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Evan Malone

University at Albany, State University of New York, malone.evan@gmail.com

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Genres, Communities, and Practices

by

Evan C Malone

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Philosophy
Spring 2022
ABS
TRACT

In this dissertation, I defend a communitarian, practice-based, theory of genre and aesthetic value. I argue that theories of aesthetic value and art ontology within analytic philosophy have been too focused on the intentions of individual artists, the features of individual works, and the aesthetic experience of individual audience members. Accordingly, philosophical accounts of genre also follow this model. However, taking genre seriously means recognizing that they are social categories. If this is right, then philosophy of art ought to pay closer attention to the ways in which genres (as social categories) mediate aesthetic practices, values, and concepts. By thinking about genres in terms of communities of aesthetic practice, we can better understand the ways in which communities create new aesthetic predicates and norms, generate and negotiate the nature of new practical identities, and develop unique ethical norms which govern their artistic practices.

The first chapter surveys existing accounts of genre (whether explicit or implied) and defends a more communitarian approach grounded in the aesthetic practices of communities. This chapter raises a handful of novel problems for existing theories and draws on social and political philosophy in developing my own view. Chapter 2 argues that extant communitarian theories of genre, like the genres-as-traditions model, fail to fully capture the role of audience-members and fans play in the development of a genre. This chapter draws heavily on literature in media studies and focuses on the role of online communities in seeding genres through curation (as opposed to the common view in which genres are fixed through artistic production). Chapter 3 then argues that aesthetic predicates are mediated in a way that broader accounts of those predicates should be sensitive to. In the service of this argument, I draw on musicological and psychological literature to differentiate the concept of musical groove along genre lines. Chapter 4 turns to the way in which artists and audiences within a genre can coalesce around a common practical identity, and how they negotiate amongst themselves the nature of that practical
identity. Here I pay special attention to the country music community and examine the way in which discourse about authenticity is used to enforce the genre’s practical identity. Finally, in Chapter 6, I apply the communitarian approach that I have advocated for to hip-hop music. By thinking about the genre in terms of community practices, and by drawing on social psychological and media studies literature, I provide an account of the ethical norm which prevents rap artists from covering one another and explain how such a norm would develop.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most importantly, I am incredibly grateful to the chair of my committee, P.D. Magnus, who encouraged me to pursue the questions that I was most excited by, who provided me with structure, focus, and guidance throughout, and who modelled exceptionally well how to be a great philosopher. I would also like to thank Ron McCLamrock and Jon Mandle for serving on my committee. Each member of the committee provided me with deep, insightful, and critical feedback at every step and each member of the committee has strengthened the work included here substantially.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of the rest of the faculty and staff of the philosophy department at The University at Albany, SUNY, especially Brad Armour-Garb and Greg Roberts (who both tirelessly advocated for me and supported me throughout my time in the department). Thank you, as well, to Carl Rodermund, Mark Thorsby, Jeffrey Jackson, Joseph Westfall, Rob Tierney, Christy Mag Uidhir, and Cynthia Freeland for their outsized roles in my philosophical education over the years. Likewise, I would like to thank John Dyck, Elizabeth Cantalamessa, and a variety of other referees, editors, and conference attendees for their feedback on the ideas presented here.

Thank you, as well, to my fellow graduate students in the philosophy department in Albany, who filled my time in the area with friendship, support, enriching philosophical conversation, and plenty of board games. In this regard, I am especially appreciative of Nick Boles, Andrew Gill, Jeff Jacques, Henry Curtis, George Kassimis, Gunnar Babcock, and Scott Wolcott Jr. I would also like to acknowledge Lyla Zusman, Joel Tirado, Jackson Gray, and
Elizabeth Gray, without whom I simply would not have survived my time in graduate school. Beyond the friendship and support that she has provided over these years, Elizabeth Gray’s influence on this project cannot be overstated. I owe her a great deal intellectually as well as personally.

Finally, I can’t begin to fully express the extent of my gratitude towards the friends and family who have supported me throughout, though I will now attempt this anyway. Beyond those friends mentioned already, I especially want to thank Ethan Marshall, Colin Aulds, Andres Aguirre, Elisa Infante, Kari Kempf, John Brockman, and Nuno Povoa for keeping me grounded in the world outside of philosophy. Likewise, I am deeply indebted to my entire family on all sides for their patience and enduring support throughout this process. As such, I would like to thank and acknowledge my parents, my grandparents, Megan, Ryan, Victoria, Miranda, and Mackenzie.
Chapter 1 – Genres as Practices

Genre discourse is widespread in appreciative practice, whether that is about hip-hop music, romance novels, or film noir. Fans spend considerable time debating whether works or artists are works or artists of a given genre. Meanwhile, artists spend just as much time attempting to have their work counted in a genre or trying to escape the genres that they have so far been pigeonholed into. Genre attributions matter for rankings, awards, appreciation, understanding music history, and for our ability to find new similar artists and works. It should be no surprise then, that philosophers of art have also been interested in genres. Whether they are giving accounts of genres as such or of particular genres, genre talk abounds in philosophy as much as it does in the popular discourse. As a result, theories of genre proliferate as well.

However, in their accounts, philosophers have so far focused on capturing all of the categories of art that we think of as genres and have focused less on ensuring that only the categories we think are genres are captured by those theories. Each of these theories populates the world with far too many genres because they call a wide class of mere categories of art genres. I call this the problem of genre explosion. While, ultimately, this problem can be avoided by adopting a particularly strong form intentionalism, this solution leads to a related problem of capturing the variety of ways that new genres develop. I call this the problem of genre invention. Likewise, theorists’ tendency to focus on paradigmatic genres (like horror films, science fiction novels, or Westerns) has so far meant that less attention has been paid to so-called ‘microgenres’. These small genres (common, at least, in music and literature) pose a variety of problems for existing accounts of genre. I argue that each of the popular theories of genre are susceptible to some worries brought up by the diverse aesthetic practices of microgenres. I call this the problem
of microgenres. The upshot of these three problems is that a good theory of genre should 1) be social in a way that distinguishes genres from mere categories of art, and 2) put fans and critics on equal footing with artists as potential and actual inventors of new genres.

In the section 2, I will survey the existing accounts of genre, say a little about why people have found those theories compelling, and describe the kinds of considerations they employ in determining whether a work is a work of a given genre. In section 3, I will demonstrate the ways in which the problem of genre explosion arises for all of these theories, introduce a potential solution that all of these theories could adopt in order to avoid the problem, and explain why adopting this view leads to the problem of genre invention. In section 4, I characterize microgenres and explain how all of the existing accounts face (in some form) the problem of microgenres. In section 5, I put forward a novel account which argues that genres are aesthetic practices. I explain how this view works, and how it avoids the problems associated with existing accounts. Finally, in section 6, I briefly summarize the remaining chapters (which each employ this model in answering a variety of philosophical questions about genres) and characterize how they relate to the view that genres are aesthetic practices.

**Theories of Genre**

Existing philosophical theories of genre can be broken up into three broad camps: genres-as-features, genres-as-functional-kinds, and genres-as-traditions. While theories that fall within each of these categories frequently disagree about the particulars (and accounts of various genres on the same theory might also disagree), this distinction does capture at least most of the existing accounts. The first of these, genres-as-features, regard genres as sets of works picked out by their

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1 This schema builds off of one introduced by Terrone, between genres-as-concepts and genres-as-traditions (Terrone 2021). Here, I refer to what Terrone calls genres-as-concepts as genres-as-features in order to distinguish it from genres-as-functional-kinds, since both functional kinds and sets of features are kinds of concepts.
common features (Todorov 1973; Currie 2004; Friend 2012). Typically, these features are internal to the work and accounts vary in strength, with some arguing that we can give necessary and sufficient conditions for a definition of each genre (Todorov 1973) and with others only saying that these features form a cluster concept (Currie 2004; Friend 2012). For example, a Western might be characterized by cowboys, tumbleweeds, duels at high noon, and scenic desert vistas. We could then think (on a definitional account) that these features are all necessary and jointly sufficient for a film to be a Western, or (on a cluster account) that a film needs at least some of these features to count as a Western and the more that it has, the more of a Western it is. In this way, whether we think we can provide an account of the conditions sufficient for inclusion in the genre, both definitional accounts and cluster accounts agree that the work needs at least some of these features in order to count as a work of that genre and that having one (or some combination) is sufficient.

While most of the features that people tend to pick out as characteristic of a genre are internal features of the work (like those described for Westerns), other accounts focus on features external to the work, or ‘mixed’ accounts where we look to both internal and external features in diagnosing a work as a work of a particular genre. For instance, a mixed account might allow us to describe Texas Country Music as works that have the internal features of country music and the external feature of being by artists from Texas (Abell 2012). These mixed accounts help us explain genres like this which are confined to a certain location or period in time (German expressionism, post-punk, etc.). Alternatively, we could have a completely externalist genres-as-

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2 Both Terrone and Fabbri have also defended versions of this view which differ slightly. Terrone appeals to audience expectations as a homeostatic mechanism for fixing the features characteristic of a genre whereas Fabbri a prototype theory (Terrone 2021; Fabbrì & Chambers 1982; Fabbrì 2012). These variations are supposed to explain how genres take on the features we associate with them but, as in the case of the other views, we are still supposed to look at characteristic sets of features internal to the work in determining whether a work is a work of that genre. As such, what is said of other genres-as-features views also applies to them.
features account. Indeed, genres-as-functional-kinds accounts are actually just genres-as-features accounts which pick out one external feature (that is, the artist’s intention to produce a work with the function characteristic of that genre). While there is no reason that the external feature needs to be the function, this does seem to be a popular (if not the only) purely externalist account. As such, I have given functionalist accounts their own category here.

On these genres-as-functional-kinds accounts, genres are picked out by the function that works of that kind are supposed to play (Abell 2014; Carroll 1987; Carroll 1997). For instance, horror films are supposed to induce horror, suspense films are supposed to cause us to feel suspense, and cringe comedies are comedy films that are supposed to be comedy films that cause us to cringe. As the examples above indicate, the function in most accounts of specific genres which utilize a genres-as-functional-kinds model is that of bringing about a particular phenomenological or affective state within the audience. However, functionalists have also provided accounts of documentary in which it is seen as a genre in which works functions as filmic assertions, so the function need not be purely affective (Carroll 1997).

Beyond this, most functional accounts of genre are intentionalist in that it is not fulfilling the function that secures genre membership, but the artists intention that the work should fulfill that function. If horror films are just films that scare us, then we couldn’t make a horror film that fails to do its job and we could make one by accident. Without a turn towards intentionalism, a genres-as-functional-kinds account of horror would tell us that the film either is a scary horror film, or it failed to be a horror film at all. However, if horror films are those intended to scare us, then we have grounds to criticize a horror film that is bad qua horror film. The filmmaker made a horror film in virtue of intending to make a scary film and they failed insofar as the film failed to
scare anyone. It is the intention to produce a work with this functionally defined appreciative plan that establishes the extension of the genre and the success conditions for works of that kind.

Finally, we have genres-as-traditions. Here, genres are traditions of artistic production in which artists reference earlier works and in which audiences appreciate the works in a shared historical context (Evnine 2015). For example, a sci-fi writer might include certain features in their work as a reference to earlier sci-fi works so that we understand the work in the context of the sci-fi tradition. Whether or not such an account is internalist or externalist will depend on whether we think the work must reference earlier works in that tradition or whether the artists must intend it. With these four broad categories of theories in hand, we can turn to the problem of genre explosion.

**The Problem of Genre Explosion**

Looking, first, at genres-as-features accounts, we might worry that if genres are just sets of features, then we have no way of distinguishing the meaningful sets (which we think are genres) from those that we would hope to deny. On the genres-as-features view, there are the genres that we know and care about, but there are also those that are merely waiting to be discovered. Why give any more weight or significance to films featuring characters in cowboy hats, duels at high noon, and scenic vistas over films featuring sassy cartoon cats, underwater fight scenes, and characters wearing lederhosen? Since this latter category is characterized by a set of features works can have, it is a genre on the genres-as-features view. Likewise, there is a genre of film characterized by those films featuring dialogue in Telegu and depicting adult men drinking milk, a genre of novels beginning with the letter Q and ending with the letter P, and a genre of sculptures less than five feet wide and greater than two feet long. Indeed, there are (on a genres-as-features account) at least as many genres as there are sets of features, and there are
genres for each permutation of features. This proliferation of genres seems to me to be a case of genre explosion. These are ways of categorizing art, but they are not genres. They are considered genres by the genres-as-features view. The account can attempt to limit the number of genres by saying that the number of genres is limited by the number of actual features and actual clusters of features that actual works do have, but this, once again, leaves too many remaining. Even if there aren’t any songs featuring tubas and a tempo over 500 bpm, there are sculptures which satisfy the size requirements mentioned above. As such, sculptures of that size are still a genre. The same can be said for sculptures less than 4 feet wide and greater than 3 feet long (as so on). The genres-as-features account tells us that there are a great many genres like this that are merely waiting to be discovered.

With regards to genres-as-functional-kinds, the problem of genre explosion arises from the fact that, if genres are kinds of works fixed by the functional role they fulfill, then the only limit on the number of genres in the world is the number of different functional roles works could play. If there is a genre which functions to induce horror or suspense, then there is also a genre which functions to elicit the feeling of ennui and one which functions to induce a fugue state. Further, since there is no in-principle reason that the function be inducing a particular and proprietary phenomenal state, the list of genre-fixing functions is actually much larger. There is a genre of works which function to make the artist’s ex jealous of their success, a genre of works which function to give the artist an opportunity to collaborate with another artist, and so on. This can be limited on most functionalist accounts of genre by the intentional clause, in that the upper bound on the number of genres in existence is set by the number of actual intentions that artists have had for the function of their actual works. As such, a genre fixed by its ennui-inducing quality only exists to the extent that an artist has actually intended a work to fulfill that function.
However, this still seems to posit too many genres. For instance, since Willie Nelson created and released his 1992 album *The IRS Tapes: Who’ll Buy My Memories?* with the intention that it function to raise him enough money to pay what he owed the IRS in back taxes, we know that there is at least an actual category of works which function to raise money to alleviate the artist’s legal troubles. The genres-as-functional-kinds account tells us that this category is a genre. Once again, this genre has at least existed since 1992, we have only so far failed to discover it. Of course, this is only one of the many genres which currently go unnoticed by us. The same can be said of works intended to function as an insult against some other artist (as is the case with The Meatmen’s “Morrissey Must Die”) or to provide an opportunity for a specific collaboration (as in the case of Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett’s *Cheek to Cheek*). However, even if we thought that collaboration works are a genre (fixed by the function of giving artists the opportunity to collaborate), it is harder to accept the many other genres that result from this view. Likewise, part of the attraction of functionalism about genres is that it provides us with an appreciative plan for works of that kind. Saying that $x$ is a horror film tells us that it is a good horror film to the extent that it satisfies that function. If the function of collaborative albums is to provide artists with collaboration opportunities, so long as they successfully record an album together then they succeeded qua collaborative album. I take this to be another case of too many genres, and unintuitive appreciative plans.

The problem of genre explosion also comes up for genres-as-traditions accounts as well. If genres are traditions of artistic production established when works reference earlier works so as to link the works together in a tradition, then we should be able to have a genre with just two works. That a genre could have only two works isn’t, itself, problematic. However, the genres-as-traditions account has no way of preventing every instance of reference between works as
counting as genres of their own. Anytime that an artist pays homage to the work of another in their own work, they will have thereby created a new genre. This means that every cover song creates a new genre, along with every quotation. We can limit the number of actual genres to only instances where inter-work referencing has actually occurred, but this still means that there many more genres in existence than any of us are aware of. Aretha Franklin’s cover of Otis Redding’s “Respect”, along with the original and subsequent covers, represent a genre. The same is true for John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, and the Bee Gees’ “For Whom The Bell Tolls” (the names of both of which reference Donne’s “Meditation XVII”). This should strike us as another instance of positing genres where none exist.

It is worth pointing out that all of these accounts could avoid the problem of genre explosion by adopting a particular strong kind of intentionalism (that I will refer to as *hard intentionalism*). This tells us that, in addition to satisfying whatever criteria constitute a given genre, a work must also be intended by the artist to be a work of that kind in order to count as a work of that genre. For instance, (on the genres-as-functions account) it might be that the artist must intend for the work to have the function that horror films have (soft intentionalism) but also the intention that the work is a work of the kind picked out by that function (hard intentionalism). This is the difference between intending to produce a work that induces horror and intending to produce a *horror film*. Hard intentionalism of this kind has been defended by at least some theorists of genre (Laetz & Lopes 2008).³ This resolves the issue of genre explosion because (presumably) no artists have actually intended their works be works of the kinds picked out by the problematic cases we have so far discussed. No one has intended their work be a part of the

³ Likewise, others have argued against any form of genre intentionalism (Collingwood 1938). See (Ridley 2002) for a more detailed discussion of this argument.
tradition that includes the Bee Gees and John Donne, of the set of sculptures that are greater than five feet wide and less than two feet long, or of the kind which functions to induce a fugue state. As such, the number of genres is limited to just those that actually exist.

However, this has two consequences that should concern us. First, this will not allow an artist to accidentally produce a work of that kind. For instance, a Robinson Crusoe-like filmmaker, who has been living their entire life on an island and cut off from the rest of cinematic history, will not be able to produce a horror film despite producing a work with the intention that it fulfill the functional role that horror films have. Likewise, a film made by such an artist which has all of the features associated with a western film is not a western. Indeed, even an artist who knows of comedy as a genre and makes a funny film will not thereby make a comedy film. Further, even if that filmmaker has the intention to produce a work that fulfills that function, they will not have made a comedy film unless they have the additional intention that the work be a work of the kind picked out by that function.

