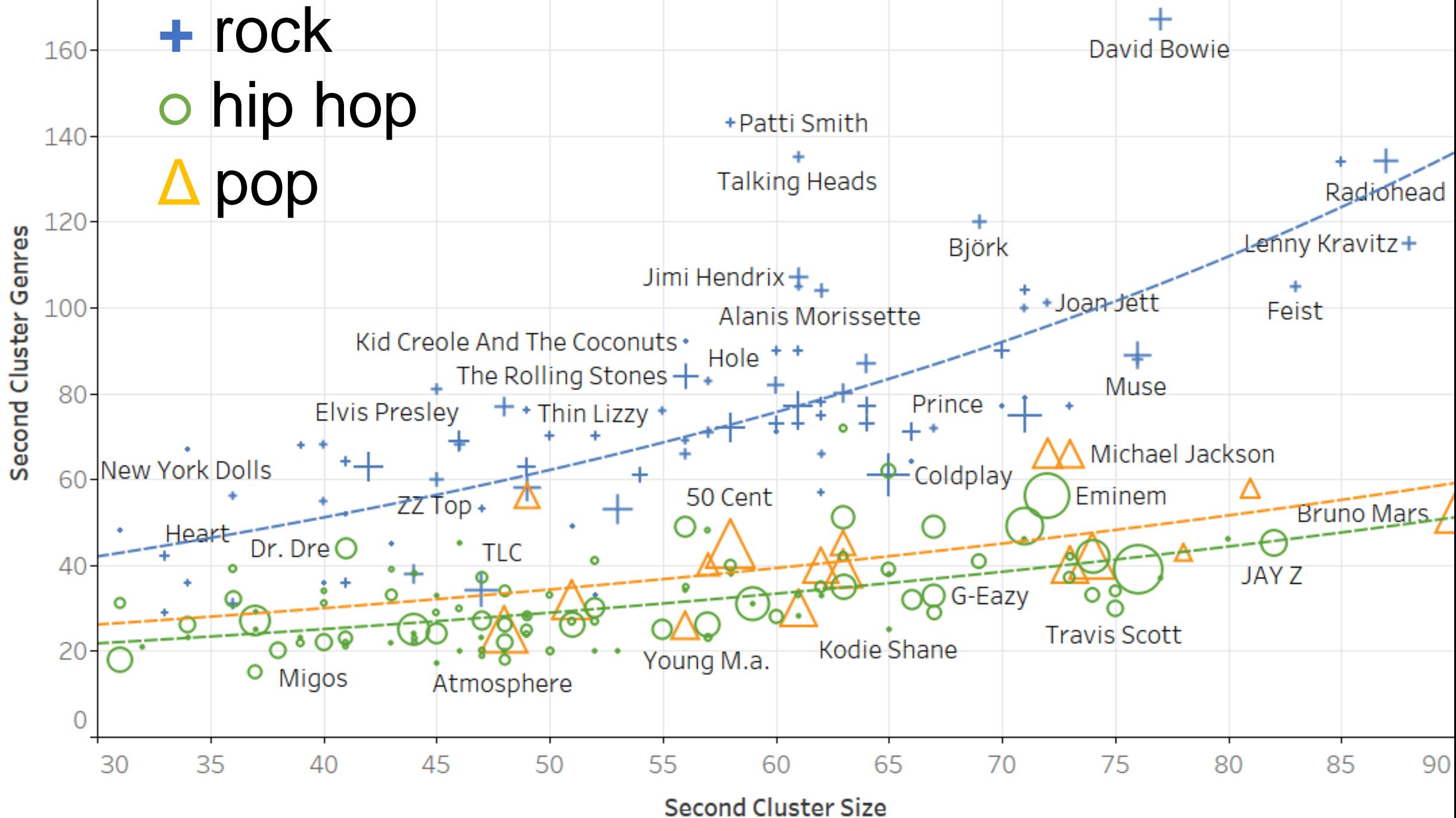
In general,  $\text{size}_{\max} =$

