

“Phantasmatic Identity Over Opinion?”: Making Sense of New Grammy Category “Alternative Jazz”

Intro

Following Beyoncé and Linda Martell in “Spaghetti” (2024): [SLIDE] “Genres are a funny little concept, aren't they?...In theory, they have a simple definition that's easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined...” Or, as David Brackett (2016) has put it: “[G]enres are not static groupings of empirically verifiable musical characteristics, but rather associations of texts whose criteria of similarity may vary according to the uses to which the genre labels are put” (4). And their boundaries, I suggest, keep getting weirder, stretching their credulity or utility.

This paper stems from an ongoing book project investigating whatever “jazz” understands itself to be at present, particularly related to moves by artists and communities of production and listenership to, at times, productively disidentify with the genre. Twin intransigent issues that present themselves as I work on this project are the incoherence of genre as a concept and object, as well as the incoherence of race as both a category and index of personhood. While I have been spending quite a lot of time thinking about race with this project, genre and the discourse of genre studies have only recently impressed themselves upon me as something to take more seriously. So, when [the Recording Academy announced in June 2023](#) its first new category for jazz music since 1995 - a new GRAMMY award for Best Alternative Jazz Record - my interest was piqued.

For the purposes of this paper I chose to think on Louis Cole's nominated record, *Quality Over Opinion*, [SLIDE] released in 2022 by Brainfeeder - an independent label operating in Los Angeles founded by Flying Lotus in 2008. When writing an abstract for this paper in November of 2023, *Quality Over Opinion* seemed like a good record to discuss as it's...well, it casts a wide net. Its title informed my title for this talk, though I was thiis close to trying to make a “Compared to What?” pun - *pace* McDaniels, [Flack](#), Harris, and [Mcann](#). I'm not sure my title works, but it seemed alright at the time. Spoiler alert: *Quality Over Opinion* didn't win the GRAMMY this last February, but that's ok. I'll discuss who did.

To set expectations quickly about the shape of this talk [SLIDE]: I'll begin with an introduction to Cole and a few examples from *Quality Over Opinion*. This will lead to a discussion of the GRAMMY awards for jazz followed by a brief sketch of how I'm approaching the idea of genre. I'll have more, then, to say about Cole's record and other nominated records, and finally some thoughts about the utility of the award and what we might understand genre to be doing at the moment.

Louis Cole: Examples

[SLIDE] I've been following Cole's music since I encountered him playing at house parties in Los Angeles around 2013. He's become significantly more popular since then. Cole is a born and bred Los Angeles area drummer/multi-instrumentalist/songwriter/producer. He graduated from the USC Thornton School of Music's Jazz Studies program in 2009. His eclectic DIY and internet culture-inspired aesthetic have landed him in the middle of a clutch of free thinking artists in the Los Angeles ecology of creative music; many of whom cultivate a post-ironic engagement with the world that's absurd and nihilistic; resigned but hyper-committed. [SLIDE] The phrase "Who Cares?" has shown up often in his solo work and with Knower, his duo with Genevieve Artadi. For example, in his song "[I'm Tight.](#)" he sings the phrase: "I give a fuck...and don't give a fuck. And that is why I'm tight." This is important for reasons I'll come back to.

I'll pause here to share some audio/visual examples related to the recent record in question: live footage, official videos, and tour. [["Park Your Car..." Video](#)] [[IG Tour Video](#)]

New GRAMMY Category: Why Now?

[SLIDE] The GRAMMYs are ubiquitous in the music industry as an award that - for some artists - validates their work and often translates to more visibility. For some musicians it remains an explicit goal, while for others [SLIDE] it's a popularity contest that doesn't mean much. In any case, [the GRAMMYs and the Recording Academy have some remarkable goals.](#)

Via their website: "The mission of the Recording Academy is to recognize excellence in the recording arts and sciences, cultivate the well-being of the music community, and ensure that music remains an indelible part of our culture." The GRAMMY Award, the Recording Academy tells us, is the "single most coveted accolade in music." As I noted earlier, beginning in 2024,

musicians would have three new categories in which to win such an accolade. In addition to Best Alternative Jazz Record, the academy added awards for Best African Music Performance, and Best Pop Dance Recording. [SLIDE] The GRAMMY website notes:

These Category additions and amendments were voted on and passed at the Recording Academy's most recent semiannual Board of Trustees meeting held in May 2023.

Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason jr. added:

The Recording Academy is proud to announce these latest Category changes to our Awards process. These changes reflect our commitment to actively listen and respond to the feedback from our music community, accurately represent a diverse range of relevant musical genres, and stay aligned with the ever-evolving musical landscape...By introducing these three new categories, we are able to acknowledge and appreciate a broader array of artists...We are excited to honor and celebrate the creators and recordings in these categories, while also exposing a wider range of music to fans worldwide.

These all seem to be reasonable and honorable goals associated with a music industry finding its way through a challenging couple of decades since the advent of streaming and radical democratization of music recording and distribution. However, in spite of the ways such new categories may occasion inclusivity for artist and listeners, such accolades have historically served as means of creating and disciplining genre categories.