I take it to be controversial how problematic it is for an account that an artist can’t produce a work of a genre on accident but notice that the hard intentionalist has no resources for that work becoming a work of that genre later either. We might be fine with the idea that our Robinson Crusoe-like filmmaker didn’t initially mean to produce a horror film, but when the outside world finds it and horror fans categorize it as horror because it fulfills the function they expect from a horror film, they are wrong. They are wrong even if subsequent artists reference that work in their own horror films. Genre membership is fixed at the moment of creation by the intentions of the artist alone. No further facts can play a role in determining if a work is a work of a given genre if hard intentionalism is true.
The second consequence, which I take to be more worrying, is that any hard intentionalist view can only permit of new genres under rare circumstances. As it stands, the only way for a hard intentionalist account to capture the invention of a genre is when an artist intends to produce a work of a new kind (whether that is fixed by a functional role or by a cluster of features). It isn’t enough that they intend to produce a work with a new combination of features or new function. They must intend that this decision form the basis for category of art to come. I take it that this has occurred in history, but I also take it that this is not the predominant way that genres emerge. Innovative artists often set out to do something new, but they rarely set out to create a new genre, they just happen to do so. By contrast, a hard intentionalist version of the genres-as-traditions account does better here by allowing the development of genres by the first follower. The second artist can hear or see or watch a work and intended to produce a work of that kind. This might be a more common occurrence in the formation of genres than artists setting out to invent new ones. However, we have no basis for including the initial work that they are referencing in their genre because its artist did not share that intention. Thus, the work which serves as the initial inspiration or prototype for a genre cannot be a member of that same genre. The referencing and referenced works can both be members of the same genre on a genres-as-traditions view, but not a hard intentionalist version of it. All of these theories face the problem of genre invention, in that they fail to capture the variety of ways that genres develop.\(^4\)

If hard intentionalism does not present us with a good solution to the problem of genre explosion, then we need some other way of distinguishing mere categories of art from genres. Each of these theories accepts that not all categories of art are genres. For instance, for each

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\(^4\) Hard intentionalism will also struggle because it requires that works have unambiguous intentions. We might worry about aggregating intentions for works produced by groups of artists, or in cases where the intentions of the artist are unavailable to us.
theory, the genres picked out by the opposing theories are actually just categories of art. For the
functionalist, clusters of features are just ways of categorizing art (and vice versa). However,
there are also (for each theory) categories of art which take the form of genres but aren’t. These
are the problematic cases that we have discussed. The genres-as-functional-kinds theorist needs a
way to distinguish the functional kinds that are genres from those that aren’t, and the same is true
for the genres-as-features account and the genres-as-traditions account. Something key to
understanding genres as distinct from mere categories of art is missing on all of these accounts.
One way of getting at this difference is to posit a genre which conforms to the requirements of a
given theory and to determine whether it is an actual genre or another problematic
counterexample (a mere way of categorizing art). How would we tell?

Using the genres-as-features account, we could posit a genre that is characterized by
songs featuring minor chords, prominent and extended glockenspiel solos, and tempos below
45bpm. Few of us would think that I have just described an actual genre of music, but the genres-
as-features account doesn’t get us any closer to understanding why it isn’t. The same could be
said of songs that function to elicit a sense of melancholy in the audience. Surely there are songs
that do this, and we could categorize them according to their ability to do this, but this is not a
genre that actually exists. Finally, on a genres-as-traditions account, we might think that the
collected body of works referencing the fight choreography of The Matrix represent a genre fixed
by their being understandable in the common historical context of that work. Yet, this is surely
not a genre. All of these are not genres but just mere categories of art.

The thing that moves kinds of works from being mere categories of art to being a genre is
that genres are social categories. That is, they are not just categories of art, but communities
engaged in aesthetic practices. Of course, we could categorize songs according to whether they
feature the A-minor chord, a glockenspiel solo, or a tempo below 45 beats per minute. What makes the genre characterized by these features only a way of categorizing art is that no one cares about it. No one does categorize art in this way, and there is certainly not a community built around this category. Fans do not to dress to signal their interest in this genre, subdivide their high school into communities based on whether people listen to this genre, or argue that they (as fans of it) must all satisfy a common ethos. They don’t do that for songs featuring the A-minor chord, for just one film referencing another, or for films that were intended by their filmmaker to make their exes feel jealous of their success. The missing component which distinguishes genres from mere categories of art, and which we look to in order to tell whether our posited genre actually exists or not, is this social component.

By contrast to the potential genres posited above, people do these kinds of things all of the time with regards to actual genres like punk, hip-hop, goth, and metal. The aesthetic practices of a genre provide members of that genre community with a sense of common identity, common fashion sense, in-jokes, special ethical obligations, and so on. Genres carve out and unify communities according to their aesthetic practices. These genres take different shapes, and they demand different things of fans and artists. Whether we think that they are sets of features, functional kinds, or traditions, we are still left with categories of art that we can recognize as having this community building power. That is, one solution to the problem of genre explosion (adoptable by any theory of genre) is to require a social condition in addition to the formal condition which characterizes the theory. Genres are the category of art that is characterized by this social component. These particular categories of art are genres because their mattering to their respective communities is manifest in that community’s practices. The way that we check
whether we have posited a mere category of art, or a genre is check against the social practices of communities.

Importantly, this condition does the work of distinguishing categories of art and genres while avoiding the problems associated with hard intentionalism. First, it allows for artists to produce works of a particular genre on accident. Take, for example, our Robinson Crusoe-like filmmaker who produces a scary movie. On a functionalist account which adopts a social condition rather than adopting hard intentionalism, there is still room for the filmmaker to make a horror film even if they have no awareness of the larger horror genre insofar as they intend to make a work which satisfies the function that is characteristic of that genre. Further, when horror fans come to learn about the film, they are not wrong in categorizing it as a horror film. This holds for social versions of genres-as-features and genres-as-traditions accounts as well. Finally, new genres can develop by becoming social. Hard intentionalism only allows for new genres to be created when artists have the intention that their work be the first entry into a new genre. A social account can allow genres to develop when the social condition is satisfied. Artists can all produce works with a particular variety of features, or with the intention that those works satisfy a particular function, and that category of art becomes a new genre when communities begin organizing around it. In this way, social accounts of genre avoid the problem genre invention.

**The Problems of Microgenres**

Outside of concerns about genre explosion, each of the theories we have so far discussed faces some issues raised in accounting for microgenres. A microgenre is just that; a small genre. Microgenres may be micro in a number of different ways. They could have few fans, few artists, and/or few works. Few people outside of their core fans could know about them. They could be highly localized to some specific city or region, or they might only last for a year or two.
Importantly, some microgenres are subgenres. For instance, Mexican neo-surf can be said to be a subgenre of neo-surf, which might be a subgenre of surf rock (O’Donnell & Stevens 2020). In this case, the microgenre is localized spatially (in Mexico) and temporally (presumably after the initial entries into the surf rock genre and during or after its renaissance). However, not all microgenres are subgenres. Chillwave, a pop music genre characterized by “summertime imagery, analog production, and heavy usage of samples” is a kind of popular music (more specifically, a kind of rock music), but it is no more a subgenre of rock than punk is (Schilling 2015). While there is a sense in which punk is a subgenre, most are content calling it a genre unto itself. Contrast this with obvious subgenres like doom metal, black metal, and crust punk. Mexican neo-surf is closer in kind to these examples whereas chillwave is closer in kind (taxonomically) to punk, despite being decidedly micro in comparison.

Beyond sharing in common their diminutive scale, microgenres also avail themselves of other trends. For instance, it is common in narrative fiction for microgenres to utilize the -punk suffix (e.g., cyberpunk, steampunk, dieselpunk) (Gerakiti 2020). These microgenres typically involve settings in which the predominant technology of some historical time period (determined by the prefix) remained the dominant technological paradigm, and often involve countercultural or antiauthoritarian messages (hence the suffix). Likewise, musical microgenres often employ temporal prefixes (e.g., ‘proto’, ‘post’, or ‘neo’) to signify their relation to the genre picked out by the suffix (e.g., proto-punk, post-hardcore, neo soul). Similarly, microgenres can be picked out by adding prefixes which reference the mood evoked by the music (e.g., doom metal, doom jazz, chillwave, chillhop). As these examples suggest, musical suffixes tend to point towards established genres. For instance, variations of hardcore punk often take on the suffix -core (e.g., easycore, crabcore), -wave points towards synthesizer heavy genres, and -hop references hip-
hop. This is just to say that microgenres are often, but not always, parasitic on existing genres. They might preempt, react against, or revive established genres. They also might jam two established genres together or alter the predominant mood of an existing one. Yet, microgenre enthusiasts need not be bound by possible combinations of these prefixes and suffixes. Other examples of microgenres include lowercase (characterized by minimalist ambient found sounds), moombahton (characterized by downtempo dembow rhythms and synths), and skweee (characterized by squeaky synthesizer tones and funky drum loops) (McDermott & Friedlander 2015; Sherburne 2021).

However, microgenres are still genres unto themselves. While they are often only fully understood in the context of an established genre, the same is true for many things we would readily call genres. For instance, grunge artists reacted against the hair metal bands that preceded them in much the same way that punk artists reacted against the progressive rock bands before them. A good theory of genre should recognize that microgenres are a kind of genre, and as such, should capture microgenres in addition to the paradigmatic cases. Nevertheless, while microgenres are genres just like punk and hip-hop, close examination of them does present us with some considerations which might count against the existing theories of genre we have discussed. Because they tend to evolve and develop at a much faster rate than fully fledged genres, there are some lessons we can learn about how genres develop from microgenres that we may not otherwise be able to access. Since they are quite common in music, I will focus on examples from music, but the lessons and concerns that those microgenres raise should extend to microgenres in other artforms.

Importantly, beyond being fleeting and sometimes obscure, microgenres differ from regular genres in that they are often not traditions of artistic production. That is, their extension is
fixed by audiences’ communal practice of curating a specific sound, function, or feature which may crosscut other genres. Take, for example, the musical microgenre chillwave. Three bands are often pointed to as key figures in the genre: Washed Out, Toro y Moi, and Neon Indian (Schilling 2015; Hood 2011). Yet, as Alan Palomo of the band Neon Indian points out, “being called chillwave is akin to waking up one day to read in the papers that you are related to the Baldwins. You begin to be asked several questions like, ‘Do you have any interesting stories from when Stephen was shooting Biodome?’ only to respond, ‘I’ve never met him.’” (McDermott & Friedlander 2015)

Palomo is clearly not in conversation with the work of other chillwave artists, and he has not intended any of Neon Indian’s work to be works of chillwave. Despite this, Neon Indian are a paradigm case of a chillwave band. If genres are traditions of artistic production the way that Evnine describes, then we would struggle to explain how Neon Indian’s work is of the genre. The problem runs deeper, however, because Palomo is saying something about the genre in general, not just about his relationship to it. The problem with microgenres is, for the genres-as-traditions account, that a proper theory of genre should allow for microgenres like this. Yet, because no artist is producing works which reference the others, or with the intention that their works be understood as a part of that tradition, the genres-as-traditions account cannot accommodate a microgenre like chillwave.

The genres-as-functional-kinds account faces a different sort of problem when confronting microgenres, and from different cases. Genres-as-functional-kinds tells us that genres are fixed by the functional role which serves as the appreciative plan for works of that kind, and that genre membership is fixed by the intention of the artist to produce a work which satisfies that functional role. Since genres-as-functional-kinds accounts tend to be offered in
cases where it seems plausible that works of that kind are supposed to elicit some affective state (e.g., horror, suspense, cringe comedy), we might think that the theory would welcome cases like doom jazz and chillhop. However, the genres-as-functional-kinds accounts needs to differentiate the function of doom jazz from that of doom metal. Both seem to be eliciting a sense of doom or dread, but they are distinct from one another. One response might be to adopt a conjunctive theory which tells us that works of doom jazz fulfill the function characteristic of jazz simpliciter along with the common doom function. By contrast, doom metal fulfills the doom and metal simpliciter functions. However, we might think that, on a conjunctive theory, good doom jazz is harder to make than jazz simpliciter, since it must succeed at doing the work that good jazz must do and also succeed at fulfilling the doom function. The successful doom jazz has done everything that the successful jazz artist has done, but they have also done more. They were susceptible to failure in exactly the same way that the jazz artist was in producing their work and met additional demands that are unknown to the successful jazz artist. As such, we might think that the conjunctive theory tells us that producing good work of a microgenre like doom jazz is more of accomplishment than producing good jazz alone. The implausibility of both (a difference in the level of difficulty and in the sense of accomplishment) should give us reason not to endorse a conjunctive functional theory. Without that, we would still need an answer to what differentiates doom jazz from doom metal and chillwave from chillhop.

The genres-as-functional-kinds account (without adopting hard intentionalism) can easily accommodate microgenres like this. Neon Indian has simply satisfied the features characteristic of the genre. The same can be said for genres-as-functional-kinds. If the artist needs only to intend that their work have the function of the genre, then Palomo can produce chillwave works without any awareness of the genre. It remains to be seen how plausible a functionalist account
of chillwave actually is though. Likewise, as mentioned above, hard intentionalist versions of
either genres-as-functional-kinds or genres-as-features will fail to allow for a genre like
chillwave. The same can be said of the genres-as-traditions account. Chillwave is not a tradition
of artistic production. It is not a conversation, and the artists producing chillwave works do not
see themselves (nor want to be seen) as working within a common tradition. Since these works
are not referential and do not occur within a tradition of artistic production, they are not genre’s
on Evnine’s account.

Finally, while at first glance we might think that genres-as-features is not susceptible to
the kinds of problems posed by microgenres, chillwave still raises concerns for the theory. In this
case, we must look to the history of the genre. The term ‘chillwave’ was coined by a writer
named Carles in 2009 on his blog *Hipster Runoff* (Carles 2009; Hood 2011). Carles has said that
“it was just ridiculous that any sort of press took it seriously.” (Cheshire 2011) It was a
“transparently manufactured” and “made-up genre” (Schilling 2015). There is widespread
agreement that the genre just didn’t exist at the time that Carles coined the term (Pirnia 2010;
Cheshire 2011; Hood 2011; Schilling 2015). However, if genres are just sets of features, and
Carles was using the term to apply to songs which had the characteristic features, then the
extension of the genre was already occupied, and the genre did exist. The genres-as-features
account does not have the resources for a genre to come into existence outside of an artist
producing a work with a previously unseen set of features. Yet, all of the artists and works that
Carles described as chillwave already existed at the time that he coined the term. As such, if the
genres-as-features account is right, then everyone is wrong about the way that chillwave
developed.
Perhaps, however, we could read these claims as saying that Carles didn’t invent the
genre but only coined a term for a genre that already existed without anyone noticing it up until
that point. This is perfectly consistent with the genres-as-features account. However, music
journalists do claim that Carles “clustered together a handful of up-and-coming bands with a
similar sound and recording approach and, by most accounts, birthed a new genre…” and that it
represented “the first successful genre launch in 10-20 years.” (Pirnia 2010; Hood 2011)
Importantly, if we want a theory to capture intuitions like this (that a critic can invent a genre by
christening it), then the genres-as-features account will struggle just as much in handling the
emergence of large, paradigmatic genres which develop in this way. Thus, we are once again
facing the problem of genre invention, which the genres-as-features account succumbs to
because it privileges artists as the sole inventors of new genres.\(^5\) By contrast, a good theory of
genre should capture the variety of ways in which new genres emerge.

The genres-as-feature account is not alone in facing the problem of genre invention when
it comes to handling the invention of chillwave. The genres-as-functional-kinds model will also
struggle to explain how the genre didn’t exist at the time that Carles coined the term if there were
already works in the extension of the term. Likewise, we should wonder why, in inventing the
genre, Carles described similarities between the works and didn’t articulate a new and propriety
functional role for works of that kind. In both cases, the only way that new genres can develop is
when an artist produces a work which occupies an extension which was previously unoccupied.
The only difference is whether those extensions pick out sets of works characterized by common
internal features or functional kinds.

\(^5\) The genres-as-features account could avoid this by defending a Platonist view of genres in which they are eternal
universals. On this account, artists are not privileged because genres with empty extensions are as real as those with
works in their extension. However, this account would not be able to capture genres being invented and, as such, is
still subject to the problem genre invention.
Indeed, while the genres-as-traditions account is easily able to capture the phenomenon of a genre coming to exist after the first work of that kind has been produced, the problems it does face in explaining chillwave are rooted in the same underlying assumption which causes the problem of genre invention for genres-as-functional-kinds and genres-as-features. That assumption is that we ought to privilege artists with the sole ability to create new genres and/or the ability to determine whether a work is a work of that genre. In the case of genres-as-functional-kinds and genres-as-features, the existence of genres is fixed when artists produce works and what genre a work is a work of is determined by either the features that artist included in the work (or facts about the artist’s spatial and temporal location) or by the intention that the artist had about the functional role that the work should fulfill. In the case of genres-as-traditions, genres are traditions of artistic production. Artists invent new genres by producing works which reference other works, thereby establishing a tradition of production. Since this story didn’t take place for chillwave, the genre doesn’t exist. Importantly, the genres-as-traditions account allows for chillwave to come to exist, but it can only happen when an artist produces a work in the tradition of Neon Indian or another artist of their cohort.