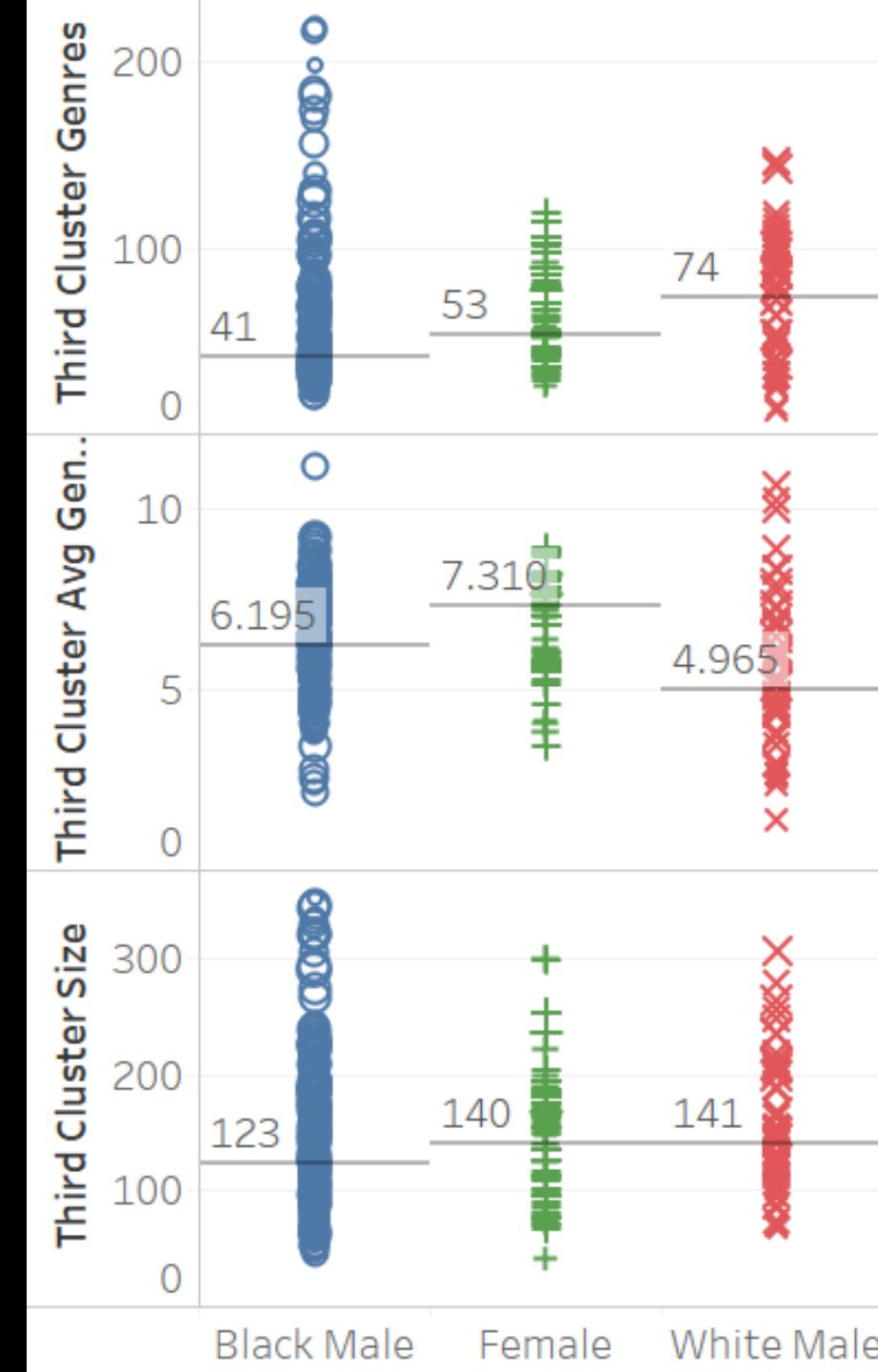
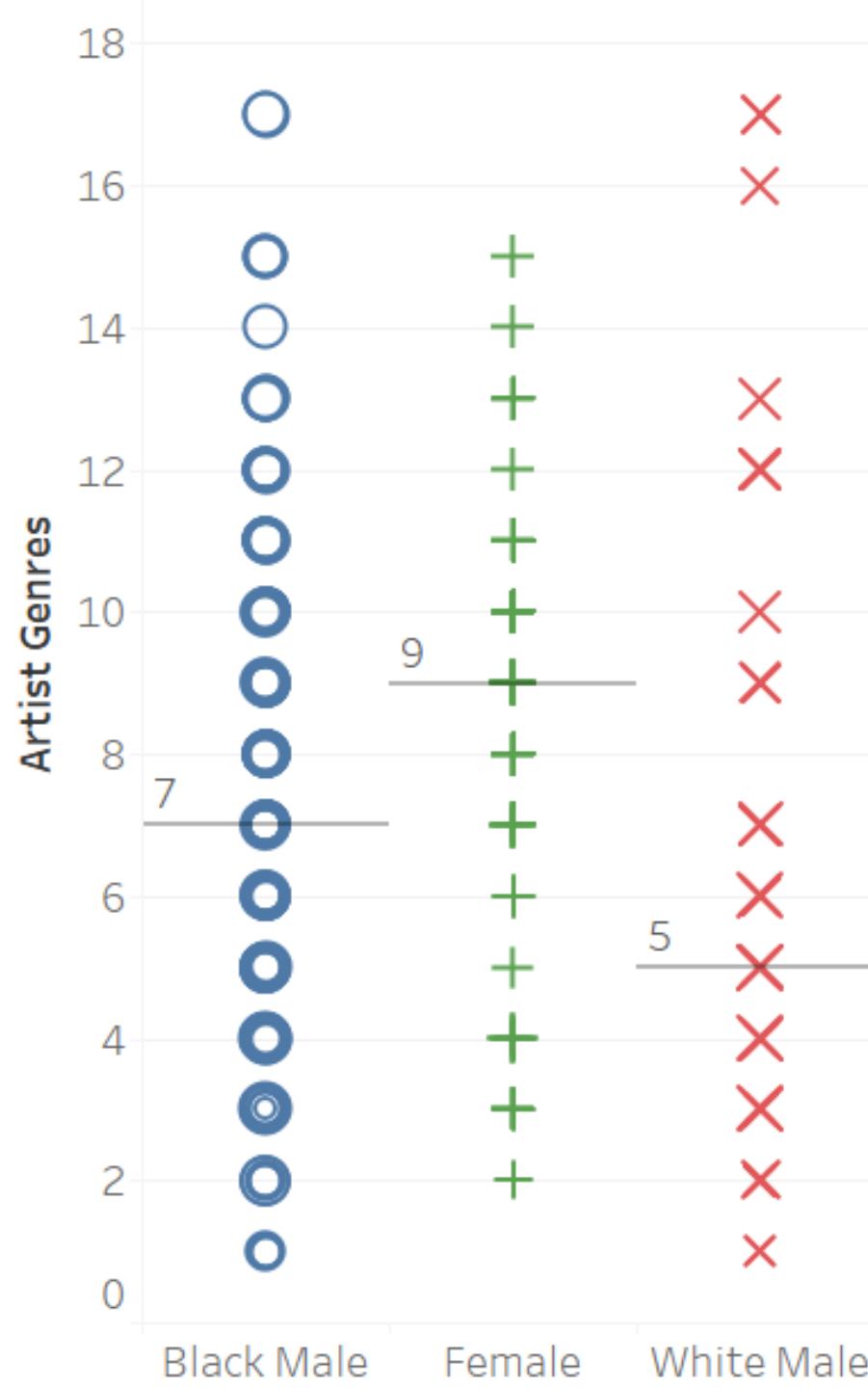
$$\sum_{c=0}^3 n^c$$