Various GRAMMYS awarded to “jazz” and other genres have existed since the advent of the awards in 1959. As an indexing marker of exemplarity, they have - for better or for worse - been related to processes of differentiation and discrimination played out by critics, radio stations, recording labels, record store owners, venues and festivals, and some musicians as a logical unfolding of a project with an internal logic; a kind of natural teleology. This exercise of what might be read as a conservative, disciplining exclusion is challenged by creative music's affinity for promiscuous incorporation. As whatever “jazz” is has traveled the world via recordings and traveling musicians, it has evinced radical plurality. The historical gatekeeping of “jazz” as a coherent genre has served to support opinions of conservative aficionados and other stakeholders interested to divine what “is” and “is not” jazz as much as demand a clear taxonomy of the music; sometimes pruning a rhizomatic phenomenon into a linear “family tree.” I don't want to be too critical here - much of this kind of organization has made some kind of sense as modes of recording, distribution, and commentary have developed in the last century, characterized as it's been by white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (with thanks for bell hooks

for that chestnut). If you peruse the GRAMMY list of awardees for Best Instrumental Album since its beginning you'll see an incredible list of artists we'd associate with the jazz lineage - and you won't meet a female winner until Terri Lynn Carrington in 2014; and her again in 2023 for her *New Standards Volume I*.

In reality - the music's always meandered and shifted, finding new audiences, alienating others, often being co opted and commodified along the way. The list of "jazz" hyphenates demonstrates this: Latin, cool, free, avant-garde, Third Stream, Brazilian, fusion, ECM (understood as an aesthetic)...we could be here all day. [SLIDE]

Always an Identity Problem

Of course, jazz has always had an identity problem, specifically in the marketplace. From its initial recording in 1917 by the all-white Original Dixieland Jass Band whose cornet-playing leader, the Sicilian-American Nick LaRocca, famously claimed to have invented the music and denied claims of Black influence. The music's proximity to Blackness has been contested by critics and historians for more than a century with LaRocca's claim holding sway with many Americans into the 1930s where we note the dominance of a mainstream attitude that, if Black folks had anything to do with the music, it was only in creating an atavistic musical base that needed refinement. For example, [SLIDE] in the exoticist and caricaturesque introduction to the "Rhapsody in Blue" sequence of the 1930 film, *King of Jazz*, bandleader Paul Whiteman notes: "Jazz was born in the African jungle to the beating of the voodoo drum." We later see in that same film [SLIDE] the famous "Melting Pot" sequence wherein it's demonstrated that, whatever rhythms make up then contemporary jazz - then understood as syncopated popular music - they were specifically of European origin and, we might assume, respectable. Of course we can note how this back and forth continued in the press with manifestations in Leonard Feather's "Blindfold Tests." Originating as a kind of interview wherein jazz musicians might judge a recording and reflect on the nature of jazz without previously having their expectations set with regard to race, gender, or even location of the performers. These columns were first published in *Metronome* magazine in 1946, moving to *Downbeat* where they are still published today. It's becoming de rigueur in contemporary discourse to recognize and discuss how an unresolved relationship characterized by both love and theft conditioned by white-supremacy and the exigencies of the marketplace has framed how we think of the music. Of course, after decades of wanton hybridizing, "real jazz" was recovered from the clutches of eclecticism [SLIDE] in the

neoclassical period of the 1990s, often asserting the real music as acoustic, blues-informed, and swinging; institutionalizing this model via huge amounts of economic capital at Jazz at Lincoln Center and elsewhere. [SLIDE]

Accompanying ongoing aesthetic disputes have been an identity crisis about the music's value and who and what it might represent in the marketplace. Apart from aforementioned gendered and racialized elements of the music, it had initially been relegated to vernacular spaces while only conspicuously being sometimes welcomed into the concert hall - conspicuous for its novelty as a music "out of place." Its flip from being a vernacular music to an "art" music and associated valences of value have been documented and theorized in works such [SLIDE] as Dale Chapman's *The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture* (2018). This study catalogs the music's now-normalized association with economic and cultural capital via urban philanthropy and market-centered ideologies (8). Also, Mark Laver's *Jazz Sells: Music, Marketing, and Meaning* (2015) that traces how "jazz," conceptually speaking, has become a marketable metonym for various modes of desirability and freedom (36). Spread conceptually thin as it is, when we consider "Alternative Jazz" we're left asking: "Which jazz? What jazz? Whose jazz? Why?"

(Phantasmatic) Identity

So, what does this have to do with the "phantasmatic" phenomenon promised in my talk's title? Well, as I'm thinking about genre, I'm - naturally - reading David Brackett. And - it seems that while writing his 2016 book, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music* - he'd been reading a bunch of Georgina Born (2000) and Judith Butler (1993), among many others. In his book he offers a rich literature review of genre studies for those of us - like myself - catching up. Born and Butler, in particular, offer formulations for identity that recognize the roles of imagination and performativity - the phantasmatic - with regard to the construction and maintenance of self in relation to music and other expressive phenomena; often manifesting in shifting and even contradictory subject positions related to fields of power, market places, affects, expressions of taste, etc.

Brackett reminds us that, in the early days of the recording industry, genres had often been assumed to correlate with homologous communities - those communities of listenership whom the music is "for"; whose experience it ostensibly reflects. This idea is, of course, related to

market practices in the recording industry that have assumed certain musics proper to essentialized demographic categories such as national, ethnic, racialized, and gendered subject positions. This idea never actually corresponded to reality as each of us inhabits multiple shifting subject positions and enjoy imaginative capacities to entertain and meaningfully respond to a breadth of lifeworlds and cultural expressions. In spite of having been problematized by globalization and the one-time dominance of that structure of feeling and associated political economy that comprised postmodernity (RIP), the idea of coherent homologous communities of listenership persists as an influential means by which musical recordings are categorized.