The lesson that this should teach us is that a proper theory of genre (one which can capture microgenres like doom jazz and chillwave) will recognize the power that fans and critics can play in inventing genres. The genre literature so far has given too much power to the artists. Genres are social categories, and an enterprising fan or critic can invent a new one in the same way that an artist can. Further, if we think this is right, then we should also think that fans and critics are empowered to determine whether a work is a work of a genre. While it might be possible for a fan or critic to invent a genre and artists then populate it with works, the kinds of cases that push us to adopt the view in the first place (like chillwave), have fans inventing a
genre featuring works that existed prior to that invention. If this is right, then fans can determine the genre of work, as the extant work became a work of that genre after the artist’s work was done. Thus, the problems posed by microgenres are problems because of the privileged artist assumption common to all three views of genre which are popular in the literature, and these problems can be avoided by adopting a social view of genre. Indeed, I take it that this move follows a larger pattern of theorists adopting more communitarian approaches to aesthetics (Kubala 2020; Riggle 2017; Riggle 2020). Instead of focusing on the private experiences of individual audience members or the private intentions of individual artists, we should acknowledge the role of fan communities and empowered officers of an aesthetic practice (like music critics).6

Genres are social. They are social because they take community buy-in. If chillwave was invented by Carles, then individual artists and individual works are not enough to create a genre. Likewise, at least in some cases, individual artists and their works are not sufficient to determine the genre of specific works. If fans and critics have this power, then we need a theory of genre which recognizes that. Given their rapid development and evolution, microgenres are a petri dish in which we can watch the emergence of new genres in real time. This insight should inform our theorizing about genres as much as paradigmatic genres do. Microgenres take on a variety of forms and emerge in a variety of ways. A proper theory of genre should work to capture this diversity and the role of the people who care about things like doom jazz and dieselpunk.

Genres-as-Practices

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6 I take it that my proposal is, in some ways, suggesting a shift from thinking about genres to thinking about genre-ing in a similar way to Christopher Small’s suggesting that we focus on the social practice of musicking with regards to music (Small 1998).
Having surveyed the problems facing existing theories of genre, we can now clarify some so far under-recognized success conditions for a theory of genre. Namely, a good theory of genre ought to 1) be social in a way that allows us to distinguish genres from mere categories of art (so as to avoid the problem of genre explosion), 2) capture the variety of ways that genres develop (so as to avoid the problem of genre invention), and 3) be pluralist enough to be compatible with the diversity of forms that microgenres take (so as to avoid the problem of microgenres). My contention is that all of these conditions can be satisfied by thinking of genres-as-practices.

On this account, genres are communities of aesthetic practice. Following Rawls’ account of practices, the genres-as-practices account view genres as “forms of activity specified by a system of rules which defines officers, roles, moves, penalties, defenses, and so on, which give the activity its structure.” (Rawls 1955, 3) If these activities are aesthetic in nature, then we are characterizing an aesthetic practice (Kubala 2020). Rawls mentions baseball and criminal justice as examples of practices. Both of these feature a number of different kinds of officers who are licensed to perform a variety of moves, and these moves, and officers are defined and constrained by a system of rules. In baseball, there can be only batter at a time, who that batter is defined by the rules, and what they are allowed to do in their capacity as a batter is constrained by rules. The same is true of pitchers, baserunners, fielders, and umpires. Further, the valence that certain moves take on emerges from the rules of that practice. For instance, hitting a homerun is valuable in that practice in a way that it is not outside of that practice. Its value is defined in reference to it. Likewise, in criminal justice, holding a particular office (e.g.: judge, lawyer, plaintiff, etc.) licenses you to contribute to the practice in certain prescribed ways (e.g.: issuing and granting appeals, handing down sentences, filing suits, etc.) and, assuming you act within the procedures of that practice, all parties recognize those moves as having a kind of
normative force that they wouldn’t if they were undertaken by other officers or by those outside of the practice.

In much the same way, genres are games that fans and artists play with works of art. This game is an aesthetic practice, participation in which picks out the community of that genre. When we apply this model to genres, a work is a work of a genre if regarding it as a work of that genre constitutes a legitimate move according to that practice. Fans and artists represent different offices, and these offices (along with others) are empowered to impact the game in different ways. On this view, fans, artists, producers, critics, venues, and the like are offices within a practice which are granted certain roles practices involving works of art. These offices provide the officeholder with the ability to perform a variety of particular moves. What officers exist, what is necessary in order to be counted as an officer of that kind, and what moves are available to those officers will be defined by the practices of that genre in particular. It might be that venues or artists are more empowered in certain genres than in others. Likewise, what moves are valuable and/or legitimate will depend on the particularities of that genre. It might be valuable to frighten the audience in horror but not in comedy. It might be valuable to scream in hardcore punk and not in ambient music. The project of providing an account of a particular genre is, then, one of understanding what moves are legitimate and valuable, why they are valuable in the context of that practice, what offices exist and how they are defined, what norms govern evaluations and determinations within that community, and what function those norms play for that practice. This model avoids all three of the problems raised earlier.

What distinguishes genres from mere categories of art on this view? The mere categories that the other theories call genres have no officeholders, The social requirement which came out of the discussion of genre explosion is met, on the genres-as-practices view, when people occupy
offices articulated by the rules of that genre. Who are the officeholders for the category of films which work to induce a fugue state? There are none. There is no community underlying the curation of novels beginning with the letter Q and ending with the letter P. While we could imagine a variety of potential ways that a legal system could be arranged, it is a legal practice when people actually involved in those practices. This same distinction is true for categories of art and genres. A mere category of art does not become a genre until there is a community (no matter how small) that is invested in negotiating its rules, curating or creating works seen as legitimate moves in it, using it to structure their aesthetic practices, or identifying as officeholders within it. In this way, genres-as-practices is a social view of genre and, as such, avoids the problem of genre explosion.

How do genres develop on this view? When Carles invented chillwave he articulated rules for regarding a work as a work of that genre (“‘chill wave’ is dominated by ‘thick/chill synths’ while [the] conceptual core is still trying to ‘use real instruments/sound like it was recorded in nature’… chillwave is supposed to sound like something that was playing in the background of ‘an old VHS cassette that u [sic] found in ur [sic] attic from the late 80s/early 90s.’”) he made himself, Neon Indian, Washed Out officeholders in that practice (Carles 2009). Once there are rules which determine the legitimacy of regarding a work as a work of that genre, then we can begin making moves in that game. Importantly, it could be that these rules are articulated by artists and gameplay is initiated when those artists produce works of that kind, but the rules could also be developed by fan communities or critics and gameplay can be initiated when they begin regarding works as moves in that practice. Likewise, whether fans regard your work as a work of that genre does not depend on your intentions as an artist or whether you conceive of yourself as producing works as part of an artistic tradition. It may be that specific
genres think these considerations matter (as is their right), but there is no reason why the genres-as-practices account is precommitted to privileging the intentions of artists when it comes to inventing new genres or in populating those genres with works. In this way, genres are historical individuals (such that they are historically contingent), but Robinson Crusoe-like artists can still make works of a genre (so long as the rules of that game regard doing so as a legitimate move). Artists with awareness of a genre can also still make works of that genre on accident according to this model as well. New genres can be invented by artists (like they are in the genres-as-traditions account and under hard intentionalism), but they can also be invented by fans without the awareness of artists. This allows the genres-as-practices account to avoid the problem of genre invention.

Likewise, we can form games of curation according to clusters of features (internal, external, or both), function, or a tradition of reference. For instance, a community might come together around the practice of curating a playlist of films which function to make them feel dread, of songs that prominently feature a tuba, or of paintings that occur with a tradition of artistic production. This is to say that practices can be functional, traditional, or entirely a matter of features. The rules for regarding a work as a work of that genre might consider external features (like an artist’s ethos, their intentions in producing works, or biographical facts about where and when the work was produced). It is up to the community to determine the project of their practice. So long as including a work in the genre is seen as a legitimate move by that practice, then it is a work of that genre. This means that insofar as we are moved to accept the other theories in virtue of their describing a particular genre well, we can have all of those accounts on a practice-based view. This kind of pluralism also gives us the ability to capture the range of practices we find in microgenres.
This has at least to other consequence of import. First, the rules of a genre can change over time. Just as the rules of baseball have changed over time but the identity of the game persists, what is demanded of a work in order to count it as a member of a genre might change over time. For instance, it might be that country music started out as a functional practice according to which works functioned to reconnect an increasingly urban American population to their rural roots (Malone 1968). Yet, this does not fix the genre so permanently that being a work of country music isn’t now simply a matter of satisfying a set of musical features. Likewise, a features-driven curation practice can change over time by requiring more, less, or different features. In this way, the genres-as-practices account captures the dynamic nature of genres.

Second, just as the rules of baseball can’t be changed by presidential fiat, what a genre is and what rules count towards genre membership is a matter of negotiation between members of that community. The genres-as-practices view does not privilege artists as such, but it does privilege the community that makes up that genre (including members who hold offices as artists in it). The nature of genres and the genre membership of works aren’t decided by metaphysical facts about features or about the private intentions of artists, they are decisions made by communities engaged in that practice. Insofar as theories ignore this social nature of genres, they run the risk of engaging in a kind of philosophical busy bodying. If genres are fixed merely by being sets of features or functional kinds, then we could have a situation in which philosophers insist to the community of, say, metal fans who are happily regarding a work as a work of metal that that work is actually not metal on account of some metaphysical facts about it. It is not philosophers or metaphysical facts that ultimately decide what metal is, the metal community decides. Community members decide whether a work or artist is of a particular genre (through the
practices they establish for counting offices, players and moves), they don’t discover whether they are.⁷

This is not to say that the community can’t be wrong. For instance, we might think that the country music community was wrong in saying that Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” isn’t country. However, whether they are wrong or not will depend on reasons that that community has picked out as relevant. On a practice-based model, telling the community that they are wrong about whether an artist or work is of that genre either 1) requires a strong argument rooted in that communities practices, or 2) appears equivalent to breaking up a perfectly content baseball game in order to argue that a particular homerun is (in fact) not a homerun on account of some facts independent of the game, the players, and the rules. The community decides what is required for a work to be a work of that genre, but they do so according to rules that they must ultimately change or be answerable to.

The social nature of genres on the genres-as-practices account makes intelligible what is strange about populating the world with millions of genres which are, right now, sitting around and waiting to be discovered like new additions to the periodic table. That is, if genres are inherently social, then it doesn’t make sense to say that there are genres which exist but have not yet been discovered. We may not yet call it a genre, or have a name for it, but a genre will have a community engaged in a practice. This fact is, in fact, the heuristic we use in determining whether 𝑥 is a genre or a mere category of art. While these communities can structure their practice around any way of categorizing art (be it according to common internal features, function, reference, or artistic intent), these categories are only possible genres until they start mattering to people in a way that structures their aesthetic activities. What makes genres distinct

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⁷ This distinction, between deciding and discovering, comes from (Thomasson 2005).
as a way of categorizing art is that they bring together and set apart particular communities based on those communities’ aesthetic practices. They structure that community’s aesthetic activity and give them a sense of identity. This is what separates the merely possible genres (that is, categories of art) from the actual genres.

Beyond better handling the problems associated with microgenres and categories of art than the existing accounts, the genres-as-practices model has other advantages. For one, it connects up with the existing literature on both practices and aesthetic practices, thereby providing us with a more unified picture. In addition, it avoids having philosophers be busybodies who butt into conversations between fans and artists. Perhaps, however, most importantly, it orients our thinking about philosophy of art towards tractable problems and provides a framework for arriving at answers. For instance, we might wonder why rappers don’t cover the work of other rappers. Here, we have a project of clarifying what rule is governing this versioning practice (such that it allows for quoting and sampling but not covers) and determining why that practice assigns it that particular negative valence. As another example, we might wonder why punk and metal assign positive value to screaming in a way that other genres don’t. An account of the aesthetic value of screaming as such fails to be sensitive to the role that screaming plays in the various subgenres of punk and metal. For instance, we might think the so-called ‘gang vocal’ yelling common to hardcore serves as a form of community building where artists and audiences unite in an accessible form of group singing. Meanwhile, metal screaming might be less accessible and be meant to demonstrate virtuosity in controlling vocal timbre and dynamics the way that metal guitar playing often involves demonstrations of virtuosity (at least in contrast to punk). Finally, screaming in screamo music might involve the expression of primal
emotions like pain and anger such that the audience identifies with the screaming front man and experiences their catharsis as their own.

The moral of this story is that providing an account of what makes a given phenomenon aesthetically valuable might require being sensitive to the role that that feature plays within a genre community’s aesthetic practice. By the same token, thinking of genres in terms of communities of aesthetic practice can also help us understand why the Grand Ole Opry plays an outsized role in determining what is or isn’t country music (because it inhabits a particularly empowered office in that practice), or why some genres seem to aim at eliciting a particular emotional or phenomenal response in their audience and others simply coalesce around a cluster of internal features. The answer is that these differences reflect differences in the practices of those communities.

Genres have the power to organize people, provide them with a sense of identity, and structure their common aesthetic practices. The thing that separates the examples from the counterexamples is that people use genres to find new works and artists like those that they know and love. People think in terms of these categories. Punks don’t sell out, and goths wear black. The reason why we know that songs featuring glockenspiel solos, 13/8 time signatures, and power chords isn’t a genre, even if there is something in the extension of this set of features, is that there is no community of enthusiasts organized around it. The mere tradition of covering a song is not a genre because the artists who cover and quote (and the fans of works by those artists) do not form or constitute a community with which they identify with. This communal dimension distinguishes the genres from the categories of art in a way that avoids the problem of genre explosion. It is able to do this because it recognizes the kinds of considerations we would employ in determining whether an art category is an actual genre or not. Beyond this, a social
theory of genre avoids the problems of hard intentionalism because it allows for accidental works of a genre, and it allows for the variety of ways in which genres develop (and thereby avoids the problem of genre invention). Whether we think that genres are functional kinds, sets of features, or traditions of artistic production, genres are ultimately more than that. They are communities engaged in aesthetic practices, and a good theory of genre will recognize this.

**Chapter Overviews**

With the model of genres-as-practices in place, we can now turn to the kinds of questions and explanations that the account opens up for us. What follows are a number of case studies looking at questions and phenomena related to genre. Across these case studies, we find that we have good reason to be pluralists about the form of genre (which the practices account allows for), and I take this to constitute an argument in favor of the model. Beyond this, each chapter will focus on one dimension of the aesthetic practices of genre which the model I have so far described allows us to account for.

In Chapter 2, we look at a particular microgenre (the ‘oddly satisfying’) and I argue that it started out exclusively as a curation-based community and grew into a tradition of artistic production as well. On the account I provide in the chapter, the oddly satisfying is best understood as a functional practice in line with horror, suspense, or cringe comedy. In this case, the genre aims at inducing ‘odd satisfaction’, a peculiar affective state associated with (or parasitic on) design appreciation. I argue that odd satisfaction is the kind of satisfaction one gets from design appreciation but divorced from practical and functional considerations. I also look at the other philosophical questions raised by the practice and how the practice itself relates to larger issues in aesthetics broadly construed.
Chapter 3 focuses on the property of musical groove. Here, attempts to provide an account or model of groove have led to a divergence in theories and findings between musicology, psychology, and philosophy. I argue that this is because some conceptions of groove track it as a term of art in the practice of rock music and others more closely track the concept in jazz. The divergence between these two concepts of groove is likely due to differences in the practices associated with the genres. These practices, in turn, follow ontological distinctions for those genres. For instance, some accounts of groove pick out track level features (which are associated with rock music) and others pick out performance level features (which are associated with jazz). There is a larger implication here about the role of genre in mediating aesthetic concepts according to the functional roles in practices that those concepts play.

In Chapter 4, I attempt to provide an account of country music as a dual character concept. On this model, there is a set of descriptive criteria which count towards an artist or work’s inclusion in the genre, but there is also a suite of values which the work and/or artist must embody in order to count as ‘real country’. This means that a song can be country (by satisfying the descriptive conditions) but not ‘real country’ (by failing to satisfy the value conditions. This model follows similar claims about punk rock and hip-hop. This has two major implications: 1) that, taken together with the account of the oddly satisfying in Chapter 2, we have reason to be pluralists about the form of genres, and 2) that thinking about country music as a dual character concept might be able to provide us with an account of the genre’s unique notion of authenticity. With regards to the first point, evidence in favor of genre pluralism is evidence in favor of genres-as-practices, as the model is best able to capture the different forms that genres can take. With regards to the second point, the notion of authenticity has been a central question in accounts of country music and there is currently considerable skepticism about the project of
providing an account of that norm. If claims about ‘authentic country music’ amount to claims about ‘real country music’ following a dual character model, then we may have a measured defense of the concept. Part of country music’s aesthetic practice is that audiences reconnect with, reify, and revise this common practical identity through identification with artists and works that manifest these values. We should then think of authenticity discourse within country music as a kind of game within the genre’s practice of shaping and maintaining this practical identity.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I look at the way in which genres can take on their own ethical norms. Just as baseball can be thought to have developed, as part of its practice, ethical norms (in addition to those directly related to the game), rap music has done the same surrounding its unique versioning practices. While the focus of the chapter is on so-called ‘biting’ in rap music, the same can be said for punk rock’s concept of ‘selling out’. Interestingly, concerns about biting in rap music follow Rawls’ model of justification within a practice. That is, sampling and interpolations are brought on board as part of the conceit of the genre which constitute the practice, but the prohibition against covering songs is a rule within the practice. I argue that the aesthetic features and the particular aesthetic valence of cover songs in rap is best explained in terms of genre practices and understanding how and why those particular practices would develop. In this case, we should understand the norm preventing cover songs to be one of reputation protection on the model of an honor culture. This is contrasted with the more individualized account which seeks to explain the relative lack of covers according to a norm of autobiographic fidelity.
Chapter 2 – Aesthetics of the Oddly Satisfying

Arthur Danto once argued that artistic innovation enriches the artworld by introducing new aesthetic predicates (Danto 1964). Aesthetic practices on the internet have introduced a variety of such predicates which now find themselves in need of some philosophical examination. For instance, beyond fostering the development of new forms of media (like GIFs, memes, and ASMR videos), the internet has also given us concepts like ‘mildly interesting’, ‘mildly infuriating’ and ‘oddly satisfying’ (Schonig 2019). While many of these new modes of aesthetic practice raise interesting philosophical questions, and each of these new predicates may be deserving of aesthetic examination, the domain of ‘internet aesthetics’ remains largely unexplored. Here, I will examine only one aspect of this field: the oddly satisfying.