$c = \text{cluster level}$





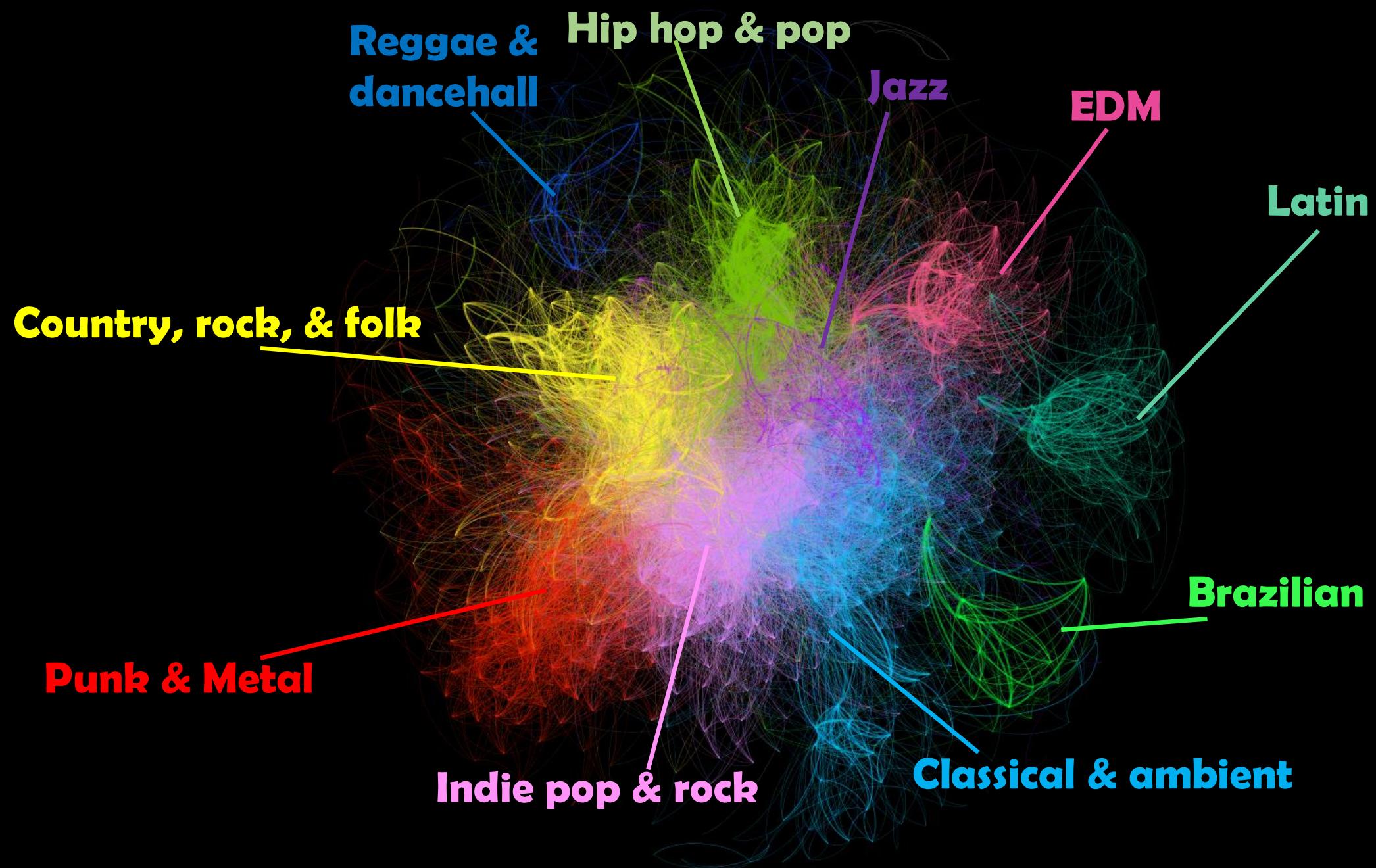




# #genre: ARTIST CLUSTERS IN SPOTIFY

**Undercoded:** “macroscopic portions of certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation...” ”(Eco 