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# TAKE A LOOK AT ME NOW: CONSECRATION AND THE PHIL COLLINS EFFECT

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## **Abstract**

Consecration is the process by which producers in creative fields become canonized as “greats”. However, is this the end of the story? Research on consecration focuses on the drivers of consecration, but pays little attention to the post-consecration period. Furthermore, the research ignores the dynamics of consecration. To address these gaps, we examine the changing fortunes of a consecrated artist – the musician Phil Collins. We identify the ways in which three actors (fans, critics, and peers) assemble for consecration, disassemble for deconsecration, and reassemble for reconsecration. Examining the changing public image and commercial fortunes of Collins as a solo artist between 1980-2020, we identify a N-shaped process of rise-fall-rise that we call the Phil Collins Effect (PCE). This effect offers a new way of thinking about how cultural producers gain, lose and regain status in their fields.

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## Introduction

In 2020, a YouTube video featuring Tim and Fred Williams, 21-year old twins from Gary, Indiana, went viral. Their YouTube channel featured the two young men listening to songs they had not heard before, mainly by older white musicians (viewers would submit suggestions, and the twins would listen and record their reactions.). In August 2020 the twins were filmed sitting in their home studio listening to, and providing live commentary on, Phil Collins' 1981 hit song *In The Air Tonight*. When they lined up *In the Air Tonight*, they were evidently a bit concerned with the album cover. "He looks like he's staring into my soul. I'm scared, I can't look at him", Fred said. They listen to the first few minutes of the song, their heads bobbing along. Then Collins' drum fill with the famous gated reverb starts and they are astonished. "I ain't never seen anyone drop a beat three minutes into a song", Fred explains. When the song concludes, Fred offers his conclusion: "You killed it Phil!".

Soon after the video was uploaded, it was widely shared on social media and viewed millions of times. Collins' iconic song immediately went to number one on US college radio stations (Shteamer, 2021). Respectable news sources such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* carried articles about the YouTube video. It also led to some heady words about Collins' music. "The drum fill on *In the Air Tonight* is one of the most dependable thrills I know", wrote one *New Yorker* cultural critic, "a very quick path to a certain kind of heady, metaphysical elation" (Petruisch, 2020). This is surprising, as only a few years earlier Collins' solo work was regarded by critics as cultural junk left over from an unloved earlier era. One music critic writing in 1998 explains that "The Eighties was the era of Serf Rock. The pointy end of the pyramid of feudal power was jostled over by a generation of silly princelings, their

catamites and Cher... Next to them on a little stool sat Phil Collins” (Coleman, 1998).

Twenty-two years later Phil Collins was a source of “metaphysical elation”. How did this happen?

There is a vibrant discussion in the sociology of culture which explores how some musicians, artists and writers are “consecrated” (Baumann 2005; Childress, Rawlings & Moeran 2017; Schmutz 2005; 2016; Schmutz & Faupel 2010). This happens when an individual is elevated from the normal status as a jobbing cultural producer to someone who has unique qualities that deserve veneration. This process of consecration entails a ‘social magic’ whereby someone (or something) is marked out as special and having enduring and timeless qualities (Bourdieu, 1984). This typically happens through processes such as conferring high status prizes (like the Nobel, Academy Award or Grammy), induction into a hall of fame (e.g., the Baseball Hall of Fame), large scale retrospectives of their career at a major institution (e.g., the David Bowie exhibition curated by the Victoria & Albert Museum), or inclusion in standard histories of a field (e.g., textbooks).

Existing work on consecration in cultural fields has explored *who* consecrates cultural producers (e.g., Cattani, Ferriani & Paul, 2014), and *what* tends to get consecrated (e.g., Allen & Lincoln, 2004). However, it is only recently that sociologists studying consecration have become interested in *how* the consecration process evolves and changes over time. For instance, they have examined how preferences shift during the process of selecting which cultural products will be consecrated (e.g., Childress et al., 2017), or how some cultural producers can become consecrated retrospectively into the canon of a particular genre (e.g., Dowd, Ryan, Schmutz, Bledsoe & Semenza, 2021). What we know less about is the post-consecration period. Is consecration the top of the so-called cultural status S-curve, or is this peak merely the rise before an inglorious fall? Popular culture is replete with examples of

artists and their works being re-evaluated, some for the better, some for worse. In this paper, we explore how the previously consecrated can be deconsecrated, and how the same deconsecrated artist can regain lost credibility.

To explore these questions, we conduct an in-depth historical case study of the solo career of the British pop musician Phil Collins. We do this by drawing on a range of archival materials which capture social evaluations of Collins' work over time by three core audiences: peers, critics and the wider public. This includes reviews, critical coverage, awards, and wider public discourse in the press about Collins. Through a longitudinal qualitative analysis, we find that evaluation of Collins' solo career roughly into three stages: between 1980 and 1992 when Collins was consecrated, between 1992 and 2000 when he was effectively deconsecrated, and finally 2001 to the present (2021) when his work critically elevated to an even higher status than during its commercial peak (a process we call reconsecration). After identifying the pattern of consecration, deconsecration and reconsecration we ask how this happens. We find interlinked consecration work on the part of audiences, critics and the peers. This leads us to identify what we call the 'Phil Collins Effect' (PCE), an N-shaped process of rise and fall, followed by rise again. In so doing we expand our understanding of the process of consecration.

By examining the longitudinal processes of consecration, we make three main contributions to the literature on cultural products. First, we identify a new dynamic of cultural evaluation which we call the "Phil Collins Effect" (PCE). We think this not only applies to 'past their prime' musicians like Collins but to many other cultural producers who fall from the pantheon of greatness and then are subsequently restored (deceased Apple co-founder Steve Jobs in business leadership is one such example). This concept allows us to think about how these processes of cultural recovery and restoration can help cement cultural

producers' consecration. Second, in identifying the PCE we extend recent work on the dynamics of consecration. In particular, we do this by exploring what happens after the moment of consecration. This reveals a broader picture about how cultural greats may endure, be forgotten and in some cases rediscovered. Finally, we think this paper opens up a broader vista for studies of cultural consecration. We highlight the work which various cultural evaluators engage in to create, maintain, undermine and restore the status of a particular cultural product or producer, with a particular focus on the role of non-experts (e.g., fans) in the process of reconsecration.

To make these contributions, we proceed as follows: we begin by reviewing the literature on cultural consecration, with a particular focus on process. To frame our study, we draw on the concepts of deconsecration and reconsecration (Talento, 2014). We explore these in relation to the career of musician Phil Collins, first providing a short descriptive history of his shifting cultural and commercial status. This provides the basis for explaining the process of consecration-deconsecration-reconsecration or PCE. We then consider how the PCE transfers to other contexts and identify some potential boundary conditions. We close the paper by identifying future lines of research and the practical implications of the PCE for cultural producers and intermediaries.

## **Consecration**

Within every field of cultural production, there are figures who are considered to be unique, special and bearers of some kind of enduring quality. They are the “great” actors, sporting “legends”, scientific “geniuses”, “canonical” writers and “star” musicians. They are seen as standing apart from the great mass of other cultural producers in that field. These greats have often performed in a way which stands out from their peers. For instance, they are often

musicians who have sold more records, sports people who have scored the most points, or scientists who have gained more citations (Allen & Parsons, 2006). However, just having the best 'objective' performance is not enough to be considered great in a cultural field (Fine, 2004). A figure also needs to go through a social process where their special and unique qualities are recognized and celebrated by others. This happens through the process of consecration.

Consecration is a term which comes from religious practice. It denotes the process of designating something or someone as being sacred or belonging to God. For instance, through a religious ceremony a building could be consecrated as a church or a person could be consecrated as a saint. While religious institutions broadly held monopoly over the power of consecration, Pierre Bourdieu argued that onset of modernity has seen the power to consecrate pass to the state (Engler, 2003). In particular, the state gained power over the ability to designate particular things or people as having special or unique qualities (such as Australia's "National Living Treasure"). The state can do this through conferring of titles, special designations and awards. According to Bourdieu, this process of consecration involves a process "of separating those who have undergone it, not from those who have not yet undergone it, but from those who will not undergo it in any sense, and thereby instituting a lasting difference between those to whom the rite pertains and those to whom it does not pertain." This process created a "discontinuity out of continuity" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.6). He pointed out that "cultural consecration does indeed confer on the objects, persons, and situations it touches; a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation." The process "tend(s) to consecrate or legitimate an arbitrary boundary, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1991, p.118).



Bourdieu's initial comments about the secularization of processes of consecration have been taken up by cultural sociologists exploring this process of "social magic". They see consecration as "the attempt by a group or organization to impose a durable symbolic distinction between those objects and individuals worthy of veneration as exemplars of excellence within a field of cultural production and those that are not" (Allen & Parsons, 2006, p.809). Cultural sociologists have explored consecration processes in a wide range of figures including baseball players admitted to the hall of fame (Allen & Parsons, 2006), musicians featured in *Rolling Stone*'s list of best 500 albums of all time (Schmutz, 2005), academy award winning film-makers (Cattani, Ferriani & Alisson, 2014), and award-winning novelists (Childress et al., 2017).