In 2013, internet communities began using the term ‘oddly satisfying’ to describe animated GIFs, videos, and pictures depicting a wide class of objects and events (Watson 2021). Mainstays of these discussions include videos of ‘sand-slicing’, of everyday objects being crushed by hydraulic presses, and of people pressure washing their driveways. Since this time, at least one of these communities has grown to over five million members, and videos on only one online platform which have been tagged as ‘oddly satisfying’ have generated over a quarter of a trillion views worldwide (Watson 2021). We might, then, wonder what exactly people are describing when they claim that these videos are oddly satisfying. That is, the term itself raises the question, what is so odd about this particular kind of satisfaction?

While much of the popular discussion has been an attempt to explain the rise of the phenomenon within the current social and political context (Faramarzi 2018; Matchar 2019), less work has been done in terms of placing it within an aesthetic or theoretical framework. I take it
that a good account of the oddly satisfying should 1) at least roughly capture the extension of the term (such that it does apply to most cases of the oddly satisfying and does not tend to attribute it where there is no such satisfaction available to us), 2) tell us something about why we find these things satisfying, and 3) tell us what is odd about this satisfaction. In this paper, I hope to provide such an account.8

Ultimately, my answer is that, taken in its paradigmatic instances, the oddly satisfying is a kind of ‘aesthetics of mechanization’ that comes with appreciating events or things which either work as designed or work as if designed. This means taking up the lens through which we appreciate mechanization, even if the design underlying the phenomenon that we are appreciating might merely be hypothetical. Here, we recognize and appreciate the satisfaction we get from observing instances of smooth operation and perfect fit (hallmarks of well-designed and high-functioning machines) outside of the strict functional considerations that come with design evaluation. Beyond providing an account of the oddly satisfying, I will also flag a few other philosophical questions raised by the oddly satisfying and discuss the ways in which the oddly satisfying might weigh on existing debates in aesthetics.

**What Things Are Oddly Satisfying?**

Before providing an account of the oddly satisfying, it might be helpful to make clearer what such an account takes as its extension. Typically, when someone says that something is oddly satisfying, they are referring to photos, videos, or GIFs which depict everyday objects or

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8 Importantly, there has already been a fair bit of conceptual creep with regards to when the term is applied. Some of this tracks trends in the genre (which are discussed here) but other uses may merely track instances of things that are both satisfying and odd. Given that the extension of the term is a matter of aesthetic negotiation, any attempt to capture it will be subject to some number of counter examples. Nevertheless, given that the phenomenology of odd satisfaction is the most peculiar thing associated with the term, and that the majority of media attention paid to the oddly satisfying as an aesthetic phenomenon is framed around attempts to explain that phenomenology, I take media which effectively brings about that phenomenology as making up the core of the extension of the term. For media coverage of odd satisfaction, see (Scharping 2017; Faramarzi 2018; Matchar 2019; Watson 2021).
events. Specific instances might include GIFs of someone efficiently hanging drywall or cutting watermelon, videos of the normal operation of industrial equipment, or images of objects fitting perfectly into other unrelated objects. In these cases, seemingly mundane objects or situations are documented through visual media and taken to be the subject of a particular kind of aesthetic appreciation. The question, then, becomes what unites all of these things such that they all produce the same oddly satisfying phenomenology.

That the term is used primarily in discussions of visual media seems to raise two questions: 1) whether odd satisfaction is a uniquely visual experience, and 2) whether the oddly satisfying is only possible in media or if it is available to us in the everyday. While the project of definitively answering these questions falls outside of the scope of this paper, there is still something that can be said. With regards to the first question, it is important to note that most videos and photos presented as (and accepted as) oddly satisfying do not require or include sound. This is not to say that oddly satisfying sounds, smells, or tactile experiences are not possible, but that my discussion will focus on these paradigmatic visual instances. The one possible exception to the dominance of the visual in discussions of the oddly satisfying is ‘ASMR’ (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos. ASMR is a sound-induced phenomenon and the genre of videos which attempts to induce it relies heavily on auditory stimuli (Gallagher 2016). A later section of this paper will discuss why we have reason to think that ASMR is not continuous with or a subset of the oddly satisfying, despite the two commonly coming up together in discussion. With regards to the second question (that of whether it is possible to have a relevantly oddly satisfying experience in the everyday), I will, again, limit my discussion to the oddly satisfying at its most paradigmatic instances. Likewise, our ability to answer these questions might depend on our first providing an account of the oddly satisfying
which at least applies to areas where there is widespread agreement about whether the predicate is appropriate.

*Alternative Explanations*

With the extension of the term roughly in place, we can now turn to the extant accounts of the oddly satisfying. As mentioned above, insofar as there have been attempts to explain the satisfaction that we get from the oddly satisfying, they have been in the service of the larger project of telling us why these videos have become so popular at this particular moment. Here, the most common account we are given is what I will call the ‘psychosocial explanation’. On this view, as society has become more disordered and people feel more alienated and powerless, they have sought out order and control in oddly satisfying videos (Scharping 2017; Matchar 2019; Faramarzi 2019; Lopez-Cleries 2020). While recognizing that this story is an attempt to explain the rise of the oddly satisfying and not the oddly satisfying as such, it does not seem that this provides us with much insight into the phenomenon. Even if we grant this story, the satisfaction that it describes does not seem odd. If we crave order and these videos provide us with a sense of order by depicting ordered things, then our satisfaction seems rather straightforward. Perhaps more problematically, it has been pointed out that sand-slicing (a common activity depicted in oddly satisfying videos) follows objects as they move from an ordered state to a disordered state (Schonig 2019). If the oddly satisfying is all about the depiction of ordering activities, then this might be a powerful counterexample.

Another option might just be to document what features are common to oddly satisfying videos and provide a cluster account. Luckily, a fairly exhaustive corpus analysis surveyed a number of these videos and identified the most common features (Werning 2020). Here, we tend to find things like craftsmanship, tool use, order, efficiency, and precision (among others). We
might be tempted to say that videos which demonstrate these features are oddly satisfying and
the more of these features that they demonstrate, the more oddly satisfying they are. The problem
with this is that a cluster account can’t, by itself, tell us why these videos are satisfying or what is
so odd about the satisfaction we derive from them. Likewise, because a cluster account isn’t
explaining the underlying satisfaction, it may not capture what is core to the concept. Despite
being a relatively new term, trends among videos labelled as oddly satisfying allow us to
distinguish various changes in the genre over time. Early oddly satisfying videos were mostly
documenting things like pressure washing, before they transitioned to sand-slicing and,
eventually, to what is now called ‘visual ASMR’ (Watson 2021). In this way, the oddly
satisfying stands out among internet trends in that people seem determined to continue using the
term where they could, just as easily, develop new terms to describe these different kinds of
videos. Any cluster account will only be a snapshot of the features present at a given moment
and will struggle to explain what core commitment allows for the continued use of the term
despite these changes over time.9

It seems worth recognizing at this point that the term ‘oddly satisfying’ has, in the
discussion so far, been used to describe a particular phenomenological quality and a media genre.
This is not an equivocation. Rather, odd satisfaction is the phenomenological quality that
structures the corresponding genre. That is, just as we might think that horror, suspense, or
cringe comedy are each genres which aim to elicit a particular affective state, the oddly
satisfying is a genre which aims to induce odd satisfaction.10 In this way, a good theory of the
oddly satisfying (as a genre) will tell us not just the features common to works in the genre, but

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9 Importantly, this problem is not unique to the oddly satisfying, and the issue has been raised as a larger worry
about our ability to provide cluster accounts of any genre (Evnine 2015).
10 See Noel Carroll’s “The Nature of Horror” for a defense of this model of horror and suspense (Carroll 1987).
how those features work to elicit the proper response (odd satisfaction), along with saying something about the nature of that affective state.

**The Aesthetics of Mechanization**

Upon reflection, what seems to unite these divergent photos and videos, at least in many paradigmatic instances, is that they are cases in which we appreciate the aesthetic features common to mechanization. Chiefly, these tend to be instances of continuous smooth operation and of parts fitting perfectly together.\(^1\) We see the former in things like oddly satisfying videos depicting labels being applied to jars moving along a conveyor belt or in industrial machines smoothly piping whipped cream onto layer cakes. Likewise, pressure washing videos follow the machine’s operator smoothly cleaning a sidewalk in one continuous even motion. That is, the operator of the pressure washer appears as if they were an extension of the machine, visually forming a unified whole with it, and working with a machine-like precision and efficiency. In the case of perfect fit, consider videos in which the gears of machines interlock neatly and without incident or a photo featuring a vacuum which fits perfectly in the gap between the legs of a dresser. This second example highlights the fact that, while the aesthetics of mechanization allow us to appreciate design, no real design intent must be present for us to appreciate the relationship between two objects as if it were by design. In this way, the oddly satisfying can be a kind of aesthetic play in which we see the mundane and coincidental through the lens of design appreciation and marvel at the beauty of a lucky meeting between two otherwise unrelated objects. Thus, the satisfaction that we get from the oddly satisfying is the satisfaction that we get from the appreciation of good mechanical design, and of seeing that kind of design go well.

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\(^1\) Paul Hekkert has argued for the primacy of “(1) maximum effect for minimum means, (2) unity in variety, (3) most advanced, yet acceptable, and (4) optimal match” in aesthetic evaluation of design (Hekkert 2006, 157). We could understand considerations of smooth and efficient operation in terms of the first principle, and the notion of perfect fit in terms of the fourth.
However, this still leaves open the question of what is so odd about the oddly satisfying. Following from Dewey’s account of the ‘aesthetic’ of the everyday, normally, the aesthetic conditions of our lived experience are characterized by things merely falling together (Saito 2019). Dewey argues that “the enemies of the [aesthetic] are… the humdrum; slackness of loose ends… incoherence and aimless indulgence… are deviations… from the unity of experience.” (Dewey 2005, 42) In this case, while the objects in our lives are primarily the products of design, they often fail to relate to one another in a way that demonstrates an overall vision. Even within the experience of using one particular tool, we often fail to see the design of the tool unless something has gone wrong. As Heidegger points out, “what everyday dealings are initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work.” (Heidegger 2010, 69). Meanwhile, “unhandy things are disturbing and make evident the obstinacy of what is initially to be taken care of before anything else. With this obstinacy the presence of what is at hand makes itself known in a new way…” (Heidegger 2010, 73). This is just to draw a contrast between our attention to the task and not to the tool (when the tool is functioning well) and our attention to the tool (only when it breaks or fails us, and the task is disrupted). This observation sets up a distinction between good design (which is often said to be ‘invisible’) and bad design (which contrasts itself with good design by being occurrent in experience).

Beyond drawing together the things that are categorized as ‘oddly satisfying’ and helping us to understand what is satisfying about them (that is, that they have the aesthetic hallmarks of things working as designed or as if designed), thinking about these cases in terms of design is also helpful in uncovering what is odd about the satisfaction we find in them. What is odd about the mundane objects and events documented in oddly satisfying videos is that the design is sneaking through into conscious awareness in an unobtrusive way. It contrasts itself with cases in
which one suddenly becomes aware of a poorly designed pen when it becomes scratchy. The oddly satisfying is the rare instance in which the goodness of good design becomes noticeably appreciable without any work on our part. Perhaps this is what gives odd satisfaction its odd character. There is an incongruity between our noticing and attending to the success of the experience and our usual failure to notice good design. The experience strikes us as odd because we typically only notice the impact design has on our lives in cases where that design has failed us. Further, as much as these cases strike us due to their contrast with the banality or anesthetic nature of everyday life, they contrast equally with the standard invisibility of good design which requires attention to appreciate.

This account (if it is right), raises the question of how the oddly satisfying relates to design appreciation more broadly. Jane Forsey has outlined a number of features of design appreciation that are equally applicable here (Forsey 2013). For instance, the oddly satisfying relies heavily on the symbiosis of form and some degree of (at least perceived) function. Likewise, judgements of the oddly satisfying are set against a comparison class (the banal counterpart), the genre draws on what is familiar to us, and judging something oddly satisfying seems to preclude considerations of monetary value. In these ways, appreciating the oddly satisfying seems like an instance of design appreciation more generally. However, it also differs from more ordinary forms of design appreciation in at least two regards. First, the design present in oddly satisfying videos need not be actual. As mentioned above, it is often enough that the design is merely apparent. Second, while there is some attention paid to function in appreciating the oddly satisfying, our evaluations are not strictly functional. That is, in design appreciation, how well the gears fit together is only valuable insofar as it contributes to the overarching function of the machine which those gears are a part of. In the oddly satisfying, we are content to
just appreciate the gears fitting together (without regard for how well the machine accomplishes its overall goal).

On the other hand, if it is not design appreciation, we might be tempted to deny the importance of design altogether. Accordingly, we could just appeal to smoothness, repetition, and perfect fit as straightforward aesthetic properties independent of their relationship to considerations of good design. However, if this were just the application of regular aesthetic predicates to the regular evaluation of media, we might still want to know why this is satisfying rather than, say, beautiful. Likewise, without referencing the experience of design, we would lack the resources to see what is odd about this satisfaction while, at the same time, taking on board the problems which led us away from providing a cluster account.

In addition to these questions, whether we should regard the oddly satisfying as falling within the domain of everyday aesthetics should be taken to be a matter of controversy. For one, despite often depicting everyday experiences and objects, we are primarily talking about photos and videos. Beyond this, however, there is a larger debate about the proper scope of everyday aesthetics. If the account that I have so far provided is accurate, then instances of the oddly satisfying are defamiliarizing in a manner acceptable to the broad conception of everyday aesthetics that Leddy and Dewey advocate (Leddy 2012, Dewey 2005). That is, the oddly satisfying is a kind of defamiliarization from mechanical logic which allows us to appreciate the aesthetics of mechanisms; the precision with which their parts interact and operate. On the other hand, Yuriko Saito and Arto Haapla both defend theories of everyday aesthetics that emphasize the primacy of familiarity and the ordinary (Saito 2010, Haapla 2005). The oddly satisfying is occurrent in experience, and has a striking, standout quality that departs from the familiar. In this way, it is a kind of experience involving everyday objects and everyday life that is not, itself,
everyday in Saito and Haapla’s sense. As such, whether or not the oddly satisfying is a proper subject for everyday aesthetics will depend on whether one adopts the stricter or more permissive view about the everyday.

**Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response**

The phenomenon known as ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) is sometimes included in lists of oddly satisfying things and, as such, is worth addressing here. Briefly, ASMR is a genre of video or auditory media commonly shared online in which creators (typically through whispering) attempt to elicit a “relaxing shivering sensation for the viewer” (Andersen 2014, 1). This shivering sensation has been described as “tingling [and] static-like”, and this feeling primarily takes place “across the scalp, back of the neck and at times further areas” (Barrat and Davis 2015, 1). Admittedly, it is hard to tell how we could provide an account of ASMR in terms of the aesthetics of mechanization. My position is that ASMR is simply a different kind of phenomenon, and that the practice of including it in the oddly satisfying has merely been a result of a failure to notice an important distinction between the two.

First, the shivering sensation that ASMR enthusiasts describe seems to gesture toward a phenomenological difference between it and the oddly satisfying. For those that enjoy ASMR, the experience presents itself as physiological as much as it is psychological. ASMR works to produce a physiological response which, in turn, has a calming psychological effect. While no side-by-side comparison study has been performed looking at differences in physiological response between ASMR and oddly satisfying videos, the phenomenology involved in appreciation of the oddly satisfying does not involve or entail a need for physiological description. The satisfaction that one feels watching pressure-washing videos involves no tingling or ‘static-like’ sensation and is entirely explicable in terms of psychological states.
Second, many ASMR advocates report watching the videos in order fall asleep (Barrat and Davis 2015, 5), which does not seem in line with reports about the appeal of the oddly satisfying. Likewise, many ASMR advocates find that they are especially triggered to have the appropriate response when the whispering is directed at the audience such that it is perceived as personal attention (Barrat and Davis 2015, 6). Nothing like this is present in instances where people attribute odd satisfaction. For instance, those seeking out oddly satisfying videos do not look for pressure washing videos where the pressure washer is aimed at the camera. This is all just to say that while ASMR does offer an odd kind of satisfaction, it is not the same kind of odd satisfaction that we find in the oddly satisfying.