1976, 135–36)

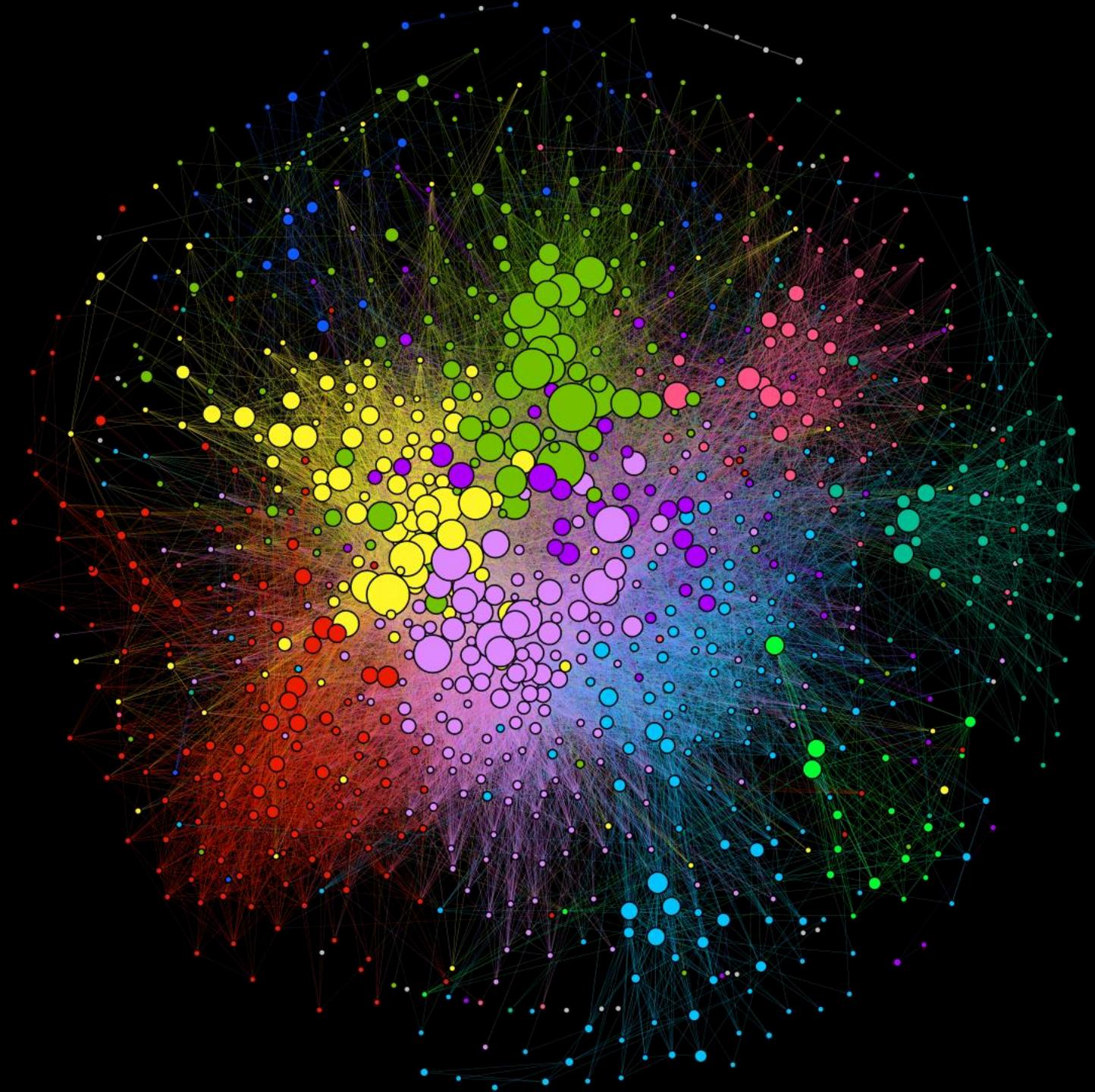
**Overcoded:** “the minimal combinable units or the minimal analyzable clusters of a given code” are made pertinent for analysis. (Eco 1976, 235)