As indicated by the multiplicity of identity crises toward which I gestured earlier, it quickly becomes evident that whatever “jazz” is, it has, in fact, been associated with many overlapping communities. In the last century, cultural markers and semantic coding associated with jazz have undergone significant drift in the mainstream American imaginary. “Real” homologous communities of listeners are augmented by imagined and constellated listeners who move between homologous communities, performatively and speculatively “trying on” scenes of cultural production; participating in multiple, even contradictory representations of subject positions.

It has been repeatedly demonstrated in musicological discourse that there are no straight lines in music production or criticism. [SLIDE] Regarding shaking up genre constraints, Susan McClary (2000) reminds us: “The problem is not so much that a dependable linear main stream has collapsed as that there never was such a thing, except in fictions constructed after the fact—and always for particular ideological purposes” (169). The same is true with regard to relations of persons to genre. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) note the dominance of what they call “splitting” in the construction of imagined identities in the musical imaginary: “the coexistence in the musical self of contradictory states and multiple subject position, invoking the concept of intersubjective fragmentation; and the attempt to absent or exclude an other aesthetic or music, which amounts to denial in musical subjectivity or cultural system” (38). The idea of “phantasmatic identity,” then, represents a kind of performative construction of identity that recognizes the complex relationship of cultural expression to a subject’s shifting, sometimes contradictory performance of self in time (Brackett 2016, 24). Such an identity complements already existing homologous and imaginary relations to music, situating a subject in their temporal, material, and imaginary valances. This formulation of a subject’s relation to musics is in line with Eric Drott’s (2013) demand for:

...a hermeneutics that does not presume a single, undivided horizon of expectation but one that is fissured, internally heterogeneous, divided between a range of competing allegiances and investments...an analytic method better equipped to grapple with the dynamics of “splitting and denial at work...in the musical imaginary” (Born 2000, 38), that is able to register the effects of “the struggle of the self against oneself” (Lahire 2005)...(41)

So, having addressed these longstanding identity issues, let’s meet the artists recognized for having created exemplary “alternative” jazz recordings. [SLIDE]

Nominees & Analysis of *Quality Over Opinion*

[SLIDE] Nominees for this award had included Cole’s *Quality Over Opinion*, but also Kurt Elling and Charlie Hunter’s *SuperBlue: The Iridescent Spree* (2023), Cory Henry’s *Live at the Piano* (2023), Arooj Aftab, Vijay Iyer, and Shahzad Ismaily’s *Love in Exile* (2023), and Meshell Ndegeocello’s *The Omnichord Real Book* (2023). Apparently all “alternative jazz records” in the eyes and ears of the Recording Academy, these records are quite different from one another. They all participate in different ways in that musico-historical assemblage we call jazz, some more explicitly than others. While the Elling/Hunter record feels a bit like Donald Fagen and Tom Waits found a drum machine, Cory Henry’s record is a varied solo set demonstrating his breadth of influences with pianistic and vocal virtuosity. *Love in Exile* is a meditative trio recording whose open songforms feature Aftab’s Hindustani classical-inflected vocalizations in nests of responsorial deep listening. Ndegeocello’s *The Omnichord Real Book* received the GRAMMY - it’s a 70-minute, 18-track record informed by post-rock, Afrobeat, and Afrofuturist themes. The core band is augmented throughout by eclectic guest artists variously associated with “jazz” and creative musics such as Jeff Parker, Cory Henry, Joan as Police Woman, Jason Moran, Ambrose Akinmusere, Joel Ross, Brandee Younger, and Mark Guiliana. Its mix of acoustic and electronic sounds that participate in genre worlds of pop and avant-garde as much as jazz.

All of these artists and records cast a wide net and, in different ways, participate broadly in whatever “jazz” is. However, they participate in many other styles, too, sometimes completely eschewing aesthetic markers of jazz. For example, here’s an [SLIDE] informal chart cataloging styles and characteristics of the twenty tracks comprising *Quality Over Opinion*. It’s explicitly not very “jazzy.”

What does genre still do?

So, what does genre still “do” - or, what might we learn from these shifting relationships to genre demonstrated by Cole’s record and those other Alternative-Jazz nominees? I’m particularly interested in current manifestations of promiscuous musical hybridities occasioned and conditioned by proximity to internet ecologies. [SLIDE]

Cole’s music has been previously taxonomized by critic and jazz writer [Nate Chinen as “viral jazz” \(2022\)](#). Following Vijay Iyer’s July 2022 Tweet naming the latest subgenre: “viral jazz,” Chinen developed the idea in an article for NPR, noting the music’s proximity to internet media ecologies: “Much truer to the spirit of viral jazz is the musician who fully inhabits a given platform, allowing it to inform their creative process... In “jazz” as elsewhere, we’ve seen a recent explosion in acts that inhabit the platform (YouTube) as a hothouse terrarium, cultivating fan bases that migrate them to major stages...” He puts Cole in the company of Thundercat, DOMi & JD Beck, and MONONEON for their savvy navigation of a “very online” and hybrid cultural space, though I suggest there’s more to it than just a situatedness in the maximalist, everything-everywhere-all-at-once nature of the contemporary internet.

Viral or otherwise, Cole himself notes his investments in “jazz.” In [an interview with Ammar Kalia](#) published in The Guardian in October, 2022, Cole said: “Funk is fun but with jazz you can just go wild with it – it’s so open-minded and experimental, which I love.” But does his investment - or those of these other “alternative jazz” artists - also recommend an ethics of liberation; toward an identification with historical and contemporary freedom struggles beyond the aesthetic? I don’t know. Sometimes?