Recent Developments

With an account of the oddly satisfying in hand, we can return to recent developments in the genre that we discussed earlier and the potential problems they might pose. Jordan Schonig has pointed to sand-slicing as a potential counterexample to accounts of the oddly satisfying that seek to ground the explanation in the apparent order (or ordering) of oddly satisfying media (Schonig 2019). Sand slicing videos feature (usually brightly colored) sand, which is formed into various shapes and sliced with a knife (or in related videos, pressed with a hydraulic press). In addition to being brightly colored, the sand is chemically treated so that the grains cling unnaturally to one another and to, seemingly, nothing else. This treatment gives the resultant sand (sometimes called kinetic sand) the uncanny ability to stay together neatly upon being sliced, unlike ordinary sand which would simply collapse into a heap under the same conditions. As pointed out above, these videos follow the sand from a state in which it is perfectly ordered to one in which that order is destroyed, and we might wonder how the present account avoids the problems this raises for the psycho-social explanation.
One thing that is important to note is that the account I have provided is not committed to the oddly satisfying necessarily being instances of ordering. It is often the case that this design-like appreciation involves recognizing the orderliness of our devices as they work, but they need not deliver ordered results. While it would be difficult to imagine things going awry as striking us as paradigmatic instances of good design, if we thought that the purpose of an item or intervention was to cause a kind of disorder, as long as that process or that item’s use went smoothly in bringing about the desired state, then we would probably be inclined to think that it was well-designed for that purpose (as silly as that purpose may seem to us). This is, in many ways, exactly what we find in videos involving sand manipulation. While there is a kind of disordering happening when we watch someone breaking up a cube of sand, the treated sand does not behave in the same way that natural sand does. If we set about to destroy a sandcastle on the beach, it would fall apart in rather unsatisfying ways, random pieces dropping off and collapsing into unruly heaps. However, in these videos, only the portion of the sand acted upon is broken up, while the rest of the cube remains intact. Further, the ‘loose’ sand is not actually loose at all, as it does not cling to the hands, knife, or objects in the surrounding area. Indeed, if we set out to destroy the sand sculpture, this is things going as smoothly as they possibly could. The knife wielder goes about their work, slicing the well-behaved sand with a kind of precision, and the sand sits nicely and neatly (typically in little cubes) as if acted upon by a machine. Again, the model I am giving draws on the aesthetics of mechanization, not on the results-oriented criteria we might apply when functionally evaluating whether or not a machine gave us the proper output. As long the process is running smoothly, it does not matter whether the result is a net increase in order.
If sand-slicing can be thought of as the second generation of the oddly satisfying, so-called ‘visual ASMR’ might be the third. Unlike the first two generations, these works do not strictly document any objects, everyday or otherwise. Visual ASMR artists like Andreas Wannerstedt, whose work is highly popular online, produce looping videos featuring computer animated machined parts and surfaces interacting with one another. These parts feature all of the hallmarks of machine parts: they fit perfectly together and they move perfectly in sync and without interruption. Importantly, the depictions that we are given provide no context for us to recognize the function of the machine. Nevertheless, we can tell that it is functioning quite well (and appreciate it accordingly). This seems to be the culmination of the aesthetics of mechanization liberated from the results-oriented considerations of design appreciation. It is the appreciation of good functioning free from concern for actual function, and this may be another way in which the oddly satisfying offers us an odd form of design satisfaction. Indeed, in the computer animated world of visual ASMR, machines are free to satisfyingly run their course not just without regard for overarching function, but free from the physical constraints of the real world. The machine need not be actually or physically possible, so long as it continuously operates in a beautiful and oddly satisfying manner. This is just the latest stage of the process by which the oddly satisfying emerged as a predicate employed in the appreciation of everyday events and became a genre and art-kind of its own.

*Aesthetic Hedonism*

Beyond the project of providing an account of the oddly satisfying and the other philosophical questions the phenomenon raises which I have flagged, the oddly satisfying may also weigh on the ongoing debate about aesthetic hedonism. This is the view that “aesthetic value is reducible to the value of aesthetic pleasure.” (Van der Berg 2019, 1). On the face of it, it might
see like the picture that I have so far painted provides a hedonistic account. That is, the value we find in engaging with the oddly satisfying is the pleasing quality these videos elicit in us. However, a large part of the aesthetic practice of oddly satisfying videos involves sharing them and debating about whether something is or isn't oddly satisfying. Further, as was already mentioned, the oddly satisfying does not exist in a vacuum and similar communities have emerged around the practice of sharing, collecting, debating about, and appreciating videos that might count as ‘mildly interesting’ or ‘mildly infuriating’. The value of these aesthetic practices is not reducible to, or strictly dependent on, the value of the pleasure of satisfaction, because people engage in similar practices with regards to the mildly infuriating.

However, we should also be careful to distinguish the social value of the practice from the aesthetic value. While people do find value in participating in the community around the genre, the value of doing so need not be particularly aesthetic. People find value in participating in online communities organized around all kinds of things, and it does not seem out of line to expect that they value their membership in those communities for many of the same reasons that oddly satisfying enthusiasts do. This is to say that hedonists and their critics both have something that they can say about the oddly satisfying.

However, the rise of the oddly satisfying as a genre also gestures at something that is both distinctly social and distinctly aesthetic. We might sometimes be tempted to think that genres emerge because artists make works, those works share some aesthetic features, and audiences identify these features under a common heading. This gives audiences the passive role of merely recognizing whether something is or isn’t an instance of the genre. However, insofar as the oddly satisfying is solidifying itself as an artistic genre, artists are following audiences. The first generation of visual ASMR and sand-slicing artists are producing works which aim at
recognition from the oddly satisfying community alongside footage of everyday instances. The artists of oddly satisfying works are not merely creators in a void; they are members of an aesthetic community which predates their contributions, and their practices are largely continuous with those who we might otherwise call mere audience members. This is the sense in which the oddly satisfying (as a genre) has a value that is distinctly aesthetic but, perhaps, best explained in terms of aesthetic communities (Riggle 2017) or aesthetic practices (Nguyen 2019; Kubala 2020).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the oddly satisfying amounts to the appreciation of the aesthetics of mechanization (whether real or imagined). While good design often goes unnoticed, the mediation of visual media can offer an experience of moments which present themselves for conscious appreciation. What is odd about this appreciation is just that; that it invites us for a rare glimpse into the underlying workings of good design without the critical and functional design inquiry that such appreciation might normally require. In many cases, we find instances of perfect fit, where things fit together either as designed or as if designed to do so. In other cases, we simply find a process going smoothly.

Further, new trends in the oddly satisfying mark a significant development in the genre. The same aesthetic concerns are at play, but we find them in increasingly specialized art. This art could feature a hyper-real spectacle of artificial stand-ins for ordinary objects (in the case of sand slicing) or wholly fabricated computer animated machines which function beautifully and without regard for any actual goal (in the case of visual ASMR). The emergence of these two categories represents the genre coming in to its own artistically, rather than merely being a collection of lucky instances of apparent design-like features documented in the everyday.
Finally, outside of the project of providing an aesthetic account of the oddly satisfying, the phenomenon raises a number of other philosophical questions and may be of concern for those interested in debates over genre, the proper scope of everyday aesthetics, or aesthetic value more generally.
Groove is often called ‘the feel of the music’ (Roholt 2014; Iyer 2002; Pressing 2002). A track with a groove is liable to compel us to tap our toes in time with the rhythm or to dance along, even if this is despite our better judgement. Groove, as a musical quality, is an important part of jazz and pop music appreciative practices. Groove talk is ubiquitous among musicians and audiences, and considerable importance is placed on generating and preserving grooves in music. Drummer Steve Gadd has said that “[he’s] found over the years that the feel overcomes everything. If you get a good groove happening, that carries it along. If it feels good, there’s not a lot you have to do” (Modern Drummer 2005). This interest in groove can also be seen in empirical and theoretical work on music as well. A growing body of literature (musicological, psychological, and philosophical) seeks to explain the nature and function of musical groove. However, musicians, musicologists, and audiences use groove attributions in a variety of ways that do not track one consistent underlying concept.

Here, I argue that we should distinguish between at least two concepts of groove. On one account, groove is ‘the feel of the music’ (groove-as-feel) and, on the other, groove is the psychological feeling (induced by music) of wanting to move one’s body (groove-as-movement). That both of these concepts answer to the word groove has led theorists and researchers to pursue an account which unifies what we find interesting about both concepts (or to assume that an account could or should unify the features picked out by both concepts). However, recent work in the empirical sciences casts doubt on the extent to which the two are related. Interestingly, the folk attributions of groove which psychologists have based their operationalizations around may

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12 An article version of this chapter is forthcoming in the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism.
track popular music appreciative practices and ontology where musical groove as understood by music theorists more closely follow features which are central in jazz practices and appreciation. On this account, what it means for a particular musical work to have groove might depend on the genre of the work and the practices which issue from that genre. If this is right, our ability to provide accounts of the nature or normativity of musical phenomena (like groove) might require us to recognize the ways in which genre mediates our aesthetic concepts.

In the first section, I will characterize groove-as-feel and discuss the places in which it comes up. In the second, I will discuss the work of music psychologists and the musical features that they have associated with groove-as-movement. In the third section, I will summarize two confusions which result from failing to distinguish the two concepts. Finally, I will then argue that these two groove concepts track differences in the genre practices of jazz and popular music respectively and discuss the implications of this for aesthetic concepts for generally.

**Groove-as-feel**

One popular theory of groove posits the musical quality as ‘the feel of the music’ which is constituted by the collected effects of various forms of musical nuance (especially with regards to microtiming). Versions of this theory are defended by philosopher Tiger C. Roholt, music theorist Vijay Iyer, and ethnomusicologist Charles Keil. While the three accounts that these theorists offer differ in substantial ways, they are united in picking out microtiming variations as the sonic correlates of groove. Since this commonality is the relevant musical feature of each of these accounts (for our purposes), we can think of them as comprising a family of theories which I will call ‘musical nuance theories’.

In Roholt’s account, he posits that groove, loosely, is “the feel of a rhythm.” (Roholt 2014, 1) This feeling is, for Roholt, primarily the product of subtle variations which occur in
microtiming. He tells us that “a successful account of the phenomenon of groove must elucidate the nature of its distinctive affective dimension (the feel), as well as the relationship between the music (the nuances) and the feel.” (Roholt 2014, 73) This is to say that the sum of all musical nuances manifest in a performance is the relevant music feature which constitutes a groove. The particulars of this characterization will be important later.

Roholt draws on Diana Raffman’s account of musical nuances in fleshing out his own theory. For Raffman, musical nuances are extremely fine-grained features of a performance that are perceptible but too subtle to be articulable in conceptual or linguistic terms (Raffman 1993). These nuances could be that a note is slightly off-pitch, that a note is slightly louder than the preceding note, or (in the case of microtiming) falls ever-so-slightly off of the meter of the beat. On Roholt’s view, reliable patterns of microtiming variations allow musicians to ‘push’ or ‘pull’ at the beat by varying ever-so-slightly when, for instance, the snare falls within the meter. Thus, while two drummers may play a piece which could be notated (in standard notation), discussed, or even conceptualized identically, the individual idiosyncrasies of each respective drummer, and their reading of what is needed by the song, will manifest in subtle differences in microtiming. For example, a punk drummer might place the snare hits slightly before the beat, creating an effect which seems to drive the music forward, while a funk drummer might place the same snare hits slightly behind the beat (giving it a more laid-back feel). The resultant effect of these differences is the feel of rhythm, or the groove. Because these variations are taken to occur at too small of a timescale to be accounted for in the music’s notation, musical nuances (like microtiming variations) are sometimes taken to be ineffable or to occur at a level finer-grained than schematization. Additionally, it is worth flagging that, by Roholt’s account, the groove is principally a property internal to the music itself. Music has a groove. The phenomenal feeling
which accompanies the apprehending of a groove is not the central explanandum in a theory of
groove. The perceived feeling of the groove is a byproduct of our coming to apprehend the
music’s groove through the body. We perceive, and come to understand, the groove through our
own conscious or nonconscious movements as a kind of embodied perception.

Vijay Iyer’s formulation of groove differs in some significant ways. While this account
again places emphasis on the relationship between groove and bodily movement, it sees the
relationship as a causal one in which groove is first perceived and enjoyed, and then causes
nonconscious bodily movement. Though they differ in that Roholt’s account is firmly grounded
in an embodied model of cognition, both Roholt and Iyer see microtiming variations as the
musical qualities constitutive of a groove, with Iyer saying that “in groove contexts, musicians
display a heightened, seemingly, microscopic sensitivity to musical timing (on the order of a few
milliseconds)… these musical quantities combine dynamically and holistically to form what
some would call a musician’s feel.” (Iyer 2003, 398) Again, for both theorists, groove is a cluster
of nuances (with particular emphasis on rhythmic nuances) which constitute a particular musical
‘feel’.

Finally, there is the theory put forward by Charles Keil (Keil 1995). Keil’s theory departs
from Iyer and Roholt’s in that Keil describes the particular musical nuances that he is interested
in as ‘participatory discrepancies’. Here, the groove of a performance is found in the interplay
between distinct musical lines (usually between two musicians playing two different
instruments). Rather than locating the groove in the manner in which one note deviates from the
meter (even if reliably), the tension between one musician playing perfectly in time and another
playing slightly behind is what generates the feel of the music. Nevertheless, Keil (like Iyer and
Roholt) is attempting to provide an account of the feel of the music and does so by appealing to
preconceptual variations (albeit, this time those variations are between musicians). Presumably, individual artists playing individual instruments are capable, on Keil’s account, of playing with groove, insofar as they are able to generate some tension between what are at least perceived as two distinct musical lines.

However, there is some equivocation in and between musical nuance theories about whether it is a musician, a band, a performance, or a genre that carries a particular groove or all of the above. Some who hold musical nuance theories argue for genres having particular aesthetic standards for the kind of groove appropriate for the music (like in the case of punk), while others focus on a given musician’s (or group of musicians’) groove. It could also be that performances or sections of performances (either taken in total or with regards to one musician’s performance within an ensemble) have groove. These focuses need not be mutually exclusive, as it may be that a musician or band’s groove, as manifest across their catalog of performances, is so successful because it is in line with the genre expectations that the artist(s) is/are operating under. While differences between musical nuance theories can and do run fairly deep in these regards, they have (for the most part) converged on musical nuances as the basis of groove, with special focus on reliable rhythmic nuances like micro-timing variations. In addition, they also have in common the importance that they place on nonvoluntary bodily movement. Here, whether or not this movement is caused by the perception of groove or is a necessary prerequisite for perceiving it (in the case of Iyer and Roholt), and whether or not the nuances are supposed to be deviations from the music as written or from other accompanying performers (in the case of Keil) seem to be wedges which divides musical nuance accounts of groove.

While those interested in groove-as-feel need not be musical nuance theorists, interest in microtiming (as a particular musical nuance) has so-far dominated accounts of this kind of
groove. For our purposes, we should just recognize that all of these theorists are giving an account of what gives music a kind of ‘driving’, ‘laid back’, or ‘on-the-beat’ feel, and all answer with some kind of account rooted in musical nuances.

**Groove-as-movement**

The same nonvoluntary movement featured in Roholt’s account also plays a central role in the dominant attempt to operationalize groove as a measurable phenomenon in the empirical sciences. Many psychologists agree with musical nuance theorists that the starting point in an investigation of groove ought to be its phenomenological character but operationalize this by way of artists’ and audiences’ attributions of groove or their assent to having this particular phenomenology. In this case, groove is frequently defined as the feeling, generated by music, that induces bodily movement. Studies in this space tend to track what features are present when people assent to there being groove present in the music, what claims people assent to about groove, and what musical features are correlated with self-reports of wanting to move to the music. The decision to center the psychological inquiry on the movement inducing feature of groove is well-supported. When researchers ask participants to agree or disagree (strongly or otherwise) with a number of claims about groove, that “groove depends on the extent to which the music makes you want to move” is not only very strongly agreed upon but is also the most strongly agreed upon aspect of groove (Janata, Tomic, and Haberman 2016, 57).

With this construct in hand, the psychological inquiry into groove, which is not pre-committed to any set of musical features, identifies a very different cohort of musical properties as relevant than the microtiming variations picked out by musical nuance theories. Instead, these researchers are only interested in explaining which musical features cause us to move our bodies involuntarily or want to move along to the rhythm. They are, here, after groove as movement
induction (or groove-as-movement), and there is no in-principle reason why rhythmic non-voluntary movement should be linked to the feel of a rhythm. This is the sense in which there are, or could be, two concepts of groove. Without a reason for thinking that they should necessarily be tracking the same thing, the extent to which a unified account of groove is possible will depend on the details of what musical features psychologists are able to associate with groove-as-movement and the success of the musical nuance theory as an account of groove-as-feel.

One study began by composing a short piano melody and using an algorithm to transform the melodies such that they differed in degree of syncopation (Sioros et al. 2014). These differences in syncopation are distinct enough that each of the six resulting versions of the melody could be transcribed differently and, as such, are too substantive to count as musical nuances of the kind that Raffman and Roholt describe. Researchers then asked a cohort comprised of lay listeners and professional musicians to rate the extent to which they agreed that groove was an apt description of their experience of the music (where groove is defined as “the sensation of wanting to move some part of your body in relation to some aspect of the music”) (Sioros et al., 2014, 4). This study found that moderate levels of syncopation increased participants’ attributions of groove while the deadpan track and the track with too dense of syncopation offered diminishing returns. Another study played a series of programmed drum breaks at six different tempos across a wide range and asked music majors to rate the level of groove (without defining it for participants) and rate the extent to which the music made them want to move (Etani et al. 2018). This study found that tempo was correlated with both attributions and concluded that people were most likely to attribute groove to music that fell between 100 and 120 beats per minute. Finally, a third study presented participants with thirty
different instrumental musical stimuli from across a wide range of genres (Burger et al. 2012). These stimuli had a consistent time signature, but provided a range of tempos, levels of pulse clarity, and levels of rhythmic complexity. Researchers instructed participants to move in a way that felt natural as they listened (including dancing should they be so inclined) and observed this movement through motion capture technology. The results of this study indicate that clear pulse (especially in the lower frequencies) and high levels of percussiveness led to greater and more regular movement.