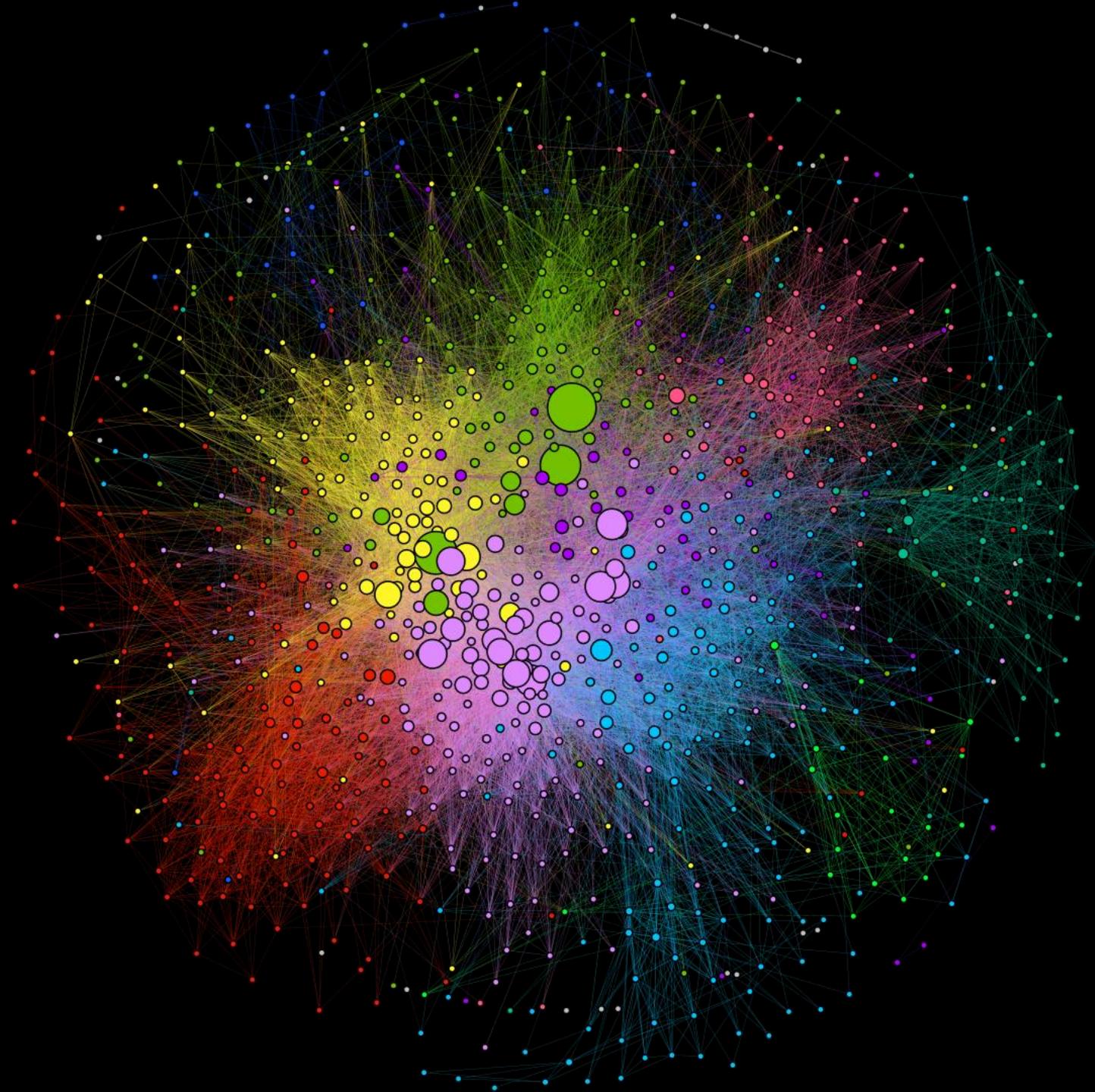


# #genre: HOW IS MUSIC CATEGORIZED?

**Hagstrom Miller:** “black and white performers [who had] regularly *employed* racialized sounds” slowly became expected to “*embody* [racialized sounds].” (2010, 4)

**Stoever:** “Developing a sonic color line—however uneven, ad hoc, and indeterminate—to verify race’s increasingly unreliable visual cues allowed whites to extend both race and racism into the auditory unseen. The sonic color line turned the notion of race inside out; blackness and whiteness could now be lived and experienced from within rather than just externally classified.” (2016, 36)







Machel Montano: “Fast Wine”