Rather than a politics conditioned by domination and subsumption, Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) diagnose a cultural forgetfulness in the leveling occasioned by new means of music exposure and distribution playing out, too, in modes of music-making and listening. They ask whether, or under what conditions “musical otherness can be simple aesthetic difference? Is it possible to discern intramusical constructions of otherness that are intended as ‘pure’ aesthetic play with other sounds and are thus, crucially unburdened by ideological associations and the psychic dynamics of projection and splitting?” (41)

This implies the possibility of a kind of subsumption of difference as a condition of contemporary music-making wherein the normalization of borrowing becomes the “metalanguage” of a new tradition or practice; post-postmodern eclecticism writ large. But going beyond the potential flattening of meaning offered by that free play of signs and signifiers, could it be the ongoing and now dominant alienation from lifeworlds of musical production occasioned by algorithmic streaming and post-pandemic online mediation might denature musical sounds from their contexts so greatly as to reduce them all to grist for the mill of hybridizing and repurposing?

I’ve clearly still got a lot to think about with regard to the ongoing utility of genre for markets, listeners, and musicians. Genre continues to be a useful fiction that points to various historical appearances and encounters of that musical assemblage we call “jazz.” It’s like a constantly shifting conceptual street address for a point of entry in this rhizomatic space of cultural expression; one that’s - for better or worse - also aligned with various forms of capital and risk for various stakeholders.

We can see this slipperiness in Cole’s ambivalent mantra of “Who Cares?” that simultaneously cares A LOT. Meaning and identity here are shifting; seemingly a-la-carte. And, of course, they always have been. However, our continued tendencies as musicologists to taxonomize and tease out the latent play of power structures related to musics keeps reanimating what may be dead-ish, or, latent-at-best worlds of meaning for listeners differently engaging with music they’ll never purchase in the rarified imaginary spaces of streaming platform interfaces.

In closing, I’ll suggest that hyper-hybrid musicking here as “viral” or “alternative-jazz” isn’t just a symptom of an internet ecology of flattened provenance and anonymity. Rather, the phantasmatic identity it engenders recognized here as “alternative jazz” is itself a kind of flex that sometimes affirms and celebrates its influences, identifies with and participates in historical and contemporary freedom struggles, and sighs with resigned indifference all at once. The stakes can be felt as desperately high and vanishingly low at the same time. A phantasmatic identity conditioned as such might be both exciting and playful with open horizons of possibility while simultaneously nihilistic, lacking meaningful stakes or outcomes. Apparently, [SLIDE] this is what - at least some - jazz looks like now.

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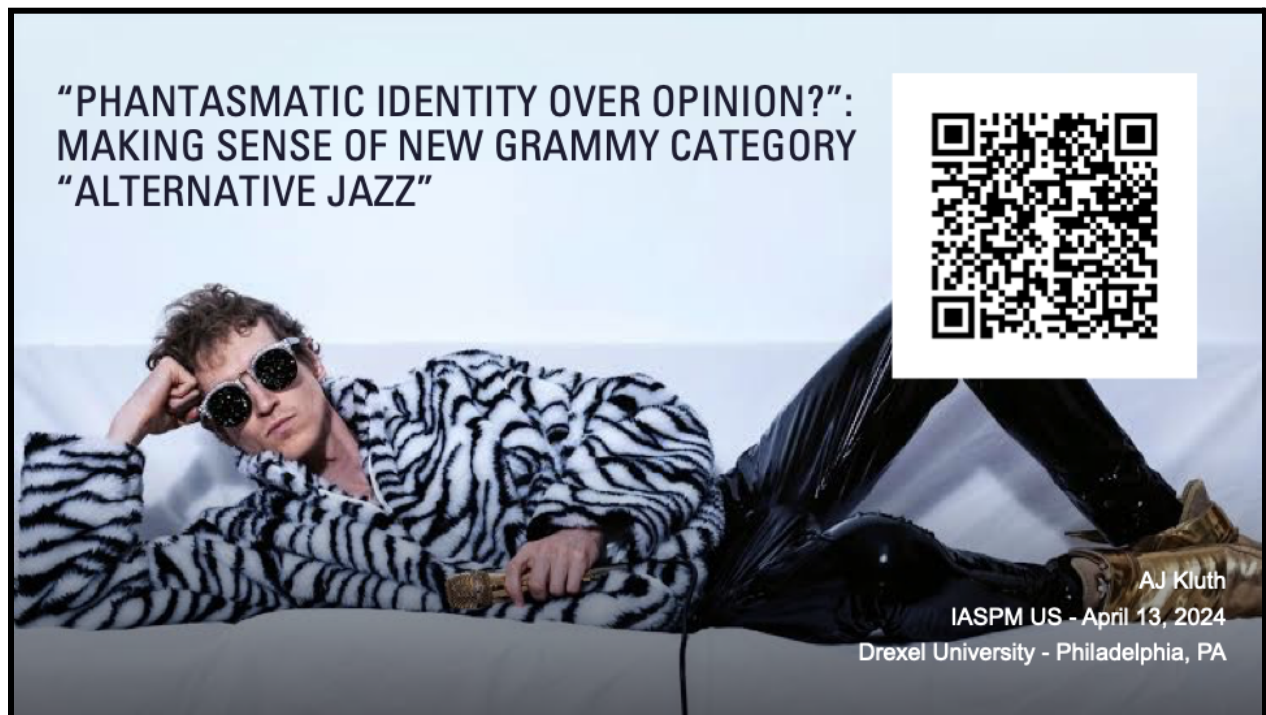
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Song Title	Style	Characteristics
Quality Over Opinion	Spoken Word - Orchestral	Introspective metamodern affirmation of commitment to the absurdist/nihilist project
Dead Inside Shuffle	Synth 12/8 Shuffle	Yacht Rock influence - self-aware
Not Needed Anymore	Acoustic Fingerstyle Guitar	"Blackbird"-style guitar/vocal/foottap
Shallow Laughter	Orchestral Aria	Rubato with falsetto vocal
Bitches	Blast Beat/Metal straight 4/4	Shreddy guitar and drums, maximalist, repetitive