What, then, can we deduce about groove-as-movement from these studies? Instead of positing groove primarily as a musical quality which either acts upon or is understood by the body, groove, here, has been primarily conceived of as a psychological phenomenon. This is, importantly, the feeling within the listener, not the feel within the music. While this operationalization places the principal locus of groove in the listener, it does respect that this feeling is in a relationship with some properties of the music being listened to. What’s more, like Iyer, this literature sees the relationship as causative, with the causal chain extending from certain musical properties to a feeling or desire to move and to actual bodily movement. However, it is worth pointing out that a feedback mechanism has been proposed in which the mirroring of the rhythm in bodily movement heightens the perception of the rhythm (perhaps echoing Roholt’s embodied account) (Senn et al. 2019). What stands out most about this conceptualization is that the explanandum in the existing psychological literature on groove is the affective or phenomenal dimension of groove apprehension. Instead of understanding groove as a particular cluster of musical nuances, phenomenal theories of groove do not pre-commit themselves to some set of musical properties as groove-inducing features and, as a result, have identified alternative musical properties other than rhythmic nuances like microtiming variations.
which fulfill that role. Instead of microtiming variations, we find that tempo (between 100 and 120 bpm), high levels of percussiveness and syncopation, and clarity in the lower frequencies are responsible for groove attributions.\textsuperscript{13}

These two accounts seem to have considerable overlap in their respective emphases on the role of the body in groove apprehension, but insofar as this empirical operationalization assumes only the phenomenal character of groove apprehension, the musical qualities which have been picked out as reliably associated with this phenomenal experience differ substantially from the features picked out by musical nuance theories. This seems to raise the question of which (if either) theory is actually tracking and explaining groove. That is, if groove is unified (as musical nuance theories take it to be), and a musician’s feel is deeply related to nonvoluntary movement in the audience, then we might wonder whether to focus on musical nuances like microtiming variations or on the cluster of musical properties picked out by psychologists.

One response would be to deny the problem all together and assert that while psychologists have found other contributors to groove, this does not rule out the possibility that musical nuances play a role in generating or constituting groove-as-movement. On this view, there would seem to be no inconsistency in claiming both theories to be successfully tracking the same phenomenon because groove is taken to be multiply realizable (with musical nuances being one way to create a groove). One problem with arguing that both, the features picked out by the studies above and rhythmic nuances, contribute to some unified groove concept is that there isn’t any evidence that microtiming influences people’s willingness to attribute groove-as-movement. For instance, when drummers are asked by researchers to increase the groove of a performance,

\textsuperscript{13} Mark Abell identifies a very similar set of features as contributing to groove, which he defines as a “unified rhythmic effect” which renders the rhythm of a 'groove-based’ work the primary meaningful component (Abell 2016, 18).
they tend to increase tempo, and do not introduce variations in microtiming (Kawase et al. 2003). Another similar study found that musicians merely increase syncopation from a deadpan baseline to increase groove and decrease syncopation to decrease groove (Madison & Sioros 2014). This study also verified that the steps that musicians took worked by asking listeners to confirm which performances had more or less groove.

In another study, participants were presented with programmed rhythms reflecting different genres (Davies et al. 2013). Three versions of each rhythm were produced, one with reliable variations in microtiming that reflected the apparent expectations of that genre, one in which the performance was deadpan, and one in which microtiming variations were not reliable. Participants were asked to rate whether their experience of listening to each track could be described as involving “the sensation of wanting to move some part of [their] body in relation to some aspect of the music.” (Davies et al. 2013, 502) Interestingly, the stimuli featuring microtiming variations led to a decrease in groove attributions across the board (except in the case of jazz, where it had no effect). That is, systematic variations in microtiming according to genre expectations made listeners less likely to attribute groove-as-movement in almost all cases and never made listeners more likely to attribute it. Returning to the issue of jazz later, these results provide us with some evidence against thinking that the musical nuance theory can be counted on to provide an account of groove-as-movement the same way that it can for groove-as-feel. Further, the results that cast doubt on the role of musical nuances in groove-as-movement are not the effect of one outlier study. Another study following a very similar methodology found very similar results (Fruhauf, Kopiez, and Platz 2013). This is consistent with the general agreement of audiences and musicians on the sentiment that “groove depends on the precision of timing (i.e., how well the musical events ‘line up’ in time)”, which suggests that deviation from
the meter in the form of microtiming variations could detract from groove-as-movement (Janata, Tomic, and Haberman 2011, 57).

With all of this evidence taken together, we have reason to think that whatever phenomenon the psychological theory of groove is tracking, it is not constituted (in part or in total) by musical nuance. If groove is unified such that these studies are after the same groove concept that musical nuance theorists are, and microtiming variations have been shown to have no bearing on whether groove is attributed or not, we have reason to doubt that groove is constituted by microtiming variations. The lesson we should take away from this is that groove can and is construed of in multiple ways, and that the musical features associated with one concept need not (and appear not to) be associated with or constitutive of both groove concepts. A failure to distinguish these two concepts of groove can lead to one of two errors: 1) holding that musical nuances form the basis of groove-as-movement or 2) holding that research from the psychology of groove-as-movement disproves the musical nuance theory of groove-as-feel.

With regards to the first error, when Roholt tells us that “The feel of a groove is the affective dimension of the relevant motor-intentional movements”, he is attempting to tie his musical nuance account of groove-as-feel to groove-as-movement (even though he disagrees about the casual process that psychologists are after) (Roholt 2014, 106). The same can be said of Iyer who, in his account of music-as-feel, tells us that “the phenomenon clearly involves regular, rhythmic bodily movement as a kind of sympathetic reaction to regular rhythmic sound…” (Iyer 2002, 392) or that “a musical groove is something that induces motion.” (Iyer

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14 Importantly, these studies leave open the possibility that musical nuances other than microtiming variations might play a role in groove-as-movement. Empirical work on the role of musical nuances has so far focused on the possible effects of microtiming, so it remains to be seen what role other forms of musical nuance could play. However, given the importance of microtiming for the musical nuance theory, we should take it to be problematic that the evidence weighs against this seemingly paradigmatic musical nuance playing a role in groove-as-movement.
This is just to say that musical nuance theorists do often take themselves to be providing an account of both, groove-as-feel and groove-as-movement. However, as we have already seen, musical nuance appears to have little to nothing to do with groove-as-movement.

Notice, however, that these studies cast doubt on the importance of microtiming variations when they 1) ask audiences about having a desire to move to the music, or 2) ask audiences to attribute groove at some level or not. More will be said on audiences’ attributions of groove later, but we should notice that the first methodology only tells us that microtiming doesn’t seem to be strictly necessary or important for groove-as-movement. These results do not count against the possible importance of microtiming when it comes to groove-as-feel. This leads us to the second confusion that arises when we fail to distinguish these two explanatory projects: taking the evidence that the psychological literature has now provided us with about groove-as-movement as counting against the musical nuance theorists.

This confusion can be seen when music psychologists have argued that “the claim that deviations from isochrony constitute the phenomenon of groove or swing is so counter-intuitive as to be tantamount to a contradiction in terms.” (Merker 2014, 1) Here, they argue that groove is characterized by synchronous bodily movement in time with the music (tapping one’s toes, swaying to the rhythm, dancing, etc.), so the worry is one of wondering how variations in timing that, by their nature, deviate or distract from the pulse could help or cause us to engage in predictive rhythmic behavior. The problem with this argument is that microtiming variations are supposed to capture groove-as-feel, which need not be tied to the kinds of bodily movement that the author describes. For the same reason, we shouldn’t take the studies cited above (which examine the impact of microtiming variations on audience members’ desires to move to the
music) as evidence against Keil, Iyer, or Roholt (except where they tie their accounts to groove-as-movement).

Indeed, there is robust evidence that, despite not doing it when asked to increase or add groove, musicians do undertake the kinds of modifications and variations that musical nuance theorists describe (Camara 2016; Camara et al. 2020; Polack & London 2014). However, these studies operationalize groove according to the broad definition of groove-as-feel. For instance, one study found reliable microrhythmic variations among drummers who were asked to perform in either a ‘laid-back’, ‘on-the-beat’, or ‘pushed’ style (Camara et al. 2020). While the extent to which these findings vindicate any particular theory of groove-as-feel might depend on the details of whether the microtiming variations that researchers are looking at qualify as musical nuances on Raffman’s account, these findings do suggest that microtiming variations (of some kind) play a very important role in generating and preserving certain musical feels (grooves on the groove-as-feel model).

We might, then, expect that artists will introduce microtiming variations when asked to make a song more laid-back or more driving but increase syncopation and pulse when asked to increase or add groove (where groove isn’t specified as to a particular feel). This suggests that artists can move back and forth between both groove concepts and different musical features track which concept is being employed. This is just to say that musical nuance theory does seem to capture how musicians produce certain ‘feels’. Although we should take the evidence of psychology to tell us that musical nuances don’t play an important role in groove-as-movement, we should not take those same studies to show that it doesn’t play a role in groove-as-feel.

This also points to a linguistic difference when it comes to attributing groove-as-feel and groove-as-movement. Musicians pursue groove-as-movement strategies when asked to increase
or add groove but seem to switch to groove-as-feel strategies when told to add a particular kind of groove (like a driving or laid-back feel). It seems that there is a general sense of groove-as-movement, but groove in the sense of groove-as-feel must be of a particular kind. If this is right, then we should expect that asking musicians to add or increase groove will produce results more closely matching the psychological literature on groove-as-movement but asking musicians to play with a particular feel will often involve altering the microrhythmic profile. This is consistent with the results discussed above.

**Genres, Performances, and Tracks:**

One interesting feature of these two different accounts of groove and the musical phenomena they pick out is that these differences seem to track differences between jazz and popular music appreciative practice. A standard distinction is made in the philosophy of music between the song, the track, and the performance. (Burkett 2015) As an example, a songwriter writes a score for a piece of music (in popular music, these are usually songs), and an artist performs it. We might then evaluate the songs written by the songwriter as well as the performances of the work undertaken by various artists. Further, we might decide to record an artist’s performance and evaluate the resulting track that this recording process produces. This leaves us with a model in which, for any given track, we can evaluate and appreciate that track as a song, the individual performances it incorporates, and/or as the final recorded track.

Recall that, for the musical nuance theorists, a groove (that is, a feel) is typically thought of as the sum of all musical nuances manifest in a performance. The musical nuances that Raffman, Iyer, Roholt, and Keil have in mind are not apparent in notation, so to the degree that the song is what is captured in notation, musical nuances seem to be primarily performance and
track level features. This is especially clear in the case of Raffman (and Roholt who draws on her work). For instance, when Roholt discusses Ringo Star and Andy White’s respective performances on The Beatles’ “Love Me Do”, he points out that the recording that Ringo is featured on feels different than the recording that Andy White is on (that is, White’s performance has a forward-leaning groove and Ringo’s does not) (Roholt 2014, 13). By maintaining that the two performances are correctly notated identically and that both are playing the song correctly, it is, then, not the song (or even the drum part of the song) that has the relevant kind of groove. While songs do not have groove on the musical nuance model of groove-as-feel, and performances do, we are not excluded from attributing groove to track-level features. Indeed, research into microrhythmic profiles has been used to generate ‘humanizing’ algorithms which can be applied to computer programmed layers of tracks in the studio to give that instrumental line a more ‘human’ feel. That is, a significant portion of the interventions available at the track-level which might generate groove-as-feel are deliberate attempts to make programmed parts seem as if they were performed by humans (taking the relationship between a notated song and a given performance as its model). That is, we can certainly imagine differences in microtiming (or other kinds of nuances) that emerge in recording or as part of the post-production process. However, performance-level decisions still seem to offer the most opportunities for introducing new musical nuances, and the musical nuances that these theorists take as paradigmatic all seem to be performance-level features.

15 While any musical nuance theorist who adopts the view that the relevant musical nuances necessarily occur at a level that can’t be captured by notation will agree that groove doesn’t occur at the song-level, they need not hold that groove is necessarily a feature of performances (even if they take performance-level nuances as paradigmatic). Others, like Garry Tamlyn, take the stronger stance, arguing that “groove emanates from musical performances (including recorded performance), not from a musical score…” (Tamlyn 2003, 610).
By contrast, the musical features that psychologists have pointed us to in order to explain groove-as-movement are not as limited or focused in this way. These features range from performance-level attributes to track and song-level attributes. For instance, while percussiveness might be (at least partially) a product of performance level decisions, many more of the features picked out by the psychological literature on groove-as movement avail themselves to emerging or being amplified in the recording studio or as a product of post-production mixing and mastering than those picked out by the musical nuance theory of groove-as-feel. As an example, low frequency pulsing can be increased in the studio through the use of an audio production technique known as ‘sidechaining’ in which the volume of the bassline is tied to the kick drum. When the kick drum hits, the bass drops down in volume and returns between kick drum hits. This creates a pulsing effect between the two. However, this is just one of many ways in which things like pulsing, tempo, percussiveness, and syncopation are alterable at the track level. Likewise, syncopation is easily notated in standard musical notation systems and, thus, can be modified at the song-level.

This is just to say that it is less that groove-as-movement focuses on track-level features over performance-level features, but that the features it picks out are more conducive to being introduced or amplified at the track and song-level than those picked out by groove-as-feel and groove-as-movement researchers do not always (or even typically) center performance-level interventions in their investigations or analysis. Likewise, syncopation and tempo are musical features which can be transmitted via notation, allowing for groove-as-movement to emerge at the song-level as well. Depending on the particulars of a researcher’s definition, groove-as-feel is either necessarily a feature of performances or manipulated most easily at the performance level, whereas groove-as-movement can freely be altered at any level more easily.
This difference is especially interesting if, as it has been argued elsewhere, rock and popular music are musical styles driven by or focused on recorded tracks (Gracyk 1996). It might then make sense that the popular conception of groove corresponds to the groove present in popular music and made easier by the production techniques of popular music (Gracyk 1996; Kania 2006). Here, the fact that folk attributions of groove track the features and conceptualization that goes with groove-as-movement might issue from concept’s doing more work when it comes to engaging with and appreciating the more predominant forms of popular music. Since they are mostly listening to track-centric forms of music, the folk of today tend to assume a more track-amenable concept of groove. Likewise, if Dan Burkett is right in arguing that rock music takes the song, performance, and track as key works to be evaluated, then groove-as-movement allows us to appreciate groove across all three ontological levels of a work (Burkett 2015).

By contrast, it is worth revisiting the fact that groove attributions were not diminished by microtiming variations in jazz while they were in other genres. Andrew Kania has argued that, while rock music may be a track-oriented musical style, jazz is a performance oriented one (Kania 2011). Recordings of jazz are expected to be transparent, accurately representing performances with minimal alteration taking place in post-production. In this case, it could be that while the psychological theory of groove-as-movement is tracking the concept common to musicians and laypeople generally, the musical nuance theory is tracking a term of art primarily used in performance-centric genres like jazz (where groove is a feature of performances). Keil even acknowledges that he takes jazz music practices to be paradigmatic in his account of groove, saying that “since the 1950s [he has] been trying to figure out exactly how a groove is created or crafted by jazz drummers and bassists.” (Keil 2010, 2) This could explain why groove
attributions were higher in instances of jazz featuring microtiming variations than those in other genres. That is, there could be a confounding effect of jazz listeners having two notions of groove and dealing with the ambiguity that goes with that. Likewise, this being a term of art might explain why some musicians and sophisticated theorists so readily endorse the theory while lay audiences and other musicians don’t. The differences between musicians’ attributions could track differences in the genre expectations and norms that those musicians work in.

*Aesthetic Concepts & Genre*

If the account I have so far given is correct, and our concept of musical groove picks out different musical features and for different reasons depending on genre, then we should wonder to what extent this might be true of other aesthetic concepts. To be clear, it is not just that some genres might have a higher threshold for attributing a certain sonic quality than others based on that genre’s conventions (the way that a track might be funky for a punk song but fail to stand out as funky when compared to funk tracks). Instead, the term ‘groove’ is actually doing different work in jazz and popular music appreciative practices. In jazz music’s performance centered practice, in which we spend considerable time appreciating the ways that particular performances (and transparent recorded tracks of those performances) differ from a notated standard song, groove talk allows us to better think about the ways in which individual musicians can leave their mark on the genre’s many standards. In popular music practice (like in the case of rock, pop, and funk), groove talk allows us to communicate more effectively about the ways in which musicians can make their songs, performances, or tracks more danceable or more sonically infectious.

This suggests that accounts of aesthetic concepts should be sensitive to their functional role within the aesthetic practices of a given community. Insofar as we pursue analyses of
aesthetic concepts from the starting point of individual aesthetic experience (as is often the case for groove-as-feel) or from private phenomenological experience (in the case of groove-as-movement), we might fail to see the interaction between features of works, individual aesthetic experience, and the function that those features and experiences play within a community’s appreciative practice. Besides revealing the ways that these two groove concepts come apart, understanding aesthetic concepts in terms of communities of aesthetic practice might also help us better understand the aesthetic value that those features add. For instance, groove can be a good thing to have in jazz music because it serves as an individualizing marker for the performer in a world of versions of standard songs. Yet, groove can be good in pop music because it makes a song easier to dance to or more readily invites the listener to dance. I take this to provide us with some reason for favoring communitarian approaches to aesthetics that are sensitive to community or social aesthetic practices (Riggle 2017; Riggle 2022; Nguyen 2019a; Nguyen 2019b; Kubala 2020) over more individualistic hedonist accounts (Van der Berg 2019). Without being properly sensitive to the differences in inappreciative practices between genre communities, we might fail to notice the ways in which we should be pluralists about other aesthetic concepts.