Because processes of consecration have been secularized, they often have to appear as if they follow the procedures and rituals of rationality. This means processes of consecration typically need to have particular rational procedures in place (Allen and Parsons, 2006). First, the body conferring consecration needs to have legitimate authority. This legitimate authority is often conferred through the body being composed of experts. For instance, admittance to the baseball hall of fame is decided by a group of veteran baseball writers. Second, the process of selection needs to be rigorous, rule bound and involve a rational procedure. For instance, there is a detailed and clearly defined process for identification of the recipient of the academy award to film-makers. Third, consecration processes need to be highly selective. That means only a very small number of people within a field will actually be consecrated. The rarity of consecration means it is seen as highly valuable. For instance, usually only one book in the tens of thousands of eligible novels receives the annual Booker prize. Finally, processes of consecration need to have some link with objective differences in performance.

For instance, scientists with unusually high citation rates are often singled out for particular high-status awards.

While Bourdieu focused on the role of the state in consecration, subsequent researchers have identified a wider range of actors beyond the state institutions who are involved in consecration. In particular, they have identified three typical types of consecrators. The first are critics. These are people who provide reviews, processes of evaluation and a wider intellectual discourse around a particular form of cultural production. Through doing this, critics bestow a sense of “bourgeoise legitimacy” onto a cultural product or cultural producer (Bourdieu, 1993). For instance, during the 1960’s film critics developed an intellectual discourse around films, designating some as a form of art (as opposed to a commercial product) and particular film directors as artists who deserve veneration (Bauman, 2001). Similar processes have played out in other cultural and commercial categories such as self-taught art, fine wine, and genres of music (Beverland, 2005; Fine, 2004; Peterson, 1997). The second type of consecrators are peers. These are other (often high profile) cultural producers who evaluate the importance of cultural products within their own field. Doing this confers a sense of “specific legitimacy” onto cultural producers (Bourdieu, 1993). For instance, academy awards are based on votes from members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) who themselves are often cultural producers, intermediaries, or former winners (Allen & Lincoln, 2004). Finally, the wider listening public can also consecrate an artist. This happens through sales, continued support and interest as well as more intense forms of fandom. For instance, despite sustained critical condemnation and peer reaction in the form of punk rock, some progressive rock acts achieved consecration through the ongoing interest of fans (Dowd et al., 2021). This commercial success and interest from fans confirms ‘popular legitimacy’ on cultural producers (Bourdieu, 1993).

As well as exploring questions of who does the consecrating, cultural sociologists have asked who gets consecrated. By looking at a wide range of fields, they have tried to identify the characteristics of those who are part of the canon. Those who are consecrated have often received significant amounts of prior recognition within their field. This may have come in the form of critical discussion, peer recognition as well as popular recognition. This means that consecration is often a cumulative process whereby those who are “older” members of a field build up a stock of recognition which serves as a foundation for eventual consecration (age and sustained success are often critical to field status and authenticity; Beverland, 2005). Second, those who are consecrated are often already associated with elite institutions within a particular field. Authors whose work is published by prestigious publishing houses were more likely to win prizes (Franssen, 2015), musicians represented by prestigious record labels were likely to have their songs become “standards” (Phillips, 2013), and screen writers who have high profile agents were more likely to receive prizes (Bielby & Bielby, 1999). In addition, cultural producers with demographic characteristics such as a particular race or gender are more likely to be consecrated. For instance, male musicians are more likely to be consecrated as being great artists (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010). Similar, there are racialized patterns of consecration, with one study finding that black artists were significantly more likely to be admitted to the rock and roll hall of fame (Bledsoe, 2021). Other researchers have found that consecration processes tend to be shaped by how different characteristics come together in a particular field. For instance, one study of the Booker Prize finds that stories authored by particular people (men) with a particular focus (male centered stories) who are supported by particular publishers (high profile) are more likely to dominate over others (e.g., female centered stories) (Childress et al., 2017).

The process of consecration has come with significant potential benefits for those whose work has been deemed as being special. Cultural consecration confers the status of ‘art’ onto what had been previously seen as a low brow commercial product (Bauman, 2007; Grazian 2003; Peterson 2005). For instance, critics played an important role in positioning rock music as an art form and some rock n’ roll musicians as artists (Schmutz, 2016). Similarly, during the 1960s, the rise of intellectual film criticism in specialist journals and popular newspapers played an important role in representing film as an art form (Bauman, 2001). Even lowbrow everyday commercial objects have been imbued with authenticity and elevated in status to signifiers of individual or collective identity (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; Beverland, Eckhardt, Sands & Shankar, 2020).

As well as creating a highbrow image of art, processes of consecration provide some degree of “autonomisation” for cultural producers. This means that creators are not measured against strictly commercial concerns (Schmutz, 2016); in fact, commercial success may undermine perceptions of authenticity necessary for cultural status (Fine, 2004). In addition, consecration makes creative work more likely to endure. Consecration creates and repositions a cultural producer in aesthetic hierarchy. Consecrated artists become seen as enduring and essential whereas others do not. This creates a clear sense of winners and losers which leads to large differentials in attention, recognition, and material rewards. Consecrated artists gain more, but the unconsecrated do not. This leads to what Merton (1968) called the “Matthew effect” whereby artists who are already consecrated gain more fame and resources while those who are not tend to lose out.

While existing work has explored the question of who does the consecrating, which cultural producers are consecrated and the results of consecration, we know less about the

evolving nature of consecration. In particular, how does status through consecration evolve over time? There are a handful of recent studies which look at this process. Some have explored “retrospective consecration” whereby critics look back to identify the great cultural products or cultural producers of the past. For instance, some researchers have pointed out that consecration processes can occur retrospectively with some cultural products being marked out as greats well after their release. This can happen through inclusion in lists such as “greatest albums ever” (Schmutz, 2005), best films lists (Lampel & Nadavulakere, 2009), or lists of classics in a particular artists genre (Dowd et al., 2021). Others have examined how consecration processes move from immediate acts of consecration (such as positive album reviews and inclusion in lists of best albums of the year), and “retrospective consecration” (such as inclusion on lists of the best albums of the decade) (Schmutz & van Venrooij, 2018). This work finds that initial conflict around which cultural products should be consecrated declines over time and there is increasing agreement about which are the all-time greats. While existing literature traces paths towards consecration, it has not really considered what happens after consecration. In particular, how do previously consecrated artists get removed from their pedestal? And, once deconsecrated, how do they return to the pantheon of the greats?

## **Methods**

We chose a historical, longitudinal case study design to capture issues of process, the impact of changes in context, and the underlying dynamics of consecration-deconsecration-reconsecration. As a starting point, the authors identified that debates about Collins’ shift in status, from uncool to cool, occurred in *The Guardian* newspaper. The tone of these articles

suggested that such a change was significant in regards to the historic coverage of Collins within this outlet. As a result, we began by examining coverage of Collins in *The Guardian* and stablemate *The Observer*, searching for all articles covering his solo career (1980-2020).

We began by conducting a search for Phil + Collins. This yielded 2,259 number of articles. Reviews of these reduced the data set down to 107 after we removed articles that simply mentioned the musician's name in passing without further comment (usually for example, mentioned as one of several attendees at an event). The outcome of this was a timeline of shifts in Phil Collins' status, shifts in tone regarding his work, motives, and character, and contextual details judged potentially relevant to our emerging contribution. To include the conservative press' coverage of Collins, we repeated the search in *The Times* newspaper. We search in *The Times Digital Archive* for pre-2015 material produced 1,984 initial hits, which included a large number of content such as birthdays and concert advertisements that are not relevant to the study, as well as articles that mentioned Collins in passing. We therefore focussed on the material classified under the subject term "Collins, Phil" (52 articles), of which 24 included commentary on Collins. The search in *The Times Online* for material from 2015 onwards produced an further 12 directly relevant articles. The coverage in *The Times* echoed the clear shifts in Collins' status over time identified in the first phase of analysis. Finally, we undertook a third round of analysis drawing on a larger, specialist music press database over the same temporal period to confirm our initial findings, clarify periods of shifting status, identify further details to enrich our story, and provide any contrasting evidence. We searched for articles mentioning Phil Collins in the *Rock's Back Pages* database (rocksbackpages.com), an extensive archive of the major rock music magazines published since the early 1960s in the UK (*New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker*,

*Sounds, Record Mirror, MOJO, Uncut, Vox, Q, Smash Hits and Kerrang!*) and USA (*Rolling Stone, Fusion, Creem, Circus, Phonograph Record, Record World and Billboard*). The search produced 281 articles, of which 114 were removed (e.g., Collins' name coming up in a piece about a producer he had previously worked with, or in a concert review in which one of his songs was covered by another artist).

Data were analysed via standard open, axial, and selective coding techniques (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Since we were examining for changing status over time, data were first organized temporally, from 1980 through to 2020. The authors then read through each of the articles on Collins, labelling each broadly positive, neutral, or negative. This process helped identify our three temporal periods. We then reviewed each article again, coding passages in an open fashion, such as “Collins admired for his skill,” “Collins associated with 80s,” “Collins influential” and so on. These were then organised together and placed in their respective temporal periods to help us understand the dynamics underpinning Collins' reputation and the roles of various actors in shaping perceptions of Collins. We were also able to reduce the number of codes down, and then undertake axial coding. Axial coding focuses on identifying relationships between codes or categories, which occurred as we made connections between actors and practices, and also between one temporal period and the next. These final set of codes drive our discussion and underpin the PCE. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to ensure theoretical saturation, a point extra data provides no new theoretical insights.