Message	R&B Waltz	D'Angelo-style Rhodes sound with lovely postbop acoustic piano solo on outro
Failing in a Cool Way	Fast "four on the floor" drums n' bass, syncopated synth cluster chords	Self-aware internet anonymity lyric
Disappear	Bossa-nova with guitar and shaker/clave rimshots	Very Brian Wilson, could be a <i>Pet Sounds</i> outtake
I'm Tight	High-impact, simple 4/4 beat with minimalist funk groove	Slow burn, small groove changes adding up to compelling tune
True Love	Soft rock 4/4 tune	Richard Marx B-side produced by Brian Eno with John Tesh on keys
Planet X	4/4 Shuffle funky tune	Thick vocal pads - synthy yacht rock?
Let Me Snack	Slow straight 4/4 1st half, insane noise EDM 2nd half	Ambient vocals turns into pseudo Clown Core tune
Forgetting	4/4 pop w/ acoustic guitar	Brian Wilson aesthetic again? Heavy BGVs
Park Your Car on My Face	4/4 funk tune, strong vocal/bgvs, horns	What I think of when I think of LC aesthetic
Don't Care	4/4 Straight Pop Tune ft: Genevieve	Detuned synths; vaporwave elements?
Laughing In Her Sleep	Shuffle pop/R&B tune	Could be a Barry White tune with different production
Outer Moat Behavior	4/4 Drums n Bass - syncopated, chromatic climb	Flange effect, hi/lo filters
When	4/4 cyclical major-keyed 6ths - no drums	Ft. Kurt Rosenwinkel, synths, falsetto love song
Let It Happen	4/4 Slowly growing R&B/pop tune, male falsetto - could be an Air Supply song; multiple modulations	Detuned, tape-warble guitar/synth; builds to huge orchestral swell; nominated for 2024 GRAMMY for Best Arrangement, Instruments and Vocals
Little Piano Thing	Elliptical piano waltz, no drums	Muted piano, pretty

Presentation Slides



BEYONCÉ (AND LINDA MARTELL) BEAT ME TO IT

Following Beyoncé and Linda Martell in “Spaghetti” (2024): “Genres are a funny little concept, aren’t they?...In theory, they have a simple definition that’s easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined...” As David Brackett (2016) has put it: “[G]enres are not static groupings of empirically verifiable musical characteristics, but rather associations of texts whose criteria of similarity may vary according to the uses to which the genre labels are put” (4). And their boundaries, I suggest, keep getting weirder, stretching their credulity or utility.



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LOUIS COLE



QUALITY OVER OPINION (2022)

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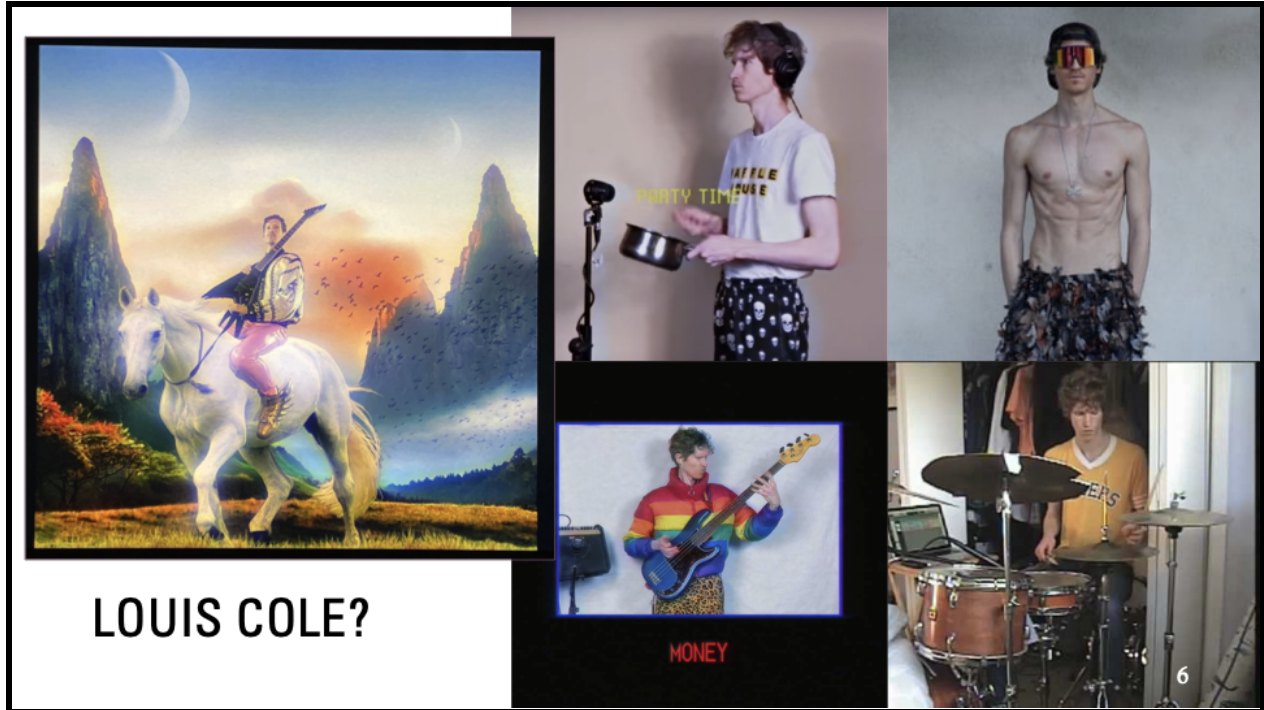
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Live Video Collage from Tour, posted to IG, December 2021