**Conclusion**

To briefly summarize, I have argued that music theorists, philosophers, and musicologists have sought to give an account of groove which takes the concept as it is understood in jazz practices (groove-as-feel) as paradigmatic. Meanwhile, psychologists have focused their efforts on investigating groove as it is understood in popular music appreciation (groove-as-movement). The fact that these two projects have identified two different sets of corresponding musical features gives us reason to think that there is no unified groove concept. Failure to distinguish
between these two concepts of groove has 1) led theorists to think that the musical features that they are interested in are responsible for both kinds of groove and 2) led psychologists to think that they have debunked the account of groove-as-feel that musical nuance theorists have offered. Both of these strike me as errors which have resulted from failing to notice the different roles that groove plays in the appreciative practices of different genres.

Likewise, there is some precedent for thinking that there are multiple groove terms which refer to distinct concepts (even within music). For instance, drummers frequently refer to a drum part in a section of a song as a groove the way that guitarists refer to a section of the guitar part in a song as a riff. Further, even outside of music, it is not uncommon to hear people talking about being in a/the groove when they are engaged in a flow-state. This kind of groove could also extend to music. That is, musicians could say that they were in a groove when they were playing while in a flow-state without necessarily feeling anything like a pleasurable phenomenology associated with non-voluntary bodily movement (though these two things could be correlated). This is just to say that there are already a number of concepts which answer to ‘groove’, and at least three are employed in discussions of music among musicians. Why not, then, add another musical groove concept by divorcing discussions of musicians’ feels from discussions of involuntary rhythmic movement?

Finally, that groove talk does different work in the practices of different genre communities should give us reason to consider whether the same might be said of other aesthetic concepts. Understanding the nature and value of aesthetic predicates might require us to reconsider the approach which takes individual engagement with works to be paradigmatic and to, instead, focus our attention on the appreciative practices that communities find valuable.
While philosophers have so far not paid much attention to country music, there is now a small but growing body of work dealing with the unique aesthetic features of the genre (Shusterman 1999; Dyck 2018; Berhardt 2018; Dyck 2021). Surveying this literature, the question of how we ought to understand the genre’s notion of authenticity has emerged as one of the central questions. Here, theorists are substantially divided. Some argue that authentic country music is a matter of the artist having a biography that supports the rural and working-class identity of country protagonists (Bernhardt 2018) and others argue that authenticity in country music is merely a matter of the music manifesting a rural American mythology that carries a certain emotional resonance (Shusterman 1999). Indeed, questions about the legitimacy of certain country artists and kinds of country music mark a dividing line in an evergreen debate within the community between progressives and traditionalists. Given the way in which some country audiences and artists use the distinction between mere country music and so-called ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ country music, we might worry that the notion of authenticity employed in discussions of the genre is nothing but a cudgel used for a problematic kind of gatekeeping. However, even if we think that authenticity is merely a coded term that some in the community use to police the boundaries of the genre, we might still ask what conditions must be met for an artist or a song to survive this gatekeeping.

16 AN article version of this chapter is currently forthcoming in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*.

17 Importantly, Shusterman’s account attempts to explain what gives country music an air of authenticity in general, not explaining what distinguishes authentic country music from its non-authentic counterpart (Shusterman 1999). Equally importantly, these projects can be related. If country music, as a genre, is characteristically authentic in this broad sense, then authentic country music might be whatever subset of the genre preserves this authenticity. Something like this view is defended by Joli Jenson, who argues that complaints about the ‘Nashville Sound’ being inauthentic were (at least in part) complaints about those artists and works failing to maintain the genre’s image because they didn’t allow for the perceived continuation of the genre’s “Imagined origins in live, communal performance.” (Jenson 1998, 64).
In this paper, I will argue that we should take claims about the relative authenticity of country music to be evidence of ‘country’ being a dual character concept in the same way that it has been suggested of punk rock and hip-hop (Liao, Meskin, Knobe 2020). That is, we should read someone saying that a given song is ‘authentic country music’ as equivalent to them saying that, beyond realizing the “set of concrete features” which make a work a work of country music, the song or artist also realizes “the abstract values that these features serve to realize.” (Knobe, Prasada, Newman 2013). This model has been argued to make sense of the distinction between ‘punk’ and ‘real punk’ in that the conditions to qualify as punk tend to be descriptive, but an artist and their work must embody the values of punk to qualify as ‘real punk’ (Liao, Meskin, Knobe 2020).

My view is that, given that country music is a dual-character concept, then we could understand the distinction between ‘country’ and ‘authentic country’ in the same way that we understand the distinction between ‘punk’ and ‘real punk’. Authentic country music isn’t a matter of an artist having a particular background or a particular intent in producing a work but is, instead, a matter of demonstrating and embodying the core value commitments of the genre. This avoids the problems associated with alternative accounts while still allowing attributions of authenticity to be substantive (contra its sceptics). These values form the basis of country artists’ and audiences’ practical identities. Part of country music’s aesthetic practice is that audiences reconnect with, reify, and revise this common practical identity through identification with artists and works that manifest these values. We should then think of authenticity discourse within country music as a kind of game within the genre’s practice of shaping and maintaining this practical identity. If this is right, and there are legitimate uses for authenticity attributions, then we have a more sympathetic account of what traditionalists are doing when they make these
attributions and, in doing so, draw attention to an underutilized space for progressive country music fans and artists to make inroads.

In the second section of this paper, I will characterize the traditionalist and progressive camps within country music and briefly summarize the debate between the two (along with its relationship to authenticity discourse). In the third section, I will survey the existing accounts of authenticity and their various deficiencies. In the fourth section, I will discuss the literature on dual character concepts and explain how thinking of country music as a dual character concept can make sense of a notion of ‘authentic country’ (along with providing a model for how these attributions relate to country music practical identity). Finally, in the fifth section, I will say something about the values I take to be central to the genre.

**Traditionalists & Progressives**

The history of country music is characterized by a kind of dialectic between so-called ‘traditionalists’ and ‘progressives’. Country music fans, critics, and artists divide up artists, works, or subgenres of country music into either category. For instance, Chet Atkins’ ‘countrypolitan’ style (also known as ‘the Nashville sound’) was considered progressive when it was introduced in the 1950’s. Atkins brought lush string arrangements and choral backing vocals into country music from popular music and R&B. The Nashville sound includes the works of artists like Jim Reeves, Tammy Wynette, and Glen Campbell. Traditionalists in the 1960’s and 1970’s reacted against this trend by leaving Nashville to establish independent country music recording scenes and sounds in California (‘the Bakersfield sound’) and Texas (‘outlaw country’). Bakersfield artists like Buck Owens and Merle Haggard recorded tracks which utilized less polished production and incorporated strongly defined backbeats from rock music, while

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18 These two camps are sometimes referred to as ‘hard core’ and ‘soft shell’ respectively (Dyck 2021).
outlaw country artists like Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and David Allan Coe drew on Texas’ western swing and blues traditions (while still preferring a less polished production).

Conflict of this kind forms a dialectic because it continuously reoccurs within the community and, with each reoccurrence, traditionalists tend to take on board the progressives of the past while reacting against the progressives of the present (Peterson 1998; Morris 2013). Despite the breakup between the Nashville and Bakersfield sounds, they were eventually able to reconcile. For instance, Bakersfield mainstay Merle Haggard recorded Back to the Barrooms in Nashville in 1980 with producer Jimmy Bowen, and critics praised its “progressive country style” which “[utilizes] horns and strings in ways not necessarily in concert with traditional country music.” (Jurek n.d.). This reconciliation did not stop the next generation of country traditionalists (this time ‘neo-traditionalists’ like George Strait, Alan Jackson, and John Anderson) from reacting against the Nashville music industry in the era of Urban Cowboy. Strait performed an analogous move to his Texas outlaw country predecessor Waylon Jennings (who declared that, in Texas, western swing artist Bob Wills was “still the king”) by drawing heavily on the western swing tradition in songs like 1985’s “Dance Time in Texas”.

In its current form, the dialectic between traditionalists and progressives is a conflict between ‘Americana’ and pop country. Both of these camps can be subdivided further. Americana includes the bluegrass-inspired Appalachian scene (featuring artists like Tyler Childers and Sturgill Simpson), a developing western swing revival (including Colter Wall), and soul and blues inflected neotraditionalists like Charley Crockett. Meanwhile, mainstream pop country includes artists more influenced by hip-hop, pop, and contemporary rock and R&B, like Luke Bryan, Florida Georgia Line, Kane Brown and Dan + Shay.
Notice, however, that while I have characterized these sub-genres in terms of musical features, each camp (traditionalist and progressive) is made up of multiple subgenres. This means that these camps aren’t purely characterizable in terms of musical features. Likewise, the disagreement between progressives and traditionalists is not merely one of traditionalists being reluctant to incorporate outside influences and progressives innovating by drawing on works outside of the tradition. Traditionalists are more than willing to draw on elements of blues, soul, and rock music (in addition to traditional country-adjacent genres like bluegrass and western swing) and do so in innovative ways. Finally, this divide is also not only a musical dispute. Traditionalists and progressives also differ with regards to lyrical content and public image. If this isn’t just a musical dispute, then what is the basis of this disagreement?

Beyond this, two general trends are worth mentioning. First, in each generation, progressive country is the predominant sound in mainstream country music. It represents what is most likely to be playing on country music radio and which artists are most likely to win awards and sign major label deals in Nashville. Of course, traditionalists can become successful despite this, and some use that success to transition into mainstream status. However, country music traditionalism is, almost by definition, a reaction against what is mainstream in country music. The second thing worth noting is that, within each generation, the divide between progressives and traditionalists takes the shape of a debate about what is or isn’t authentic country music. Typically, this debate amounts to traditionalists insisting that progressive country music isn’t authentic.

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19 See Table 1 in (Peterson 1998) for a side-by-side comparison of hard-core (traditional) and soft-shell (progressive) country on issues ranging from lyrical composition, stage presentation and costuming, and artist biographies.
While progressive country fans form the majority of the country music community, they and the artists who make that music are often derided by country music critics and older country artists (who tend towards traditionalism). Thus, while progressives hold most of the keys to power in the industry, authenticity discourse often serves to deny them a full sense of recognition within the community. In this way, progressive fans and artists may view authenticity discourse as a kind of insidious gatekeeping which works to denigrate their preferences at the expense of those of veteran artists and purists. The task of providing an account of authenticity in country music is, then, a task of determining what the traditionalists are on about. The task of denying authenticity is seen as one of pushing the country community to recognize that progressives are legitimate heirs to the country music tradition.

 Accounts of Authenticity

In his discussion of authenticity, John Dyck draws on and (helpfully) expands on the common kinds of musical authenticity employed in the broader philosophy of music literature. Following Dyck, country music might have a kind of sourced-focused authenticity, folkloric authenticity, or music-focused authenticity. Here, source-focused authenticity might be best understood as something like standing. That is, the question of whether a given track is authentic country music (if country authenticity is source-focused) is a question of to what extent the artist occupies the right kind of social position to perform and write works of country music in a non-defective way. Meanwhile, folkloric authenticity is a matter of the artist’s intention. In this case, an attribution of authenticity should be understood as a recognition that the music does (or at least seems to) issue from a place of pure self-expression rather than from commercial interests. Finally, if country music has a kind of music-focused authenticity, then a work or artist being called ‘authentic country’ is a matter of the degree to which it manifests the musical features
typical of the genre. I will now briefly survey a variety of ways in which each of these could explain the notion of authenticity at work in country music discourse and also argue that each is, in its own way, deficient.

First, one might be tempted to explain authenticity in terms of source-focused considerations because we already have reason to think that some musical genres might require that artists have a kind of standing in order to participate in a non-defective way. For instance, a similar debate occurs in philosophical discussions of hip-hop (Taylor 2005) and blues (Rudinow 1994; Young 1994; Taylor 1995; Langston & Langston 2012). It may be that the notion of authenticity at play is genre specific. Often, however, these discussions revolve around appropriation in the context of race and the traditional practices of a marginalized culture. As such, our first worry might be that there is no deep and proprietary connection between any given culture and country music because country music’s establishment as a genre distinct from folk music was merely an artifact of commercial partitioning of the recording industry market (Malone 1968). We might, then, be sceptical that there is a sufficiently substantive connection between any particular culture and the music to justify concerns about standing. Nevertheless, county music commentators and artists do appear to articulate concerns about standing. For instance, Richard A. Peterson quotes Hank Williams as saying that “you have to plow a lot of ground and look at the back side of a mule for a lot of years to sing a country song.” (Peterson 1997, 217) Similarly, in his song “Some Days”, Sturgill Simpson bemoans artists “playing dress up and trying to sing them old country songs”. Something like this is echoed by Bernhardt, who argues that authenticity is about singing from a “rural and working-class” identity rather than merely about it (Bernhardt 2018). Defenders of source-focused authenticity want to capture intuitions like these, that biographical facts are relevant in assessing country music works and
artists. The motivation for providing a source focused account is that, as the above quotes suggest, country music fans and artists often see themselves as in a musical tradition that is historically continuous with a folk music tradition. The project of providing an account of authenticity is (for advocates of source-focused authenticity) one of clarifying what conditions should be met in order for an artist to count as one of those kinds of folks. However, actually making sense of the kind of authentic standing that Williams, Simpson, and Bernhardt are talking about may prove tricky.

For one, gaining the standing to perform country music is not obviously a matter of socioeconomics. While it would hurt one’s credibility as a rapper or punk artist if they were the offspring of a rich and famous rapper or punk rocker, it does the opposite for country musicians. If country music authenticity is a matter of the degree to which the performer hails from a working-class background, then we should expect to find that the sons and daughter of famous country artists are treated with the same scepticism that Jay-Z’s daughter might face if she pursued a gangster rap career, or that the son of Minor Threat’s Ian MacKaye might face from the punk community. Instead, Hank Williams Jr. and Hank Williams III have heightened credibility in virtue of their being the son and grandson of a rich and successful country artist (that is, Hank Williams). The same could be said for Justin Townes Earle, the son of country star Steve Earle.

With regards to the idea that country artists should hail from, and live in, rural areas, few would argue that Steve Goodman and John Prine lack credibility as country artists in virtue of their being from Chicago. There also doesn’t seem to be a principled reason for requiring a rural biography. Bill Malone’s expansive history of country music, *Country Music USA*, argues that “the farther Americans became removed from the cowboy past, the more intense their interest in
cowboy songs and lore.” (Malone 1968, 163) On this account, country music rose to popularity in post-war America because it served to reconnect increasingly urbanized Americans with their rural roots. If this is right, then who would be better positioned to understand this predicament than a fellow city-dweller. Indeed, many iconic and representative country songs gesture at this story implicitly. After all, in “Luckenbach Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)”, Waylon Jennings tells us that we should “go to Luckenbach, Texas” (that is, not stay in Luckenbach, Texas). Likewise, Merle Haggard asks for the bright lights of his ‘dirty old city’ to “turn [him] loose and set [him] free.” Finally, in “Country Is”, Tom T. Hall tells us that “country is living in the city… country is all in your mind”. If an artist has an entirely rural autobiography, it is hard to see how they would be well-positioned to connect with the target audience of country music and their experience as nostalgic city-dwellers. If authenticity in country music is about having standing in a shared community with country listeners, then an entirely rural autobiography might actually hurt one’s credibility.

Another alternative source-focused account of authenticity might argue that country music is the music reflective of the culture of Scotch-Irish settlers to the American south, and the relevant standing is that which comes with membership in this community. This story, of country music’s origins in the American south, is often attributed to Bill Malone’s *Country Music, USA* and is the subject of significant historical controversy (Malone 1968; Cohen 2014; Mather 2017; Peterson 1997). First, as we have already seen, John Prine and Steve Goodman both had considerable standing in the country music community while also hailing from Chicago, and Jerry Jeff Walker did not face controversy on the basis of his being from Oneonta, New York. It is not just that these are or were successful country artists, but that they would be widely recognized as falling on the authentic side of the genre by those in the community. Further,
beyond erasing the contributions of black southerners (Miller 2010) and Tejano artists (Lewis 2008), grounding country music in the culture of Scotch-Irish settlers to the American south also ignores the significant country music traditions in Canada, Australia, and Africa. Indeed, the divide between mere country music and authentic country music exists between artists within the Japanese country music scene (Furmanovsky 2008). We shouldn’t expect to find authentic and non-authentic Japanese country music if authenticity is a matter of descending from Scotch-Irish settlers to the American south.

Likewise, the notion of a common culture across the American south pays insufficient attention to the differences in experience, settlement patterns, environment, and economics between places like Texas, Louisiana, and Kentucky. Indeed, country music practices reflect this diversity of settlement patterns. For instance, Texas country musicians often write polkas and incorporate accordions to reflect the influence of central European settlers to the region. The abundance of waltz and polka country standards (along with the ubiquity of the African-derived banjo) suggests that the genre is not merely reflective of Scotch-Irish identity. Indeed, Buck Owens, an authentic Bakersfield mainstay, even released a song called “Tokyo Polka” on his 1967 album In Japan! without losing any credibility with his authenticity-valuing audience. It is difficult to see how the song might be understood as an expression of Scotch-Irish cultural identity.