### **Findings: The Changing Fortunes of Phil Collins**

*"There's a reason those two YouTuber kids were blown away by In the Air Tonight. Forty years on, it still sounds like a record from another world: strange and tense and compelling, and filled with moments of instrumental brilliance – not just the drum break that causes the kids to bounce in amazement – but the phasing and multitracking of individual words for emphasis, the scrape and clang of guitars in the background. Collins never gets the credit he deserves as one of mainstream pop's great experimentalists. This record alone would merit canonisation." (Hann, 2020).*

*"Collins is fascinating in that he's an icon to a whole generation of troubled souls who not only don't care how uncool they are, but don't even know it – a special bracket of part-time music fans for whom pop is simply a race to be the biggest, the slickest, and the flashiest, regardless of how little emotional reach the songs possess." (Cox, 2000).*

The above two quotes contrast the changing fortunes of Phil Collins' image in the UK media between 1980 and 2020. Over the course of his solo career, Collins' image has gone from appreciation for his drumming skill and song writing talent to global superstar to being a byword for all that is wrong with corporate music to a godfather of popular culture. A brief overview of his career and changing fortunes is shown in Figure 1, which summarizes his emergence and development as a solo artist. This section will provide a descriptive overview of his changing fortunes, and provide the basis for the analysis of his fall from grace and subsequent reconsecration. Before that, we will briefly cover Collins' pre-solo career with progressive rock band Genesis, as this background has contributed to shifts in his status over time.



<<<insert Figure 1: Phil Collins' Solo Career Timeline: All Of My Life>>>

*Tomorrow Never Knows*<sup>1</sup>. Having joined Genesis in 1970, Collins played drums and provided backing vocals for the first five years of his involvement in the band. Reflecting trends at the time, the band was initially part of an art-driven progressive rock movement, producing lengthy tracks and concept albums, and led by the flamboyant Peter Gabriel. The band built up a cult following on the live music circuit, enjoyed increasing chart popularity, and produced albums of varying critical success. When Gabriel quit in 1975 due to a combination of personal issues and strained relations with the rest of the band over artistic direction, Genesis struggled to find a replacement lead singer. Collins, who had been helping potential candidates learn the band's songs, found himself increasingly behind the microphone, inevitably exposing his vocal abilities to other members of the band. In his own account, he became the accidental vocalist for the band. The subsequent album, 1976's *A Trick of The Tail*, was a marked departure from Gabriel's art-rock style. A critical and commercial success, it became their biggest selling album to date. During this period, Collins, who was regarded as a superb drumming talent, remained behind the drums while providing vocals for the band.

Over the course of the next few albums, Genesis moved from their progressive roots towards a more mainstream rock or pop sound. This shift was timely, given the emergence of punk rock as a reaction to what was viewed as the overblown pretentiousness of progressive or "prog" rock. Collins' presence became more apparent over three albums released in the 1980s, *Duke* (1980), *Abacab* (1981), and *Genesis* (1983) where critics generally approved of

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<sup>1</sup> Sub-headings throughout feature Phil Collins songs and aim to reflect the essence of his status within a particular temporal period.

his makeover of the band via shorter song structures and a more relevant sound<sup>2</sup>. As these 1980s albums also coincided with the release of Collins' first two solo albums, a critical consensus began to emerge that his solo music was fresher and more innovative, whereas Genesis were regarded like many older acts at the time as being less musically relevant. This perception was reinforced when the band decided to leave Collins-penned tracks (such as *In the Air Tonight*, which would later become his signature tune) off their own albums, or opt for instrumental tracks to pad out albums.

Subsequently Genesis became less productive, as all of three members (Collins, Mike Rutherford, and Tony Banks) developed their own solo careers. However, Collins' personal sound was clearly evident on the band's most successful album *Invisible Touch* (so beloved by Patrick Bateman, who described it as the group's "undisputed masterpiece" in Brett Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho*) as well the follow up *We Can't Dance*, the last Genesis album to feature Collins. As Genesis albums and supporting tours typically fit between Collins' own solo material and supporting tours (and to a lesser extent those of Mike & the Mechanics (Rutherford) and Tony Banks), Collins-penned and -sounding material was omnipresent between 1985-1991, resulting in regular nominations at music awards.

***Take a look at me now.*** Collins' solo career began in 1981 with the album *Face Value*. The album was a smash hit, spending 275 weeks in the UK top 100 album charts, including three weeks in number 1, and featured what would become his signature tune, *In the Air Tonight*.

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<sup>2</sup> As his number one fan Patrick Bateman (aka *American Psycho*) stated: "Phil Collins' solo career seems to be more commercial and therefore more satisfying, in a narrower way. Especially songs like *In the Air Tonight* and *Against All Odds*. But I also think Phil Collins works best within the confines of the group, than as a solo artist, and I stress the word artist. This is Sussudio, a great, great song, a personal favorite." [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/american\\_psycho/quotes/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/american_psycho/quotes/) (accessed 19/3/2021)

His second album *Hello I Must Be Going* followed a year later, spending 163 weeks on the UK Top 100 charts and featuring hit single *You Can't Hurry Love* (originally recorded by *The Supremes*). That same year, Collins won the Ivor Novello International Hit Of The Year for *In the Air Tonight*. Collins undertook tours as a solo artist to support his albums, while also recording and touring with Genesis (who released three studio albums, one live album and one EP between 1980-83). In music press he was portrayed as “likeable”, “affable”, “genuine” and as solo artist in his own right. He was lauded as one of rock’s finest drummers, and whereas the 1983 *Genesis* album received mixed reviews, Collins’ solo success was praised (with one reviewer calling him the “boy wonder”; Denselow, 1983). He was even viewed as a breath of fresh air, with his modest persona setting him apart from his contemporaries:

“In these post-punk days, most British pop stars get by on glamour of grotesqueness. Phil Collins is rather different, and harks back to an earlier age: his calling cards are his musicianship, his ability to fashion infectious pop-soul dance tunes and dreamy ballads, his appealing voice and, in concert, a way of addressing the audience and putting them at their ease which is matey without being patronizing. Collins’ naturalness infuses his records, making them, by contrast with so much current music, notably easy to live with.” (Williams, 1992).

Collins’ third solo album, *No Jacket Required*, triggered what could be called his regal period as a global pop superstar. Released in 1985, the album would eventually go on to sell 20 million copies worldwide, establishing Collins as a superstar in the United States and won him three Grammy Awards and two BRIT Awards (among others) the following year.

Combined with a revitalized Genesis (*Invisible Touch*) over the next three years, Collins was a

chart and award regular, and also made his movie debut to generally positive acclaim in *Buster*. He continued this success with his fourth studio album released in 1989, ... *But Seriously*. His image in the media was one of an artist of popular appeal associated with long-lived successful acts such as Queen.

However, towards the end of the 80's his ubiquity and popular appeal began to be characterized in more negative terms such as “bland”, “corporate”, “overproduced”, “AOR”, with Adam Sweeting of *The Guardian* (who would become a long-term Collins hater) describing him as “decidedly uncool” and “Sainsbury Chardonnay” but grudgingly admitting that he “can play drums” (Sweeting, 1990). In 1991, Collins was featured in Brett Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* as a favorite artist of the titular character Patrick Bateman. Ellis’ musical choices for the novel, in particular Huey Lewis and The News, Phil Collins and Whitney Houston, reflected his critique of capitalism as cold, shallow, superficial, materialist and fake. As one reviewer stated:

“The funniest three chapters in the book are the “musical group” chapters, in which the narrator suddenly spends a few pages discussing one of his favorite singers or bands. Being a vapid soul, he likes only the most vapid bands; Huey Lewis and the News, Whitney Houston and Genesis are the three bands he discusses in the book. By taking these pop bands so seriously, so analytically, Ellis succeeds in showing just how soulless and transparent these bands are.” (Jackson, 1991).

Ellis is on record as choosing Collins and Genesis because they represented what he saw as the worst examples of 1980s corporate rock (Grow, 2016).

***Throwing it all away.*** The bland, corporate image of Collins portrayed by Ellis was reinforced by an article in *The Sun* newspaper in the run up to the 1992 UK general elections, which reported that Collins would leave the United Kingdom if the Labour Party won. As electronic pioneer Gary Numan found after voicing support for Margaret Thatcher in the 80s, public support for the Tories fuels a backlash from music critics, who became increasingly vitriolic towards Collins. Although Collins' star would eventually wane, his ubiquity in the early 1990's became a sore point among critics. Collins' profile remained high due to sales of his live compilation album, Genesis' *We Can't Dance* as well as numerous re-releases and compilations, and his own 1993 studio album *Both Sides*, all of which resulted in his continued award nominations. Continued BRIT nominations were a particular sore point among local critics (Collins has won six in total), with Collins receiving nominations for Best Male Artist between 1989-1993. The nominations were generated by chart performance before being voted for, so releases of soundtrack singles, compilations and live albums as well as new material continued to ensure nominations, all while popular music was changing significantly. The following excerpt from *The Guardian's* cynically minded Pass Notes section on the BRITs (the first without a Phil Collins nomination for some years) describes this view:

“So the Brits aren't intended brash young pop upstarts? Yes and no. The Brits committee became embarrassed at always giving the awards to Phil Collins, Dire Straits, and Annie Lennox. This occurred because the voters were all record company executives who never listened to music only added up sales figures. And they all voted for their own acts.” (Pass Notes, 1995).