OFFICIAL VIDEO FOR "PARK YOUR
CAR ON MY FACE" (2022)
FROM *QUALITY OVER OPINION*



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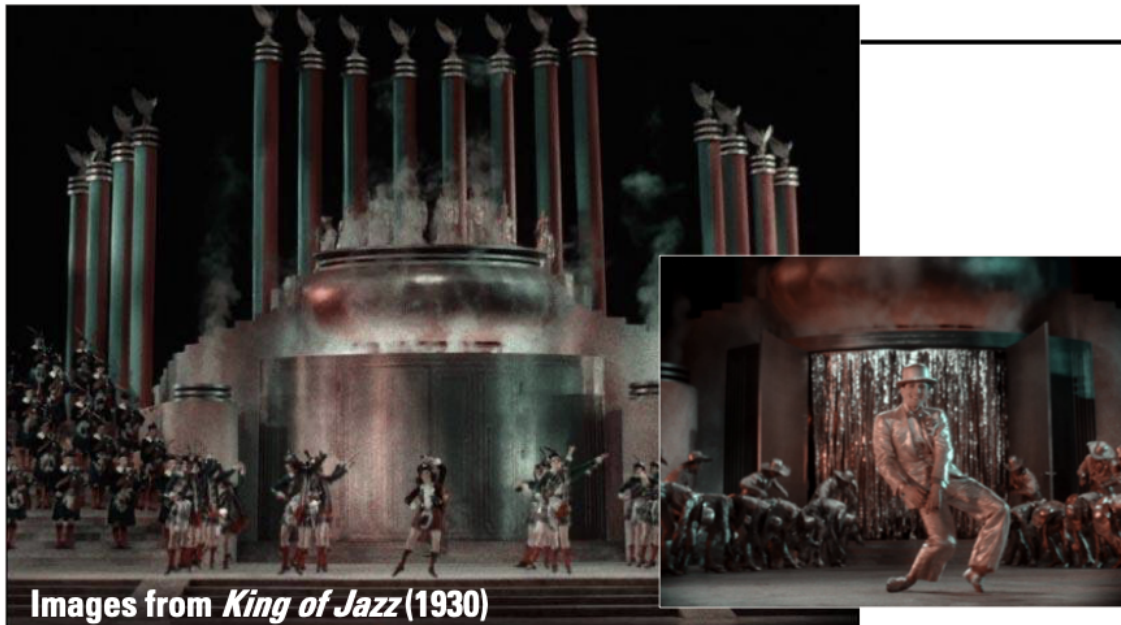
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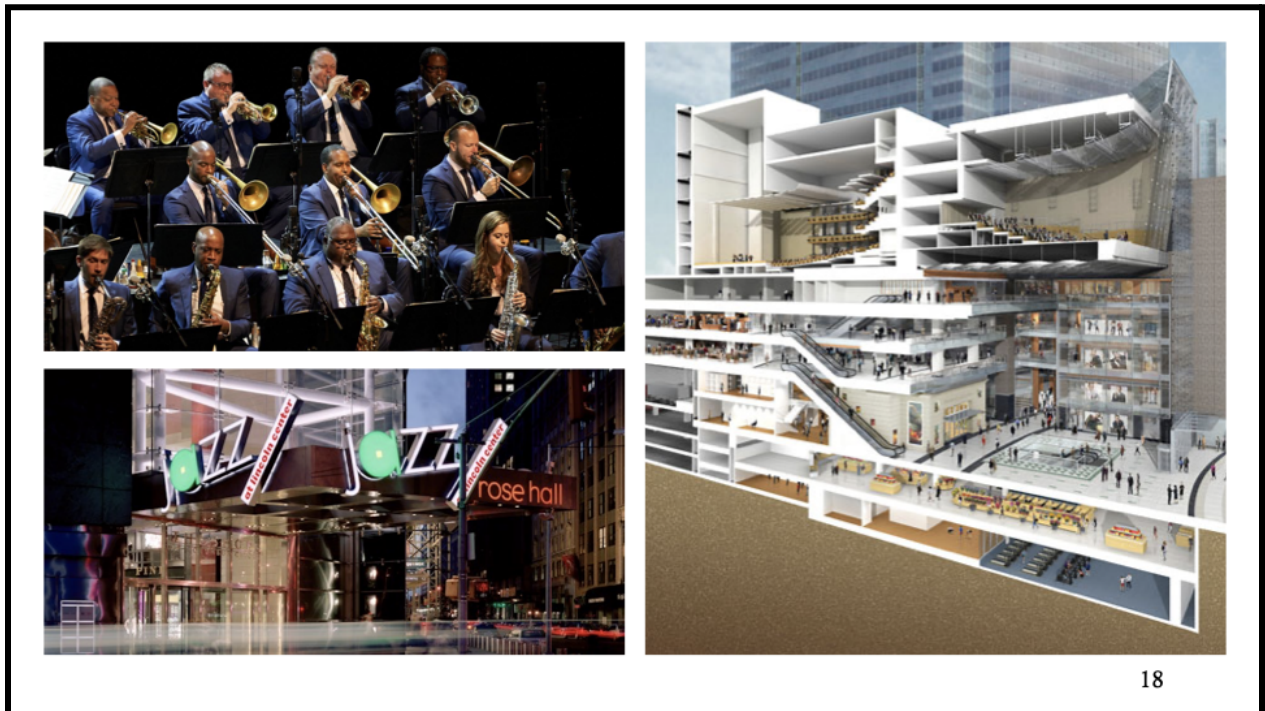
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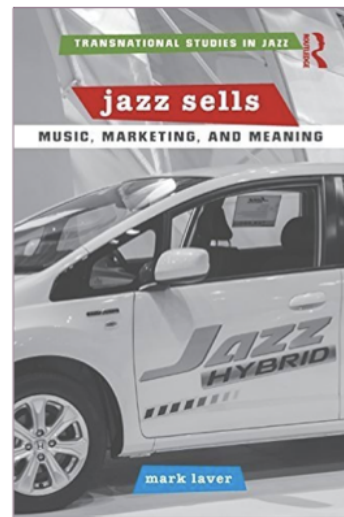
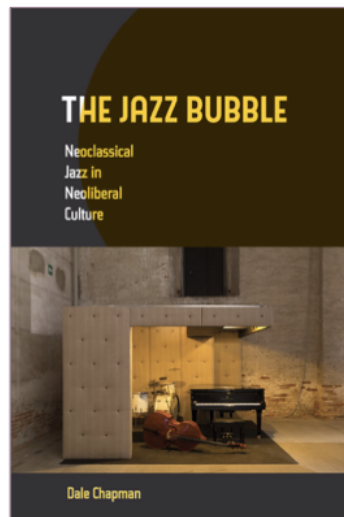
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SPLIT IDENTITY, PHANTASMATIC IDENTITY, PERFORMING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Regarding shaking up genre constraints, Susan McClary (2000) reminds us: "The problem is not so much that a dependable linear main stream has collapsed as that there never was such a thing, except in fictions constructed after the fact—and always for particular ideological purposes" (169). The same is true with regard to relations of persons to genre. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) note the dominance of what they call "splitting" in the construction of imagined identities in the musical imaginary: "the coexistence in the musical self of contradictory states and multiple subject position, invoking the concept of intersubjective fragmentation; and the attempt to absent or exclude an other aesthetic or music, which amounts to denial in musical subjectivity or cultural system" (38). The idea of "phantasmatic identity," then, represents a kind of performative construction of identity that recognizes the complex relationship of cultural expression to a subject's shifting, sometimes contradictory performance of self in time (Brackett 2016, 24). Such an identity complements already existing homologous and imaginary relations to music, situating a subject in their temporal, material, and imaginary valances.