# dancehall

lovers rock

roots reggae

dub

reggae

# reggae

rock steady

teen pop

rap

boy band

urban contemporary

pop rap

europop

norwegian pop

grime

lectro

edm

house

disco

techno

electro

trance

uplifting

trance

progressive

trance

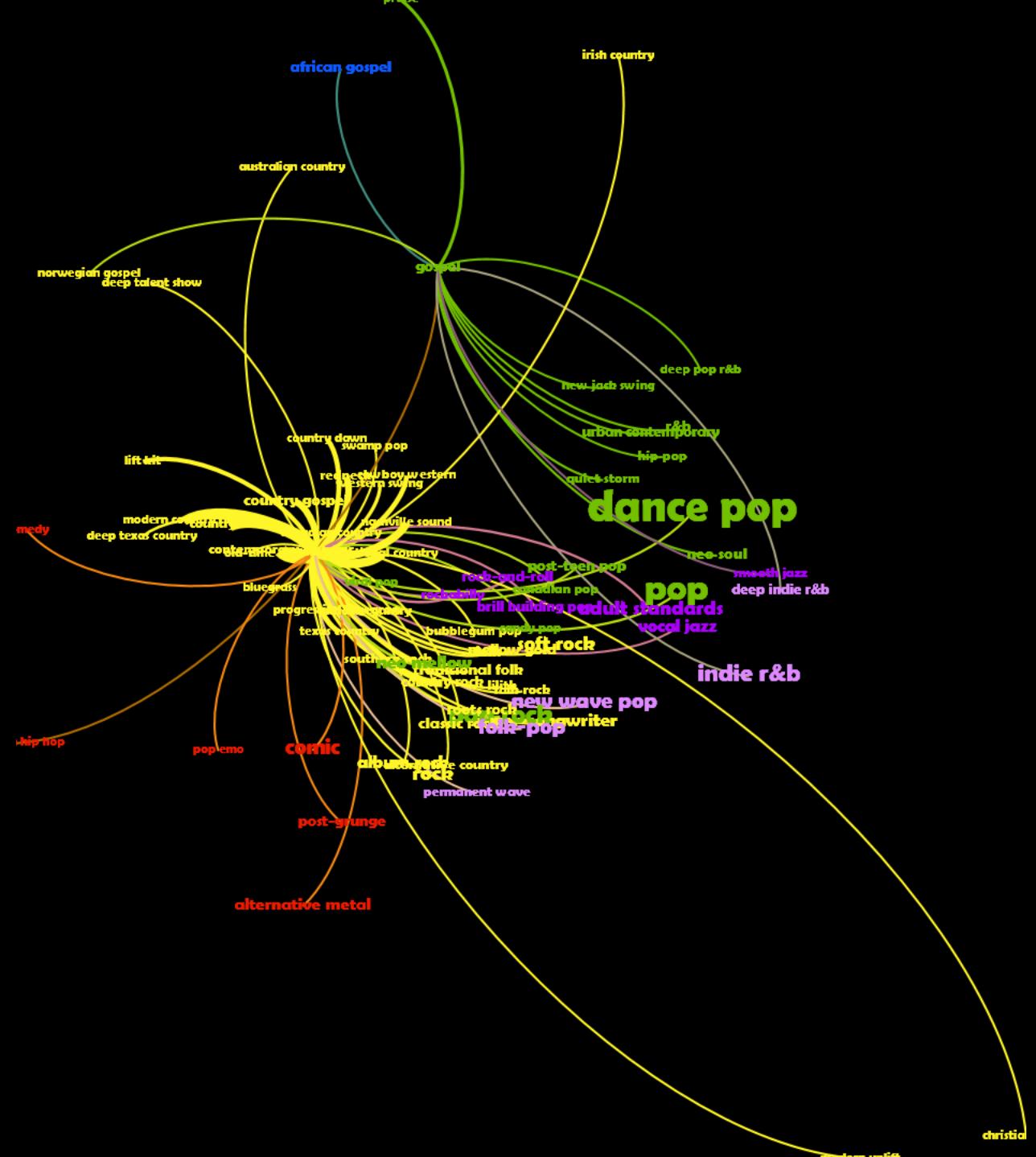
progressive