Changing musical tastes and the rise of genres such as Britpop, grunge and house saw Collins becoming viewed as a dinosaur that the UK scene would be better off without. During this period the most positive view of Collins was a grudging admission that he was a talented drummer, although his image in the press overwhelmingly was one of an object of ridicule. Exacerbating this was the media coverage of his personal affairs including alleged tax avoidance (triggered by his move to Switzerland in 1997), marital issues, legal cases involving small claims of accidental royalty payments against backing musicians (during the mid-1980s), and his thin-skinned attitude to criticism in the press. His carefully cultivated self-effacing everyman image (e.g., in the Genesis music video for *I Can't Dance*, a female driver ignores a hitchhiking Collins in favor of an iguana waiting patiently on the side of the road), was seen as fake and inauthentic. At the end of the decade an article in *The Guardian* captured his changing fortunes – a musician embodying the essence of the 1980s, his strengths had become weaknesses by the 90s. He was seen as artistically bankrupt, irrelevant, and as the reviewer stated “Marketable, perhaps, but cool? Never.” (Cox, 2000).

If the 80s were Collins' imperial age, the first decade of the 2000s could be characterized by him easing into retirement. Commercially, Collins' solo albums saw diminishing returns. Collins enjoyed some success via soundtracks for Disney films such as *Tarzan* and *Brother Bear*, for which he won Grammy and Academy Awards. He also received the equivalent lifetime achievement awards through the Hollywood Hall of Fame (1999), Disney Legend Award (2002), and Songwriters Hall of Fame (2003). His output mostly consisted of compilations, and Genesis box-set re-releases. In 2004 he embarked on his *First Final Farewell Tour* while in 2006, Genesis reformed for the 2007 *Turn It On Again Tour*. In popular culture Collins was an object of ridicule. A notable example was his caricature in the

“Timmy 2000” episode of *South Park* (aired on April 19, 2000), where he was portrayed as a bitter, drunken, washed-up star who was sustained through the widespread prescription of an ADHD medication which caused children to become dull and boring. Horrified upon learning that the medication also caused children to like Collins’ music, the prescribing doctor quickly realized the error of his ways and concocted an antidote. Collins and Genesis also featured prominently in the 2000 movie version of *American Psycho*. Collins’ so-called final solo tour was criticized for its commercial motivation, and labelled by one critic as “Topping Up The Pension Tour” (Pill, 2004)

However, the latter half of the decade was also the beginning of the reappraisal of Collins as an artist. This reappraisal was driven by popular culture, including computer gaming, hip hop and a new wave of credible pop stars and pop artists (*De-Face Value Project* - <https://artvinyl.tumblr.com/post/143058857080/de-face-value-project>). In *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* (released 2006), Collins holds a concert in the faux-Miami Vice City and drums through his famous song *In the Air Tonight*. The song was later reworked by hip hop stars Lil Kim and Nas into a club hit. Cadbury’s 2007 Gorilla advertising campaign, which featured a gorilla playing the famous drum fill from *In the Air Tonight*, was well-received globally, and returned Collins to the UK singles chart and earned him a New Zealand Number 1 that bettered its original peak of number 6, despite no official re-release. The Cadbury ad also triggered a wave of spoofs, introducing Collins to a new generation of viewers. Collins’ critical reassessment took a further positive turn when he won the Ivor Novello International Achievement in 2008 (one year after he announced his retirement from live music) and was nominated for the BRIT Awards British Album of 30 Years in 2010 for *No Jacket Required*. In 2009, *The Guardian* ran an article on Phil Collins’ “non-ironic revival”, highlighting his

enduring artistic influence and credibility, linking him with the likes of Brian Eno, John Cale and Robert Fripp (McGee, 2009).

*Hang in long enough.* The positive reappraisal of Collins gathered momentum from 2010 onwards. During this period the media discourse moved from negative aspects of Collins' music or personal life to reflecting on how others had engaged with his work. For example, in 2013 Paul Lester wrote in *The Guardian* that Phil Collins and other acts that were once regarded as a joke were now being hailed as gods. Collins was named as a musical influence by indie bands such as The 1975 and In the Valley Below, and also heavily adopted in the RnB/rap genre. A further article in *The Guardian* asked if Collins was the “godfather of popular culture”, identifying that his vast influence warranted this recognition (Simpson, 2013). Collins' decision to return to music in 2015 was greeted positively, his most popular albums were reissued to positive reviews. His *Not Dead Yet* world tour was an artistic and commercial success. In 2020 Collins was the focus of a viral YouTube video mentioned in the opening of this article, which by January 2021 had received 8.3 million views and helped return his albums to the UK charts.

## **Discussion**

The career of Phil Collins is a story of rise, fall and return. In the previous section, we have seen how his career as a solo artist can be roughly divided into three stages. The first (1980-1991) involved a process of consecration where he received acclaim from critics, applause and partnering from / with peers, and commercial dominance. From 1992, things changed. Although his records continued to sell (albeit with diminishing returns), critics



rubbished his work and peers (particularly newer acts) sought to define themselves against Collins' lack of credibility. He fell from being a musical great to tabloid fodder (focused on his divorce case and private life). But what is perhaps even more interesting is that from 2010, a reassessment of Collins began. New audiences began buying his work, critics started to talk about Collins in positive ways and peers acknowledged his influence as a pioneer. What this points towards is a fascinating journey from consecration, deconsecration and reconsecration.

### *Potential Explanations*

Such long run processes have been largely overlooked by researchers examining consecration. However, there are two potential explanations available. The first focuses on social structural changes associated with the shifting distributions of power that favor or undermine a particular cultural product. These dynamics are picked up in a study of the deconsecration and reconsecration involving the translation of literary works into Swahili (Talento, 2014).

Talento's study traces how translations changed from being consecrated (because of their association with Arabic, the language of the Koran), to being deconsecrated (because they were associated with English, the language of colonialization), and were later reconsecrated (because of their association with the international post-colonial literary scene). This study shows how a particular cultural product can go from sacred to profane to sacred again. It largely focuses on how this process is driven by changing distribution of cultural capital under different regimes of power (precolonial, colonial and post-colonial). This work suggests that if we want to understand the changing assessment, we need to understand the wider systems of symbolic power which re-distribute cultural power. For instance, one of the more significant structural changes in recent years has been shifts in technology. Understand

changing modes of distribution and assessment associated with the online era of music has influenced patterns of consecration of cultural products (Dowd et al., 2021). These have led to the decline of particular critical infrastructures (such as the UK music press) and the rise of alternative models of cultural assessment (expert and non-expert bloggers and YouTubers). It has also led to alternative ways of distributing cultural products (from radio and stores to online platforms).

A second potential explanation for the shifting fate of Phil Collins is his own pattern of productivity and creativity. Psychologists studying patterns of creativity across time have found a pattern of rising creativity followed by a fall. This typically occurs after about 20 years in their respective field (e.g., Simonton, 1997). It stands to reason that when this decline begins to set in, an artist's critical reception, peer recognition and popular acclaim might also be effected. However, it could be that consecration processes work in an opposite direction to peak creative output: that is, when creators have been in a field for longer, their likelihood of consecration rises. Although we are not aware of any research which shows this for the age of cultural producers within a field, researchers have found that the age of a cultural product such as a film or album is significantly related to consecration (Schmutz, 2005). When placed together, it would lead to a potentially interesting pattern whereby creativity rises and then falls after about 20-years in the field, but consecration lags significantly and often only begins to rise once a cultural producer has been in a field for a significant amount of time. This may potentially lead to an 'N' shaped distribution of recognition across producer age. It rises (based on creativity) then falls (as creativity wanes), and then rises again (as reconsecration processes kick in). This would explain why Collins gained increased recognition through the 80s (when according to psychological theories of creativity, he would be at his peak - bearing

in mind he had been in Genesis as drummer since 1970 and as singer since 1975), then declines during the 1990s (when psychological theories would predict his creativity would wane), and increases again in the new millennium (when longer running reconsecration processes kick in).

While each of these explanations are potentially compelling, we would like to explore an alternative account that emphasizes the consecration work engaged in by field level actors to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct an artist, their legacy, and importantly, the genre in which they are categorized. Building on existing theories of cultural consecration, we argue that changing fate of Collins is not just due to wider societal changes or the changing character of his work. Rather, it is due to the changing way in which audiences relate to Collins. This involves purposeful consecration work on the part of three audiences: expert-critics, peers (new and old) and non-expert fans (new and old). This interplay between an artist and respective genre is critical, particularly to deconsecration and reconsecration, because Collins' changing image and fate often reflected reassessments of a temporal period in popular music, namely the 1980s, rather than any action on his part.