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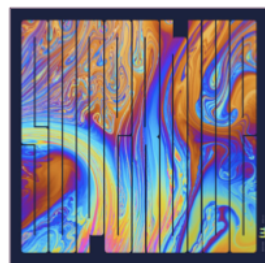
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NOMINEES FOR BEST ALTERNATIVE- JAZZ RECORD



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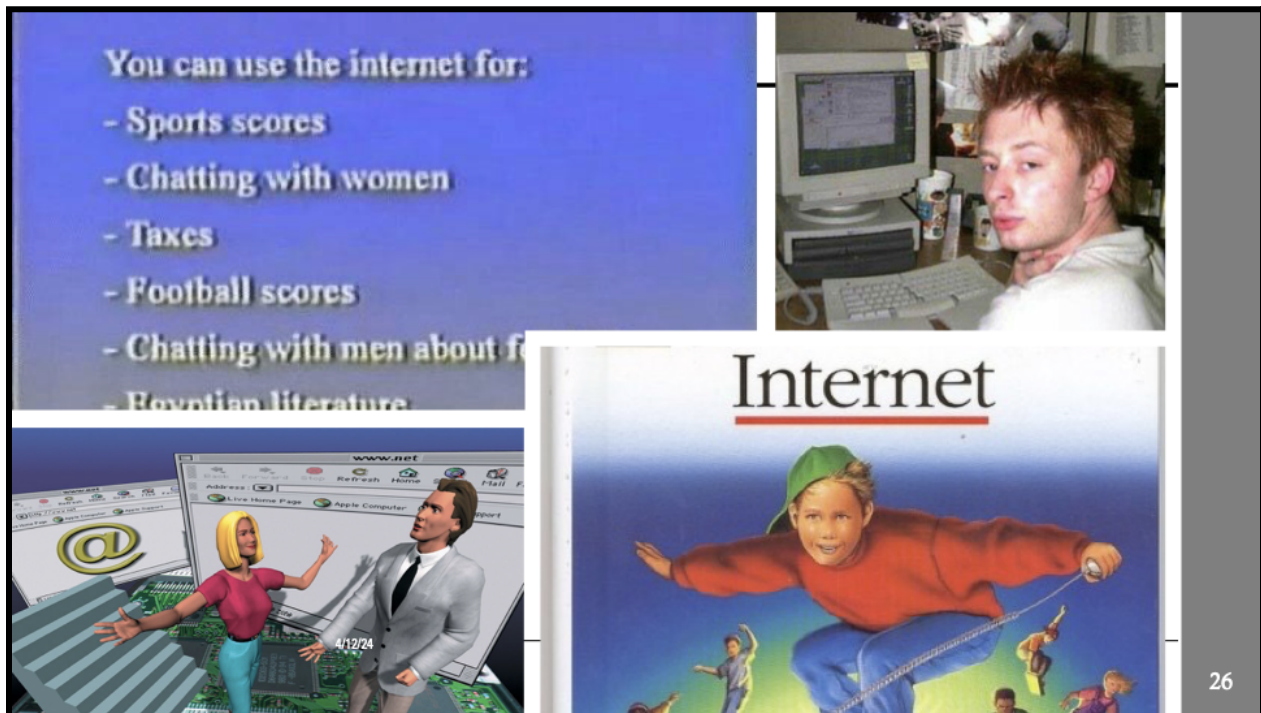
Song Title	Style	Characteristics
Quality Over Opinion	Spoken Word - Orchestral	Introspective metamodern affirmation of commitment to the absurdist/nihilist project
Dead Inside Shuffle	Synth 12/8 Shuffle	Yacht Rock influence - self-aware
Not Needed Anymore	4/4 Acoustic Fingerstyle Guitar	"Blackbird"-style guitar/vocal/foottap
Shallow Laughter	Orchestral Aria	Rubato with falsetto vocal
Bitches	Blast Beat/Metal straight 4/4	Shreddy guitar and drums, maximalist, repetitive
Message	R&B Waltz	D'Angelo-style Rhodes sound with lovely postbop acoustic piano solo on outro
Falling in a Cool Way	Fast "four on the floor" drums n' bass, syncopated synth cluster chords	Self-aware internet anonymity lyric
Disappear	4/4 Bossa-nova with guitar and shaker/clave rimshots	Very Brian Wilson, could be a <i>Pet Sounds</i> outtake
I'm Tight	High-impact, simple 4/4 beat with minimalist funk groove	Slow burn, small groove changes adding up to compelling tune
True Love	4/4 Soft rock tune	Like a Richard Marx B-side produced by Brian Eno with John Tesh on keys
Planet X	4/4 Shuffle funky tune	Thick vocal pads - synthy yacht rock?
Let Me Snack	Slow straight 4/4 1st half, insane noise EDM 2nd half	Ambient vocals turns into pseudo-Clown Core tune
Forgetting	4/4 pop w/ acoustic guitar	Brian Wilson aesthetic again? Heavy BGVs
Park Your Car on My Face	4/4 funk tune, strong vocal/bgvs, horns	What I think of when I think of LC aesthetic
Don't Care	4/4 Straight Pop Tune ft. Genevieve	Detuned synths; vaporwave elements?
Laughing In Her Sleep	Shuffle pop/R&B tune	Could be a Barry White tune with different production
Outer Moat Behavior	4/4 Drums n Bass - syncopated, chromatic climb	Flange effect, hi/lo filters
When	4/4 cyclical major-keyed 6ths - no drums	Ft. Kurt Rosenwinkel, synths, falsetto love song
Let It Happen	4/4 Slowly growing R&B/pop tune, male falsetto - could be an Air Supply song; multiple ascending modulations	Detuned, tape-warble guitar/synth; builds to huge orchestral swell; nominated for 2024 GRAMMY for Best Arrangement, Instruments and Vocals
Little Piano Thing	Elliptical piano waltz, no drums	Muted piano, pretty

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VIRAL JAZZ?



Defined by Chinen as having a proximity to internet media ecologies: "Much truer to the spirit of viral jazz is the musician who fully inhabits a given platform, allowing it to inform their creative process... In "jazz" as elsewhere, we've seen a recent explosion in acts that inhabit the platform (YouTube) as a hothouse terrarium, cultivating fan bases that migrate them to major stages..."
<https://www.npr.org/2022/10/12/1128152356/viral-jazz-louis-cole-domi-jd-beck-mononeon>

What is viral jazz?

Easy to recognize and hard to define, a savvy young cohort takes shape

OCTOBER 12, 2022 · 6:00 AM ET

FROM

Nate Chinen



Louis Cole leads collaborators through a deadpan dance medley in the video for "I'm Tight."
YouTube

Here is a litmus test for anyone looking to gauge their exposure to viral jazz. What's your favorite dance move from the "I'm Tight" video by Louis Cole?

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Hyper-hybrid musicking here as “viral” or “alternative-jazz” isn’t just a symptom of an internet ecology of flattened provenance and anonymity. I suggest the phantasmatic identity it engenders recognized here as “alternative jazz” is itself a kind of flex that sometimes affirms and celebrates its influences, identifies with and participates in historical and contemporary freedom struggles, and sighs with resigned indifference all at once. The stakes can be felt as desperately high and vanishingly low at the same time. A phantasmatic identity conditioned as such might be both exciting and playful with open horizons of possibility while simultaneously nihilistic, lacking meaningful stakes or outcomes.





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THANKS BE IN TOUCH!

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