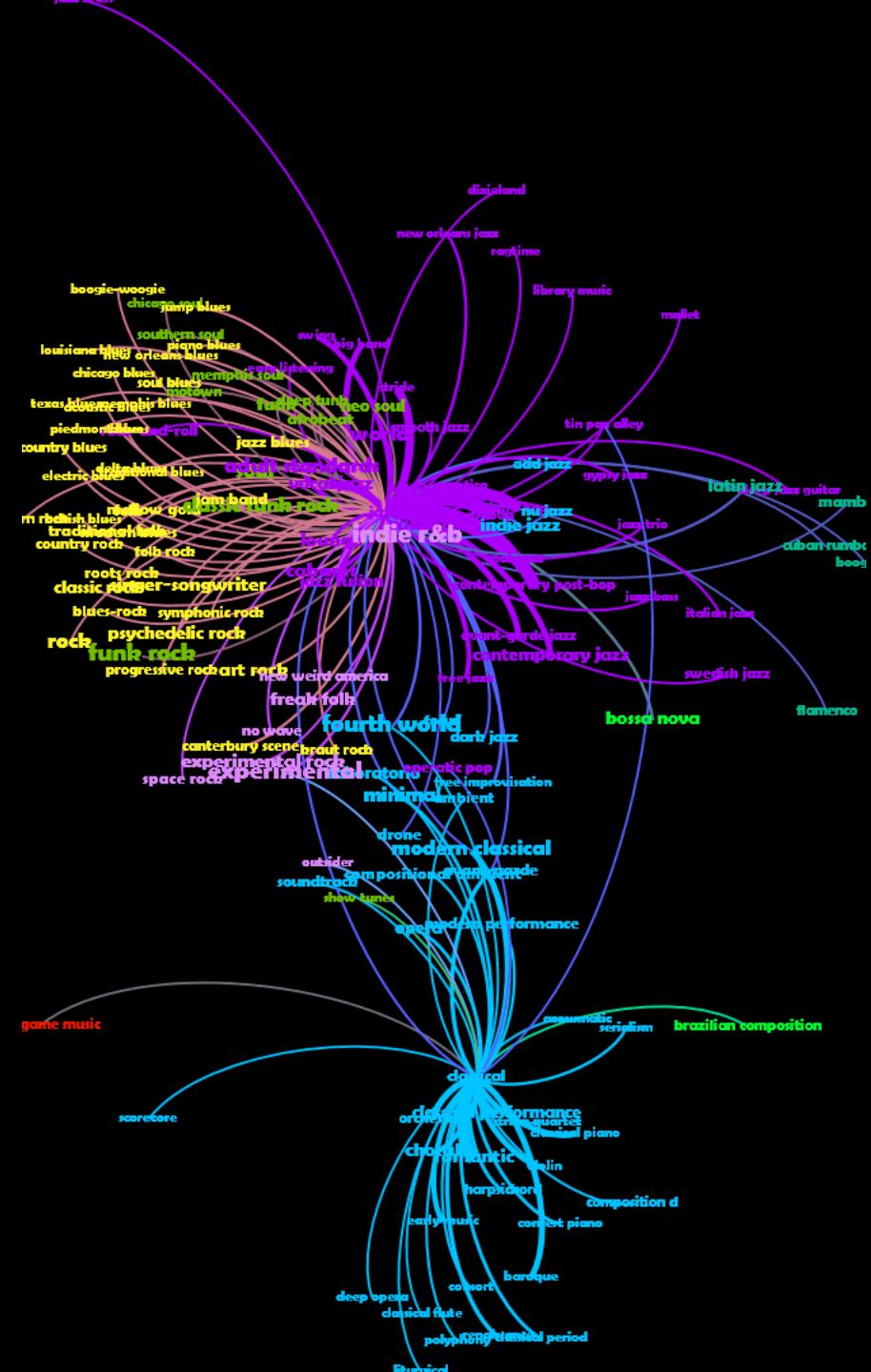
trance

deep

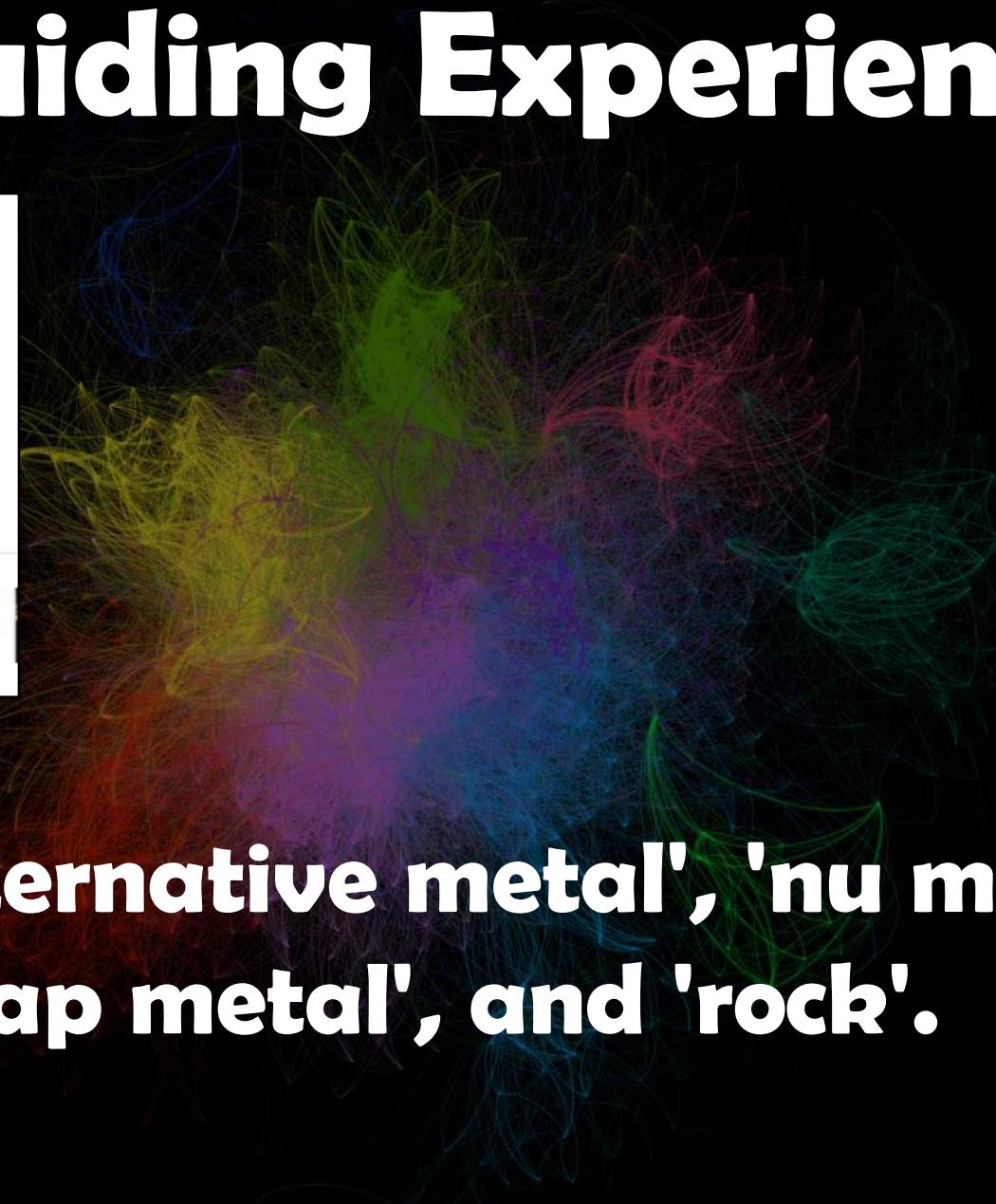
trance

big room





# #genre: Guiding Experience



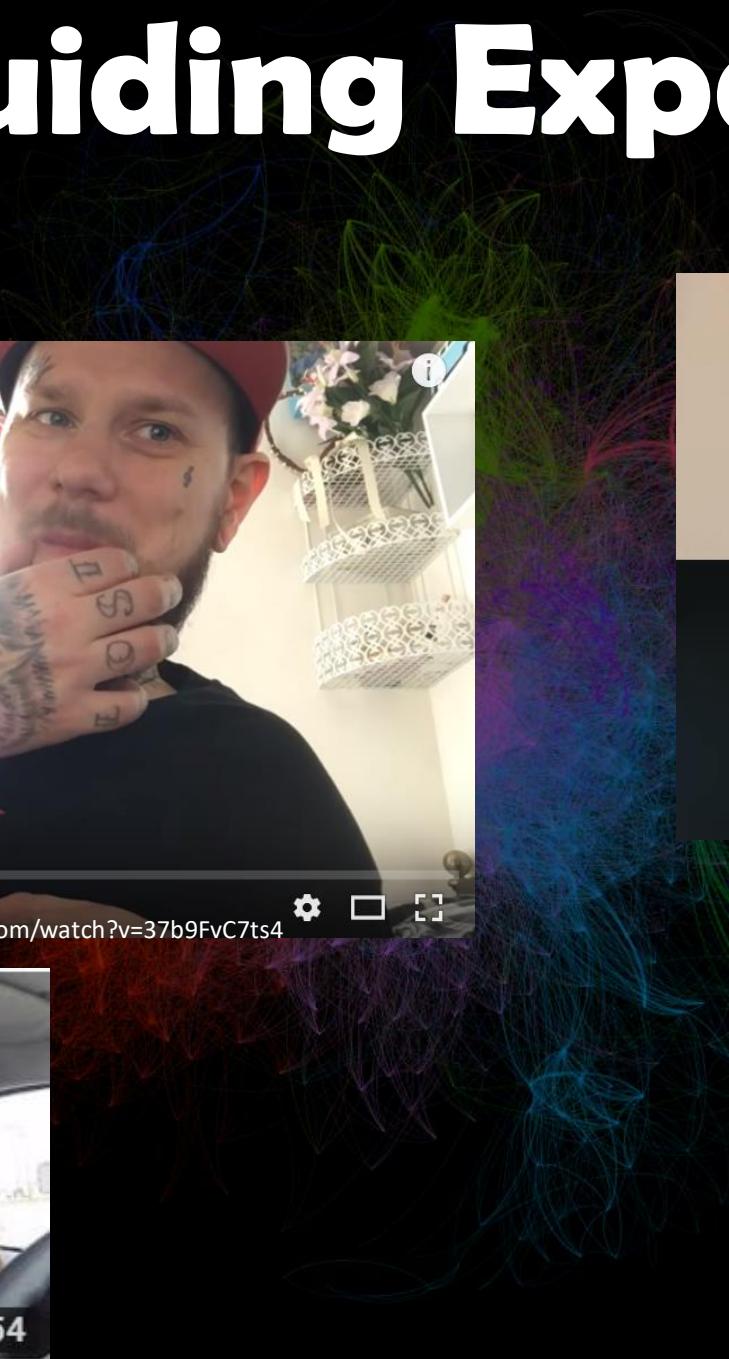
Mike Shinoda   
@mikeshinoda

Genre is dead?

RETWEETS 1,380 LIKES 2,895

**Linkin Park: 'alternative metal', 'nu metal', 'post-grunge', 'rap metal', and 'rock'.**

# #genre: Guiding Experience



# #genre

- **Genres still matter**
- **Become *adjectivized***
- **Frow: Genre is “central to human meaning-making.” (2015, 10)**

# Selected Bibliography

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