In this sense, the PCE was an outcome of actors assembling, disassembling, and reassembling parts of the respective genre (1980s pop), an artist's work (i.e., his craft and aspects of his catalogue), and enduring legacy (which was often reevaluated by new actors). We will argue this involves three stages of consecration, deconsecration, and reconsecration. We argue that all this work can drive a process of cultural demise and death followed by cultural resurrection can help to ensure the enduring consecration of a cultural object of a producer. We call this pattern of cultural death followed by cultural resurrection which ensures enduring consecration the Phil Collins Effect (PCE). Figure 2 shows the three phases

constituting the PCE, and, for each phase, the activities carried out by three social actors: popular audience, critics and peers. Table 1 provides example passages from the qualitative data. In what follows, we explore the PCE in more detail.

<<< insert Figure 2: The Phil Collins Effect (PCE) >>>

<<< insert Table 1: The Phil Collins Effect (PCE) Example Passages >>>

### ***Consecrating***

We think that there are three types of activity which are particularly important in the processes of consecrating a cultural producer. These are *veneration* on the part of popular audience and fans, *celebration* on the part of critics, and *recognition* from peers.

The first way which a cultural producer can become consecrated is through veneration by their audience. This happens partially through practices of purchasing, listening and attending to the artist. It can also take on the form of fandom, whereby communities appear around a particular artist or cultural product (Fiske, 1992). These communities develop a sense of identity associated with the artist and often obsessively follow the various twists and turns of the artist's careers. Through all their work, they develop an intensive base of support for a cultural producer. Many artists attract particularly intense fan communities – however Phil Collins was not one of them (a fan club emerged in the 2000s). During the 1980s, Collins certainly enjoyed commercial support and had fans who would buy his work and follow his career, but the support was more mundane and similar to the notion of a “public” rather than more intense tribal connections between members (Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). This is not to

say such support was less valuable; in fact, Collins' music crossed genres, age groups, and fan bases (rock, soul, pop) with ease and became staples on radio and in car stereos during the time (along with other massively successful AOR acts such as Dire Straits). As many music identities were tribal at the time (metal, ska, new romantic, goth etc.), Collins appealed not so much to specific fans (who often had to downplay their love for certain "uncool" artists) but a mass audience of people who simply "liked music", those less committed consumers who sampled across popular culture rather than digging more deeply into it. Collins may not have engendered intense feelings of love or hate, rather, his power came from his everyman, everyday, almost mundane image (cf. Miller, 2009; see also Beverland et al., 2020).

The second way a cultural producer can be consecrated is through processes of *celebration* by critics. This involves professional critics and other key cultural intermediaries providing positive assessment of a particular cultural producer. They do this through positive reviews and coverage of their work within the media. What is perhaps even more important for consecration processes is the development of critical discourse around the cultural producer. This critical discourse elevates the work of a cultural producer from a profane commercial product into something which is deserving of "higher" consideration in terms of artistic merit. This process happened around Collins during the 1980s as his work was reviewed in the specialist music press as well as newspapers. In the case of Collins, stepping out from behind the drums of Genesis to embrace a more modern "white soul" sound was seen as being in step with the times (reflected in the emergence of artists such as ABC, Hall and Oates, Culture Club and so on), achieved with increasing confidence in recording (the first trio of albums increasingly developed a more consistent sound as Collins relied on his own material rather than covers and leftovers from Genesis) and in live performance. His

successful collaborations with other artists along with his near constant appearance at the Grammy Awards from 1984 sealed his status as a stand out song writer and performer. His breakout 1985 album *No Jacket Required* was celebrated not only for its production values and song writing, but also for middle of road appeal. The belief that Genesis began to sound more like Phil Collins also enhanced his artist status, with *Invisible Touch* viewed by many as representing a critical and commercial peak for the band.

The third way a cultural producer becomes consecrated is through recognition from peers. This can come as formal recognition such as prizes which are awarded by peer associations. But this recognition can come in more informal modes such as collaborations and joint appearances with other high profile and already consecrated artists. During the 1980s both of these things happened to Collins. He received a wide range of prizes awarded by peers including multiple Grammy, Ivor Novello, Billboard, and BRIT awards, plus numerous nominations. He also collaborated with many already venerated artists such as Eric Clapton, John Martyn and Brian Eno, and also produced smash singles, notably with Philip Bailey (*Easy Lover*) and Marilyn Martin (*Separate Lives*). These associations meant that Phil Collins also came to be seen as a peer among contemporary musical greats.

His commercial and critical prominence saw Collins become part of wider social discourse as he became involved in possibly one of the defining moments of 1980s music (and arguably the decade itself), Live Aid. His success as a popular solo artist (rather than as a member of Genesis) led to his inclusion on the Band Aid single *Do They Know It's Christmas?* (on drums) alongside a lineup of popular 80s stars such as Duran Duran and Culture Club as well as more seriously regarded acts such as U2. This led to his inclusion in the Live Aid program, where he played at both the UK and US Live Aid concerts and made

headlines by flying from London to Philadelphia on the Concorde in order to drum for a hastily reformed Led Zeppelin.

Through each of these three forms of consecration, Collins became seen as an artist who had enduring qualities. He wasn't just a pop singer, but he became a household name and a vital part of the cultural landscape. While he wasn't classified into any particular sub-genre, he, along with others, became indexically associated with the 1980s through his use of particular technology (the Fairlight digital synthesizer and sampler which led to his distinctive drum sound, subsequently copied by many; Jones, 2020), MTV friendly music videos, radio friendly pop songs, corporate and casual fashion, and early adoptions of technology such as the compact disc. This had many upsides for Collins. While the context in which Collins flourished was regarded positively, he became consecrated as one its leading authentic exemplars, seemingly able to do no wrong. However, the tight, *terroir*-like connection with the decade eventually created the basis for his subsequent downfall, when tastes and even politics changed.

### ***Deconsecrating***

Consecration is not the end of the story for a cultural product or producer. Consecration is not binary. Rather it is a cumulative process whereby a producer or object can gain an increasing sense of being special and unique over time. However, this pattern is not just one of accumulation – it can also entail loss. There is a distinct possibility that consecration processes can go into reverse, and someone or something which was seen as being sacred suddenly is overlooked and even outright rejected. We label this 'deconsecration'.

The shift in attitudes towards Collins was relatively swift as the 1980s gave way the 1990s. As audiences, critics and peers rejected the eighties sound and ethos, Collins found himself suffering not only a crisis of relevance (like 1980s superstars such as Duran Duran), but was reframed as an exemplar of inauthentic corporate rock. Deconsecration happened when audiences, critics and peers engage in work to deconsecrate a ‘great’ cultural producer, while simultaneously, consecration work ceases. This happens in three ways: *rejection* by the audience, *rubbishing* on the part of critics and *disidentification* by peers.

Processes of deconsecration often have their roots in rejection by audiences. Typically, most cultural goods and producers will not find universal acceptance with the wider public. There will be fans, those who are indifferent, and haters. However, when large parts of the wider audience becomes indifferent or even actively hostile towards a cultural producer or cultural product, they can begin to lose their luster. In the case of Phil Collins, this happened during the early 1990s. The very ubiquity of his work during the 1980s continued into the early part of the 1990s, due to the delayed impact of his 1989 album *But....Seriously*. Well received commercially, the album won a number of awards, and together with Genesis’ *We Can’t Dance* (1991) and various compilations and live albums, Collins profile remained high. However, this profile sat increasingly at odds with musical trends such as house, indie, grunge, hip hop, all of which had roots in the cultural fringe and embodied a spirit of inventiveness and outright rejection of 1980s excess. Much like the decline of the Bee Gees in the early 1980s (in part driven by a “disco sucks” backlash), Collins’ ubiquity created a backlash, while younger fans wanted little to do with their parents’ music.

Popular audiences responded to this saturation by losing interest (“Not another Phil Collins album!”) and eventually outright hostility towards his work. Whereas ubiquity is not



necessarily the antithesis of artistic authenticity, retaining authenticity requires a felt sense of connection to time and place (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Beverland et al., 2020) and the ability of consumers to relate it to their desired self (Belk et al., 1989). While this worked for Collins in the 1980s, by the 1990s the connection fell away as tastes shifted and a new generation of artists challenged for supremacy. Collins' musical style barely changed, retaining much of its polished 1980s production and signature digital drum and sequencer sound. As such, continued interest in the music of Phil Collins became a sign a lack of cool, or worse, social conservatism and 1980s capitalism. An interview with singer Björk and Sugarcubes bandmate Thor captured Collins' sheer banality:

"Phil Collins is unbelievable!" squeals Björk. "He is everywhere in Germany. You go to a cafe, a restaurant, your hotel... stuck in the elevator with Phil Collins. He's taking over, he already has!"

Thor: "He's the man from outer space."

Björk: "He's the leader of the world." (Dalton, 1992)

Alongside popular rejection of Collins, after 1992, critics were increasingly vitriolic towards him and his work. This not only happened through increasingly negative assessment of his new work (and *schadenfreude* at his declining commercial fortunes) but with an increasingly negative narrative about his career - one that was "wearing thin" as Collins "remained a performer for whom quality of cut is more important than originality or depth of material" (Sinclair, 1996). He was represented by critics as being decidedly "uncool", driven by commercial concerns (a key marker of inauthenticity; Beverland, 2005) and having unsavory political views. Critical discourse about Collins shifted from his work to his

personal life. Tabloid stories about his divorce circulated, including one in which he was said to have ended his marriage by fax. To the extent that he remained a reference point in discussions about music, Collins became a kind of symbol in critical discourse of everything that had gone wrong with music, which was finally being righted by bands such as Rage Against the Machine, Nirvana, Public Enemy, and Beck's lo fi "loser" rock. This process of rubbishing "has-been" stars by critics seems to be an important part of their own work of showing they have their "finger on the pulse" of culture and their judgements of taste are up to date. Well known figures are seen as "fair game" as critics attempt to display their independence from commercial concerns, their up-to-date musical tastes and the dynamism of their chosen field of critique. Indeed, a central part of the economy of criticism isn't just about celebrating the new but it also tearing down the old. That often means public and often highly ritualistic acts of toppling previous greats from their consecrated pedestal.

Alongside audience disinterest and a critical backlash, previously feted artists are also deconsecrated by their peers. This typically happens through a process of disidentification whereby other artists – in particularly newer ones – seek to establish their distinctiveness and authenticity by clarifying what they are not (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009). Often this means contrasting their own work with that of those who were most recently dominant (Verhaal, Hoskins, and Lundmark, 2017). For instance, in the early 1990s new generations of British musicians established their authenticity by contrasting themselves with "cultural dinosaurs" such as Phil Collins. Noel Gallagher (the outspoken lead guitarist of flavor of the moment Oasis) described how he wanted to "stamp out Phil Collins". Such comments are not just about the quality of Collins work. They are a way which Gallagher sought to purposefully establish the identity of his own brand of music as something which is novel and authentic.

Furthermore, in the 2000s, Collins shift into scoring Disney movies only reinforced his has-been uncool status among peers (a nomination for the Nickelodean Kids' Choice Award in 2000 was one example). Although he would continue to get awards (even a Grammy), much of them were outside of the mainstream profile categories, instead falling into decidedly unhip ones such as "Disney Legend Award" (reinforcing his corporate status) and "Best Adult Contemporary Artist" (i.e., AOR or "dad rock"), a far cry from "Favorite Pop/Rock Male Artist" of Collins' imperial period.

Audience rejection, critical rubbishing and peer disidentification all played an important role in undermining the previously consecrated image of Collins. This rejection was in part tied up by a reframing of the previous decade's music, politics, fashion, and industry trends, all of which were reframed as inauthentic, and unworthy of critical merit. It meant that Collins went from being considered a great musical artist to something of a cultural joke. His work did continue to sell, but he became increasingly invisible from discussions about popular music. When he was discussed, it was likely to be as a negative counter-point, whereby Phil Collins became the marker for all that was uncool, in poor taste, and wrong with the world. Not for nothing did Beavis and Butt-head's observation that Collins was a "dork" (Season 4, 1994) hit the mark among young and old alike. This process of deconsecration made Collins into a decidedly profane figure who was a legitimate target for mockery. Indeed, he became a common feature in the routines of stand-up comedians ("Where does Phil Collins go to listen to his own music? The Grocery store"), and regularly became a figure of mockery in satirical columns in *The Guardian*, and in popular satirical shows such as *South Park* (which championed a range of iconic musicians such as Joe Strummer, Robert Smith, and Isaac Hayes as well as popular contemporaries).

### ***Reconsecrating***

Following Collins' fall from the pantheon of pop music in the early 1990s, he spent about a decade as an artist who was largely derided. However, small shoots of a shift in his status began to sprout around the turn of the millennium. A reconsideration of some aspects of the eighties began, including new sub genres and artists who saw 1980's stars as sources for inspiration. In particular, the early new wave / new romantic period of 1979-1984 was reassessed, even by *The Guardian* critics, as a period of novelty and inventiveness (Reynolds, 2019). Documentary treatments of the period, critics and artists new and old began to place greater emphasis on the experimentation, rebellious, and anti-establishment ethos of its players. Furthermore, the trend of remastering and repackaging greatest albums often saw critics reconsider the works of particular acts in a new light. New fans began to engage with 80s music as an artform, divorced from the socio-political context in which it emerged. High profile uses *In the Air Tonight* also put Collins back in the spotlight as a musician. As a result, by 2010, Phil Collins began to be reconsecrated as a true artist with a back catalogue worthy of praise. This involved *rediscovery* by a new generation of fans, *reassessment* by music critics and *relating* by peers.

The first process which seemed to be central to the reconsecration of Phil Collins was *rediscovery*. This rediscovery was facilitated by the fact that Collins' work continued to circulate in advertising (primarily through the Gorilla advertisement for Cadbury), and classic hits radio stations (a format that became increasingly prevalent in the 2000s). Rediscovery in this sense was very ground up, given that Collins was creatively inactive during this period (he had effectively retired from live performance). This rediscovery had two dynamics. One

involved a kind of nostalgic or ironic rediscovery on the part of audiences who were already familiar with Collins work. For some, listening to Collins work became a way of reconnecting with the 1980s and experiencing the pleasures of nostalgia and memory. For others, listening to Collins became a way of developing an ironic relationship with his work (and indeed aspects of 1980s culture), and was often part of an emergent hipsterism (Arsel and Thompson, 2011). This kind of appreciation had a more symbolic air, rather than representing a wholehearted embrace.

Second, there were younger listeners who had little knowledge of Collins. This lack of existing associations meant they often encountered Collins' work without the associations created during previous periods. What is perhaps even more important is that they were not encountering the entirety of Collins back-catalogue. Rather, the inevitable process of cultural selection meant that it was only a handful of Collins' more innovative songs which they heard. This meant some particular songs – such as *In the Air Tonight* – became increasingly widely circulated. For both these audiences what they often got was Phil Collins without Phil Collins. Because Collins had largely retreated behind his songs, it meant that audiences consumed his music without the cultural baggage attached to his persona. This gave significantly larger scope for them to understand and interpret Collins in their own ways. This scope for differing interpretations meant the popular audience was able to develop a wide range of assessments with Collins' work.

Alongside this process of rediscovery on the part of fans is a process of *reassessment* by critics. This involved critics going back to Phil Collins songs and assessing them as a body of work. They also typically assessed this body of work in the context of a particular historical moment. Collins became not just a single artist but an important part of a wider

story of cultural history of the 1980s. However, it was not all of the 1980s that became reassessed, but genres and periods within it. First was the period of 1978-1984 involving innovative electronic acts such as the Human League, Heaven 17, Ultravox, Japan, alongside post-punk pioneers such as Talking Heads. Driven by documentaries such as *Made in Sheffield* (2001) and books such as *Rip it Up and Start Again* and *Retromania* by former *The Guardian* critic Simon Reynolds, this period was reframed as particularly inventive. Many of the acts became seen to embody the true spirit of punk with their DIY ethos, reliance on new synthesizers and dubbed sounds, gender-bending imagery, unconventional songs (e.g., Ultravox's *Vienna* or Japan's *Ghosts*), and of course, left wing politics (encapsulated best in Heaven 17's ironic *Penthouse and Pavement*).

Reynolds in particular laid the groundwork for an assessment not only of this period, but eventually the whole decade, exploring how seemingly radio friendly acts such as Talk Talk eventually embraced anti-commercialism to produce enduring masterpieces such as their career destroying *Spirit of Eden*. For Reynolds, retromania referred to the music sector's endless recycling of its past, with the 1980s seen as the last truly innovative decade (the 1990s largely channeled the 1970s), which, later rechanneled in the 2000s, ensured that music would forever be caught in a never-ending cycle of retromania. In this context, Collins' early work was reassessed, with 1981's *Face Value* in particular being viewed as groundbreaking, brave and innovative. The lead single from that album, *In the Air Tonight*, was not only seen as an enduring classic, but a wholly inventive and risky release. The song, much like *Vienna* was an unlikely hit for the times – a long lead-in and unusual chorus structure. This slow brooding, dark song about a break up, with its signature gated reverb drum sound appearing a full two minutes into the song, was a far cry from the formulaic three-minute radio friendly pop single

of the time. It is interesting to note that, of all Collins' extensive back catalogue, this one particular song provided the lens through which to re-evaluate his artistry and songwriting talent. In contrast, 1985's mega-selling *No Jacket Required*, garnered less recent attention, possibly because 1984 was seen as British pop's dividing year between inventiveness and exploitation (Elliott, 2020).

Underlying both of these processes was generational change among critics. Music critics who had been writing about Collins for decades were gradually replaced by new blood. In addition, changing assessments of Collins have been facilitated by changes within the critical infrastructure. Many of the publications where earlier criticism of Collins had appeared (such as the British music press) went into sharp decline, declared bankruptcy (e.g., *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *Q*), and became increasingly irrelevant (e.g., *NME*) as tastemakers. The music press (e.g., *Pitchfork*, *The Quietus*) was replaced by a new more fragmented critical infrastructure which had different dynamics and often lacked the apparently authoritative critical voice of earlier music critics. These more serious critics were often more likely to focus on artist's work as opposed to their image. Furthermore, the music press that was successful had a strong focus and/or retro theme. New titles such as *Electronic Sound*, and *Classic Pop* appeared and appealed to old and new fans alike. The latter, often celebrated particular periods or artists, and tended to provide a far more positive assessment of an artist's music.

Alongside rediscovery by audiences and reassessment by critics his work are peers *relating* to his work. In particular, younger generations of musicians searching the past for inspiration for their own music often re-engaged with the music of the 1980s. In the early 2000s a new group of artists emerged, embracing retromania and being influenced by the

1980s in some way. Some, embodying a colder electronic sound and grouped under the “Electroclash” moniker, channeled earlier innovators such as Kraftwerk, Human League and Neu!. Others, such as the immensely popular Killers, overtly channeled Duran Duran, identifying the former pin-up band as a critical influence. Even more indie-minded acts such as Arcade Fire and the uber cool LCD Soundsystem, channeled a collage of influences, including many 1979-1984 references, particularly in the latter’s seminal 2000s club hit *Losing My Edge*. During this time, Collins’ work also got highlighted for its influence.

Through reassessing this part of the 80s, new artists came across aspects of Collins’ own music – in particular his earlier solo work. In some cases, this involved direct sampling of his work – Collins drum beats had long been sampled by hip hop artists such as 2Pac, DMX, and Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. What is perhaps even more important than these processes of influence is younger artists such as diverse as Adele, Lorde, Kanye West, Taylor Swift, Sleater-Kinney and Yeasayer publicly acknowledging his influence, with Bon Iver frontman Justin Vernon expressing surprise at his previous uncool status with his quote “I didn't even know that I was supposed to apologize for listening to [Collins]” (Wallace, 2011). By being acknowledged as an important influence by these contemporary greats, Phil Collins was restored to his own position as a cultural great. This establishes a kind of genealogy of intergenerational influence which represents Collins as not just great in himself but part of a lineage of cultural influence which stretches across generations of artists. Being cited as an influential ancestor (evidenced in his press reassessment alongside other AOR greats such as Fleetwood Mac) gives Collins a sense of grandeur and enduring importance. This means he shifted from being a kind of embarrassing older relative to becoming a sacred ancestor.



### ***Conclusion: The Phil Collins Effect***

The curious case of Phil Collins reminds us that consecration is often only the beginning of a journey which can go through processes of deconsecration and then reconsecration. Indeed, there is a possibility that many cultural icons go through repeated waves of this. Each of these waves involve some degree of work on the part of audiences, critics and peers – whether that is liking Collins, or loathing him. What is particularly interesting is how this N-shaped movement in the consecration processes seemed to eventually add to Collins’ position in the cultural landscape. That is, the process of rise, fall and then rise again cemented Phil Collins position as an important figure not only in the history 1980s music but also as a forerunner of experimental pop and therefore contemporary music. This process of cultural crucifixion followed by cultural resurrection seemed to give some additional *cachet* to Collins. Indeed, we think this rise, fall and rise leading to greater consecration is the essence of the PCE.

We also think that the PCE has application much beyond Collins. Indeed, the world of popular music is full of artists who underwent a similar movement from consecrated stars to deconsecrated has-beens and eventually returned as classics. It seems to that simply because they were able to survive a period of cultural death and undergo a resurrection that they prove their enduring vitality and their continued sacredness (stories of trials and tribulations followed by triumph are central to many claims of authenticity; Beverland 2005). Actor John Travolta’s career resurgence following his appearance in Pulp Fiction is one example. Business leaders, such as Steve Jobs arguably enjoyed reconsecration following his years in the wilderness away from Apple. The ways in which brands such as Lego (Schultz and Hernes, 2010), and those revived through retro campaigns (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003) experienced changing fortunes similarly can be understood through the PCE.

Politicians, such as Sir John Major and Ken Livingstone in the UK, Malcolm Fraser in Australia, Mahathir Mohammed in Malaysia, and George HW Bush have all enjoyed similar changes in fortunes. More controversially, perhaps Donald Trump is presently undergoing a period of deconsecration, while Aung San Suu Kyi's recent removal through a military coup may help trigger a period of reconsecration.

While we think that the Phil Collins Effect could be used to understand the fate of a wide range of cultural figures, it is important to note the limitations of the present work. First, our paper is based on a study of the career of a single artist. To further develop the concept, it would be important that future research looks at a much larger sample and traces their career trajectory. Such research would need to ask whether most "classic" artists follow the N shaped pattern of consecration, deconsecration and reconsecration or whether there are other trajectories as well. For instance, some might follow a path of progressive consecration while others might only achieve consecration late in their career (or indeed when they die, as in the case of singer-songwriter Nick Drake). Second, looking at a larger sample would also allow researchers to explore why some artists experience a rise, fall and rise while some go through a wave of consecration followed by deconsecration and never recover again. Third, future research would need to establish whether the Phil Collins effect generalizes beyond music to other creative sectors (e.g., actors, visual artists), sports (e.g., baseball and soccer players), the economy (e.g., business leaders, star investors), and public life (e.g., politicians, public intellectuals).

We think our paper has some practical implications for creative producers. One implication is processes of deconsecration are not necessarily the end of the road for creative producers. As we see from Phil Collins' career, despite becoming decidedly uncool his work

was given a new sense of value by a new generation of critics, audience members and peers. What is perhaps even more interesting is how Phil Collins managed this reconsecration process (whether it was conscious or not). Rather than trying to continue to maintain some degree of contemporary relevance through reinvention and innovation, Collins seemed to adopt a strategy of fidelity. He stuck to being himself – or at least being himself as he was at a particular period in his career. By almost removing himself from the performance, he became worthy of this sacredness. A similar dynamic can be seen with the Bee Gees. After being a famous disco band in the 1970s, during the mid-1980s, they experienced a revival as popular artists after they stepped back from stardom in favor of writing hits and singing backing vocals for stars such as Barbara Streisand and Diana Ross. This move reemphasizing their talent as great song writers while removing the association with disco and the backlash that emerged from their post *Saturday Night Fever* ubiquity that so annoyed many radio DJs. By removing themselves from the process, reconsecrated artists can become a kind of screen onto which the hopes and interpretations of their audience can be projected. Ambiguity allows space for creative veneration on the part of fans. Just like religious worshipers, fans, critics, and peers are able to give their own meaning to reconsecrated artists.

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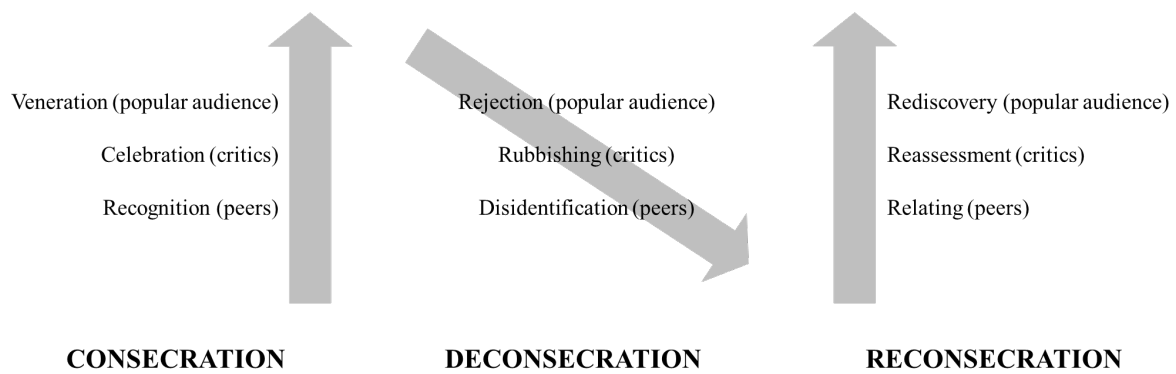
Table 1: The Phil Collins Effect (PCE) Example Passages

	<b>Consecration (1980-1991)</b>	<b>Deconsecration (1992-2009)</b>	<b>Reconsecration (2010 onwards)</b>
<b>Popular audience</b>	<p><i>Veneration</i></p> <p>All but one of the four studio albums (<i>Hello, I Must be Going</i>) made it to nr. 1 on the UK charts, and remained in the top 100 for 682 weeks (cumulative).</p> <p>"There was a gaping hole in the market from the hip-yuppie to young kids to people collecting their endowments," explains Pete Wilson. "There's nothing for people aged 45 or 50 who've paid off their mortgage and have loads of money coming in. So they go and see Phantom Of The Opera or Eric Clapton, Phil Collins, Dire Straits and, to a lesser extent, Manhattan Transfer." (Snow, 1990; article on Gipsy Kings, quote from Pete Wilson)</p>	<p><i>Rejection</i></p> <p>Only one of the three studio albums (<i>Both Sides</i>) made it to nr. 1 on the UK charts (for one week). They remained in top 100 for 50 weeks (cumulative).</p> <p>"Sadie spends a ridiculous amount of time in the bathroom and plays terrible music. She's just bought some new speakers and I keep getting woken up in the morning by Phil Collins. She blames it on her iTunes shuffle. I mean, what kind of 20-year-old girl listens to Phil Collins?" (Murray, 2008; article featuring university students talking about their experience living in student halls).</p>	<p><i>Rediscovery</i></p> <p>Compilation album The Singles (released 2016) reached nr. 2 on the UK charts, and remained in the top 100 for 75 weeks (as of 12 February).</p> <p>"'Tis is the story of how, against all odds, I learned to love Phil Collins, the Dad of Dad-Rock and the Norm of Normcore. Alternatively: how I found myself dancing like a loon to Su-Su-sudio, one of the most evil earworms of its benighted era – a song which I had valiantly tried to purge from my memory shortly after its release in 1985." (Stafford, 2019; Collins concert review).</p>

<b>Critics</b>	<i>Celebration</i>	<i>Rubbishing</i>	<i>Reassessment</i>
	<p>“A superb drummer, an accomplished singer, an agreeable composer, Collins is one of the few rock musicians to have successfully spread his particular talents over a formidably diverse musical radius without seeming to dabble aimlessly ... Collins' Face Value finally places the artiste in a light where all the masks merge, and a middle ground is located. Collins' own music is not a particularly radical brew: far from it, considering the general bias towards contemporary funk, and the human side of the fusion behemoth. But, like the far superior Michael Jackson masterpiece Off The Wall, it has found favour with a formidably large audience who probably don't know or care much about trends, but know what they like.” (Kent, 1981; article on Collins).</p> <p>“In these post-punk days, most British pop stars get by on glamour of grotesqueness. Phil Collins is rather different, and harks back to an earlier age: his calling cards are his musicianship, his ability to fashion infectious pop-</p>	<p>“Compact, simply dressed and seemingly bereft of pretention or edge, Collins has that everyman look so central to his musical appeal. But while the young – and not-so-young – might dream of playing guitar like Eric Clapton or writing a standard with the ease of Paul McCartney, it <i>is</i> hard to conceive of anyone burning with ambition to be a Phil Collins for the 21st century.” (Jackson, 1993; article on Collins).</p> <p>“No one can say that Phil Collins's heart is guided by his pocket. While swimmers and runners break records in Beijing, the Genesis singer is making a different, more expensive mark on history – paying out the largest-ever settlement in a British celebrity divorce. While we sympathise with Collins's romantic nature, might we suggest that next time he consider a pre-nuptial agreement? And yes, somehow we suspect there will be a "next time" (Michaels, 2008; article on Collins).</p>	<p>“... maybe some of that much-derided solo material is due a reappraisal. One could argue – and I will – that If Leaving Me Is Easy's moving electronic minimalism paved the way for James Blake, that Sussudio audibly reveals a Prince influence, and that few mainstream pop smashes are as inventive as In the Air Tonight. Collins will always divide opinion, but there's every chance that his copper-bottomed hits – freed from the shackles of Magic FM ubiquity – will make next year's gigs a final triumph.” (Simpson, 2016, article on Collins).</p> <p>“There's a reason those two YouTuber kids were blown away by In the Air Tonight. Forty years on, it still sounds like a record from another world: strange and tense and compelling, and filled with moments of instrumental brilliance – not just the drum break that causes the kids to bounce in amazement – but the phasing and multitracking of individual words for emphasis, the scrape and clang of guitars in the background. Collins never gets the credit he</p>

Peers	<i>Recognition</i>	<i>Disidentification</i>	<i>Relating</i>
	<p>“It came about because we were both on the same label. He had had some dealings with Atlantic’s Phil Carson and had said to him that if I was doing anything he would love to hold out. And he came down to Rockfield and played on some of the tracks. As a contributor, both live on the first solo tour and in the studio, Phil was tireless. And he was really very, very concerned that it should be right. Considering that it was just a project that he was just visiting, he was a real contributor. I was very moved by him. He gave me a lot of energy.” (Hoskyns, 2003; interview with Robert Plant, quote in relation to Collins’ involvement in Plant’s 1982 album, <i>Pictures at Eleven</i>).</p> <p>25 awards won: AMA (2), Billboard (4), Brit (7), Golden Globe, Grammy (6), Ivor Novello (4), MTV VMA.</p>	<p>“I don't make art-punk records like Primal Scream, or art-pop records like Blur. I just make rock'n'roll records and hopefully they sell 50 million. . . . It's difficult to make cool commercial music. Most big commercial records are naff. Nicky Wire [of the Manics] seems to think that because he sells a load of records, that's automatically good. If that's the case, then Phil Collins is the fucking don of all dons, isn't he? Just because you sell loads of records doesn't actually make it good.” (Lester, 2000; interview with Oasis, quote from Noel Gallagher)</p> <p>“Imagine being in... certain British bands that sell millions and sound like Phil Collins. All those public school bands are too well-adjusted for my liking and they make well-adjusted music for well-adjusted people. There's nae danger or sexuality there.” (Cameron, 2006; interview with Bobby Gillespie).</p> <p>8 awards won: Academy, AMA, Disney Legend, Golden Globe, Grammy, Ivor Novello, NRJ</p>	<p>“A longstanding favourite with hip-hop and R&amp;B artists, he was a major influence on Kanye West’s anhedonic 808s &amp; Heartbreak album. Adele, who talked to him about working on her third album, called him “a genius”. Lorde tweeted: “my love for phil collins is a beautiful thing”. Members of Sleater-Kinney, Yeasayer and Sleigh Bells have come out as fans. It’s not just down to nostalgia or the guarded enjoyment of a guilty pleasure. You can see why hip-hop producers would admire his rhythms, and why Adele and Lorde would be drawn to the sleek intimacy of chart-topping ballads such as One More Night and Against All Odds. “These days,” Charles Aaron recently wrote in the New York Times, “you speak ill of Phil at your own risk.” (Lynskey, 2016; article on Collins).</p> <p><i>No Jacket Required</i> nominated for the 2010 Brit Award for British Album of 30 Years.</p>

Figure 2: The Phil Collins Effect (PCE)



## ALL OF MY LIFE



"...Collins is always seen as the Genesis frontman first and his multifarious activities with musicians like Eno, Bob Fripp, Peter Gabriel, Brand X and John Martyn are virtually dismissed as mere extra-curricular dabbling, despite the fact that he's one of the finest drummers in Britain. But there's no excuse for that now. 'With 'In The Air Tonight' having reached number one in the MM singles chart in just three weeks and his first album Face Value due to be released in a week's time, Collins is busy etching his name on the public heart as a solo artist; taking credits for the vocal, songwriting, drums, and keyboards." (Barber, 1981)



"It would be tempting to dub this the Topping Up the Pension tour. Collins is the first to admit he's getting too old for this, constantly reminding us that it will be his last tour. Rather than giving the evening a sense of occasion, the comment sounded loaded with melancholy and regret. None of this raw emotion translated to his performance. Flanked by a neatly choreographed brass section and backing singers who revelled in acting out over-literal interpretations of his lyrics (during 'Wear My Hat, they wore each other's hats'), Collins maintained a professional detachment from his own songs throughout. He may as well have sung his shopping list to the tunes of Sussudio or Easy Lover because, though he was sweating profusely by the third song, the sentiment was as hollow as the Arena's cavernous ceiling. (Pill, 2004)



"...there's the not-so-small matter of his contribution to British music. Yes, we may sneer at the mopey divorce ballads (although Kiss's face-painted, hard-rocking frontman Paul Stanley, of all people, has been known to praise the ostensibly goatey 'Against All Odds for its 'stunning, desperate vulnerability') but we shouldn't forget that Collins, as drummer-turned-vocalist, powered Genesis through four decades, from cult prog rock band to stadium-filling adult pop sophisticates. He played on Brian Eno's brilliantly trailblazing albums in the '70s, and with the likes of Robert Wyatt. He pioneered the innovative gated drum sound that can still be heard throughout pop. American R&B types consider him pop royalty." (Simpson, 2016)

### 1980-1991: TAKE A LOOK AT ME NOW

- 1981: Face Value (275 wks)
- 1982: Hello, I Must Be Going (163 wks)
- 1984: Against All Odds (Take A Look At Me Now)
- 1985: No Jacket Required (176 wks)
- 1989: ... But, Seriously (68 wks)
- 1990: Serious Hits... Live! (50 wks)

1985: Collins performs on Live Aid with Led Zeppelin

Awards won: AMA (2), Billboard (4), BRIT (7), Golden Globe, Grammy (6), Ivor Novello (4), MTV VMA.

### 1992-2009: THROWING IT ALL AWAY

- 1993: Both Sides (25 wks)
- 1994: Dance Into The Light (14 wks)
- 1998: ... Hits (107 wks)
- 1999: Tarzan Soundtrack
- 2002: Testify (8 wks)
- 2003: Brother Bear Soundtrack
- One box set and one compilation album

1992: The Sun article about Collins supporting Conservatives

1995: Collins leaves Genesis

1997: Collins relocates to Switzerland

1999: Collins receives a star on the Hollywood hall of fame.

2003: Collins inducted to the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

2004-05: The First Final Farewell Tour

2006: Genesis announce reunion and tour

Awards won: Academy, AMA, Disney Legend, Golden Globe, Grammy, Ivor Novello, NRJ Award of Honor.

### 2010-: HANG IN LONG ENOUGH

- 2010: Brit award nomination for British Album of 30 Years (No Jacket Required)
- 2010: Going Back (16 wks)
- 5 compilation/remix/box set releases
- 2011: Collins announces retirement
- 2015: Collins announces return to music
- 2017-19: Not Dead Yet Tour