The last form of source-focused authenticity that we will discuss is one grounded in biographical fidelity. On this account, an authentic country artist would be singing from their own experience. However, this does not square well with standard country music practices. Historically, the norm of country music recording has been one of distinct singers and songwriters. No one would deny that Buck Owens and Dwight Yoakam have the standing to sing
country music (both fall on the more ‘authentic’ traditionalist side of the genre), and they don’t seem to be violating any norms by singing “Streets of Bakersfield” despite it focusing on events and sentiments from the life of the songwriter, Homer Joy. Likewise, country music is no stranger to murder ballads (Marty Robbin’s “El Paso”, Colter Wall’s “Kate McCannon”, Chris Knight’s “Down the River”) and no one’s enjoyment of these is contingent on thinking that the artist is the narrator (or did the things that the narrator did). For the same reason, the standing that allows Steve Earle to perform as a country artist licenses him to write songs like “The Mountain”, in which he describes (from the first-person perspective) the life an Appalachian coal miner, even though Earle is from Houston, Texas (notoriously devoid of mountains and Appalachian coal miners).

This brings us to folkloric authenticity. Remember that, on this account, authenticity is a matter of an artist writing from a place of pure self-expression and divorced from commercial considerations. However, country musicians (even those held up as the paradigm of authenticity) often do let commercial interests influence their creative process (Peterson 1997). For instance, Willie Nelson’s 1992 album *The IRS Tapes: Who’ll Buy My Memories?* was released in order for Nelson to raise enough money to pay off his tax debt. Yet, few would deny that Nelson is an authentic country artist. Country music is (and always has been) full of pageantry and pandering, and attributions of authenticity do no track distinction in the degree of these things. On top of this, as mentioned above, country music (as a genre) exists as a result of decisions made on the basis of commercial interests.  

As we have seen, we can find exceptions to each account of country music’s supposed source-focused authenticity and the inherently commercial nature of the genre (along with a true

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20 For further reading on country music’s development as a popular music genre, and the role of market segmentation in that development, see (Miller 2010).
accounting of its history) should make us sceptical of folkloric accounts of country music authenticity. Considerations like these have led to John Dyck arguing that “country music scholars have debunked the idea that country authenticity gets at anything real.” (Dyck 2021, 1) The challenge is, then, in providing an account of authenticity which avoids the problems that Dyck rightfully points out. The case for being sceptical of authenticity rests on the recognition that none of these accounts gives us anything close to sufficient conditions for securing authenticity. Existing accounts of authenticity depend on a model in which contemporary work are in line with the practices of that genre at its origins (whether that is with regards to what kind of people are writing and performing works or to what those artists’ intentions are). Sceptics debunk this idea by showing that all of these origin stories are false. What I am offering is an account of authenticity that isn’t rooted in the origins of country music or in needing to satisfy them.

‘Real Country’ & ‘Real Punk’

The view that I am defending is that the modifier ‘authentic’ functions in the same way for country music that ‘real’ does for punk rock or hip-hop. This is to say that country music is a dual character concept. These are concepts like ‘friend’ where one could reasonably say something like ‘x is a friend, but they’re not a true friend’ (Knobe, Prasada & Newman 2013). When people distinguish friends from real friends, they distinguish those who merely satisfy the descriptive conditions necessary for being a friend from those who also embody the values of friendship. Contrast this with ‘bus driver’. People tend not to think that being a real bus driver requires embodying a unique set of values beyond satisfying the descriptive features necessary to count as a bus driver (Knobe, Prasada & Newman 2013). Of course, linguistic practices allow for us to distinguish between an x and a ‘real x’ for functional kinds, in the way that there is a sense
in which an umbrella past a certain point of disrepair could be said to be an umbrella but, failing to fulfill its intended purpose, isn’t really an umbrella. However, dual character concepts are not intended to capture every instance of the x/real x linguistic practice, but to pick out instances where these kinds of attributions are intelligible and for the reasons described above. This is the sense in which country music should be thought of as a dual character concept, in that it allows for this linguistic practice and attributions of real country come down to a matter of those works and artists embodying a particular set of values.²¹

As mentioned, some have already suggested that musical genres could be dual character concepts, as people might question whether a given band is really punk or whether an artist’s work is really hip-hop (Liao, Meskin & Knobe 2020). Indeed, the phrase ‘real country’ is not absent from country music discourse (there is even a country movie musical titled Real Country), and there is no substantive reason, looking at country artist’s and fan’s attributions of authenticity, to think that ‘authentic country’ and ‘real country’ pick out different things.²² This equivocation is not lost on Dyck, who tells us that “authenticity is a standard for judging ‘real’ country songs and artists.” (Dyck 2021, 1)

Thus, on my account, when country artists and audiences say that a song is authentic or real, they are telling us that they think that the song should be considered as part of the canon of songs which make up the community’s statement of values. When country fans say that an artist does real country, they are saying that that artist’s work embodies country music’s values, not necessarily making a claim about the artist’s background or intent in creating it. By debating whether a work is or isn’t authentic (or real country), the community refines, revises, or

²¹ What descriptive features count towards genre membership is a task best left to musicologists. More work is needed in this field. However, for an analysis of formal musical features characteristic of the genre, see (Neal 1998).
²² Kembrew McLeod argues that ‘authenticity’ and ‘real’ co-refer in hip-hop discourse, so we might expect this in country music discourse as well (McLeod 1999).
preserves the character of their shared practical identity (and the values which embody it). This is to say that we can distinguish the problematic gatekeeping around what is or isn’t country music from the legitimate aesthetic practice of maintaining that authentic country music is that which satisfies the values and practical identity which characterize it as a dual-character concept. Country music need not be authentic in order to be country music, but it must embody the non-formal values of the genre in order to be seen as authentic.

There are at least two potential responses to this view that are worth considering. First, defenders of one of the accounts of authenticity mentioned above might argue that their account is not incompatible with country music being a dual character concept if those views about authenticity can be cashed out in terms of values. For instance, on a folkloric account, authentic country music simply embodies the value of artistic expression over commercial interests. It is right that this is a version of a dual character account. The problem is that it gets the values wrong. Attributions of authenticity don’t track embodying this value (as the Willie Nelson case shows). Likewise, it is harder to see how accounts of source-focused authenticity could be converted neatly into stories about values (though I will ultimately argue that they are related and explain how). One version of this might be arguing that authentic country music values the community of the American South (for instance). However, claims about standing (like when Hank Williams tells us that you need to plow a lot of dirt to sing country music) aren’t about embodying that value, but satisfying a requirement. Williams doesn’t tell us that the song should be about someone or reflect the life of someone who has plowed a lot of dirt, the song should be performed by someone who has done that. Dual character art concepts are a matter of an artist and audiences’ values being in alignment, not merely having an artist do things that audiences value.
The second response worth addressing is that the defenders of a music-focused account of authenticity might ask why we should think that ‘real’ is tracking a difference in values rather than merely tracking the degree to which a song participates in the cluster of descriptive features which pick out the genre. Here, the more features typical of the genre that a song employs, the ‘more real’ it is. However, we do have some reason to think that this story isn’t quite right. For instance, while attributions of authenticity in country music tend to track the traditionalist/progressive divide, this divide is not always musical. Country artist Sturgill Simpson is commonly regarded as authentic and, as we have already seen, has positioned himself in contrast to those he perceives as inauthentic. This is despite his incorporating horns (which were banned from the Grand Ole Opry for much of country music history), drawing on influences in hip-hop and psychedelic rock, and covering Nirvana’s “In Bloom”. This seems to depart significantly from the traditional cluster of musical features associated with country as a genre. Likewise, a cluster account is a characterization of what is typical of things of that kind. However, it is precisely what is typical and popular that is commonly denied authenticity. A music-focused account of authenticity can’t make sense of why the authentic country music is the unpopular kind, but the values of country music might be unpopular even among those who are fans of the descriptive features of the genre.

Besides mapping onto country music discourse, thinking about country music as a dual character concept can also accommodate the intuitions of those who were sympathetic to various accounts of source-focused authenticity. It is not that the artist must satisfy some specific biographical conditions in order to be accepted as authentic but, rather, that these biographical markers can provide audiences with evidence that artists might share their values. Authenticity attributions are invitations for identification issued by and to people with a common practical
identity, not declarations about the correlation between biographical and historical facts. Those facts merely serve as reasons to motivate this invitation. For instance, we feel safe in assuming that a person who chooses to continue living the life of rodeo champion (in the case of Chris LeDoux) or who continues to live on a ranch in Pearsall, Texas despite their enormous wealth and fame (in the case of George Strait) really endorses the lifestyle of rodeo champions and ranchers that they manifest in their songs. It is the responsibility of the country artist (insofar as they want to be recognized as authentic) to communicate this practical identity to us in whatever way they can, whether by playing music that directly embodies country music’s values, or by having a biography or lifestyle that lends credibility to their endorsing those values. This avoids the problems associated with source-focused authenticity because, unlike on the source-focused account, these biographical facts aren’t the necessary and sufficient basis for attributing authenticity but are points of prima facie evidence in favor of attributing the values that authenticity attributions track.

In this way, we should think about authenticity discourse as the linguistic field of a larger aesthetic game (with its own set of moves, rules, and officers) in which the country music community negotiates the genre’s values and their common practical identity. This is a kind of conceptual negotiation in which we should understand these claims as kinds of moves (reifying or revising moves) in a game of tug-a-war in which traditionalists and progressives wrestle to develop and maintain their common practical identity (Cantalamessa 2020). Which kinds of things count as value signifiers (whether they are source-focused facts about artists, musical properties of songs, or thematic features of lyrics) are the basis of rules which are constantly in

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23 Thinking of practices in terms of games (along with the terminology of offices, moves, and rules) follows the account of practices that Rawls developed (Rawls 1955). Robbie Kubala has extended this model to aesthetic practices as well (Kubala 2020).
flux as they are negotiated by parties. At any moment, there is a prevailing view of which things count as acceptable signifiers, and this serves as the comparison class against which we can understand authenticity claims.

For instance, when a traditionalist tells us that George Strait is *authentic* country, they are performing a reifying move, because they reinforce the prevailing practical identity. When they say that Strait is authentic country because of reasons y, and z, they reinforce those signifiers as signifiers of the practical identity. When a progressive country music fan tells us that, actually, Florida Georgia Line is authentic country music, they are performing a revising move, because they are looking to expand or otherwise alter the prevailing practical identity. When they say that Florida Georgia Line is authentic because they, like the great country artists of the past, push the boundaries of the genre in new and interesting ways, they are making a move in the discourse so as to introduce new signifiers or otherwise revise the list. Likewise, to deny any of these claims is to perform an equivalent defensive move.

The mistake that the extant literature on country music authenticity makes is that it assumes that authenticity attributions are answerable to one correct and fixed criteria which directly determine what counts as authentic. Advocates of source-focused and folkloric authenticity think that being authentic is a matter of a work lining up with facts out in the world and about the past. Authentic works are by the same group of people who made works like this in the beginning (or are made with the same intentions that those people had). As we have seen, however, all of these stories are simply factually wrong (Dyck 2021). One way of avoiding these problems is by avoiding the model which tells us that authenticity is fixed. Here, the origin story of a genre (whatever it may be) is set at the beginning of the genre, so the criteria for authenticity
are fixed at that point in time. This model fails to capture how the criteria for authenticity can and does change over time.

The notion, which forms the boundary of the genre’s practical identity, is forever being negotiated and this will mean that there are always exceptions and revisions. However, this should not give us reason to deny the reality of authenticity all together. Country music fans aren’t wrong in arguing that $x$ is authentic for reason $y$, they are electing to stake out a particular space, defend it with moves that the community recognizes as legitimate, and hoping to sway others to their side. The reality of country music authenticity is just its use within the genre’s practical identity game. Claims of authenticity can be more or less justified because, despite this ongoing negotiation, there is still considerable agreement on much of what makes up country music practical identity and what things count as signifiers for it. Likewise, even in the fringe cases which form the basis of the disagreement between the two camps, which side is justified is fixed by whether the community, as a whole and at any given moment, is won over by that side’s moves. A central component of country music appreciative practice is the value of sharing a common practical identity and participating in the negotiation of this practical identity by playing in the authenticity game is a valuable feature of country music appreciation. That is, rather than providing us with reason to not attribute authenticity in country music, that there isn’t a fixed definition of authenticity is precisely the reason why people value attributing it in the first place.

It is worth pointing out a few things about the authenticity game. First, audience members are not the only players. For instance, when artists who are considered authentic make claims of authenticity, we might think that these moves are worth more points than if the same move was performed by an audience-member. The same goes for other officers within the practice, like the
Grand Ole Opry, which often serves a kingmaker in these discussions. Second, the unique office that artists inhabit allows for a variety of moves which aren’t available to audience members. Established artists can lend their reputation to less established artists as either a reifying or revising move. When George Jones endorses and collaborates with neo-traditionalist Randy Travis, he is performing a reifying move, and Billy Ray Cyrus’ collaborations with Brazilian country artists Chitãozinho & Xororó or rapper/country artist Lil Nas X might count as revising moves. In the same way, covering a traditional song could count as reifying the canon of standards in the same way that covering a new song with the same signifiers will reinforce the existing canon. On the other hand, progressives could revise the canon or revise the list of musical signifiers by either covering a non-country song (such as Johnny Cash’s cover of Nine Inch Nails’ “Hurt”) or by covering a country song in a new style (as was the case with Ray Charles’ classic album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*). Importantly, teams need not be entirely fixed. Players can form alliances to advance particular signifiers or accept a reifying move in one area but stick to revising moves in others.

The lesson we should take from all of this is that authenticity claims are just one aspect of the larger game in which the country community negotiates its common practical identity, but they are an important aspect. Attributors of authenticity are not applying fixed rules but, in inviting identification with some work or artist, suggesting rules which are either accepted or rejected by the community. These suggested rules allow the invited party to consider whether they also recognize something of themselves in the signifiers which form the justificatory base.

However, there is another important structural point that can be made about the authenticity game. That is that progressives tend not to deny the authenticity claims of traditionalists, only that their justificatory base is necessary. That is, we tend not to see
progressives deny that George Strait is authentic, but they might deny that an artist needs to satisfy any given rule or signifier which is marshalled out as justification for his authenticity. Thus, the reifying moves of traditionalists are more often reminding progressives of their extant commitments rather than telling progressives to commit themselves to something new. This should not surprise us as, (as I will argue in a later section), valuing tradition has been a constant component of country music’s practical identity since its conception. Negotiation on this matter is only ever a negotiation of the extent to which we should value tradition and over which combinations of signifiers are sufficient to establish it.

The traditionalist position is a conservative one which asks progressives to proceed with caution so as to safely guard the practical identity that the community has found valuable, and which connects listeners to country music’s past. If country music stops playing the authenticity game and doesn’t preserve its identity, then it runs the risk of simply becoming something else. However, if it fails to adapt to different social circumstances, it will fail to connect with younger artists who are interested in the latest trends. The progressive position is that the flame of country music can only be kept alive by keeping the genre relevant to new listeners. The strategy which unifies progressive movements in country is one of meeting new audiences where they are, by combining musical features characteristic of country music with those characteristic of more contemporary and popular genres. As new audiences enter the community, they might only be attracted to the descriptive features of the genre at a given time, so traditionalism encourages artists to preserve the values and practical identity of the genre as well. The larger the community is, the more difficult it is to maintain a common practical identity that satisfies everyone while still setting the genre apart from the larger musical community. The tension between these two forces, the authenticity game, is what has allowed country music to thrive.
across generations where other popular music genres burned out. That is, it manages to stay relevant but also stay the same.

Finally, I take this account of authenticity to be a defense of the traditionalist position only incidentally. For entirely contingent reasons, progressive strategy within the larger practical identity game has shifted away from attributing authenticity. We often don’t see revising moves within the authenticity discourse along the lines of those defending Florida Georgia Line above. Progressives still participate in the larger game by covering and collaborating with artists and by appealing to signifiers and to the values of country music’s practical identity, but they aren’t typically attributing authenticity directly to songs or artists. This has left those defending authenticity discourse as de facto defenders of the traditionalist position because they are defending a field of play in which only the traditionalists are currently making moves. My point in defending an account of authenticity is that traditionalists are not wrong to make these moves and, in doing so, I also gesture towards a space of play within the genre’s aesthetic practice in which progressives could make moves like those above. This is not to say that no progressives make authenticity claims directly, but that this is an underutilized space and that traditionalists are wise to use it as they do (and progressives may be wise to do the same).

If, as I have argued, country music is a dual character concept, and authentic country music is that which embodies the genre’s values, then we might wonder what those values are. After all, we can offer accounts of the values of other supposed dual character genres like punk (Prinz 2014). Since these values are subject to constant negotiation and revision, what binds the signifiers of country music practical identity at any given time may be contingent and unrepresentative of its history. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, it is my contention that the

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24 In this way, authenticity in country music may be thought of as a ‘floating signifier’ along the same lines as McLeod has argued in hip-hop (McLeod 1999).
importance of tradition has been consistent throughout country music history and is endorsed (at least to some degree and in some respects) by both sides of the debate. Note that this is a commitment to tradition as such as much as it is a commitment to the country music tradition. Tradition, here, consists in a shared sense that the way things were is something worth either preserving or getting back. While it can take on many forms, this romanticism about the past (in various forms) is central to the web of identity for country music. It is potentially subject to revision, but it is deeply interwoven into country music’s aesthetic practices.

*The Values of Country Music*

As mentioned above, the emergence of country music as a commercial genre, distinct from folk and traditional music, historically follows the movement of Americans from rural to city living in post-war America. Country music served a functional role of connecting people to the traditional way of life, the family, and the places that they left behind. In this way, the romanticization of the past (personal or historical), of traditional values, and of rural life runs fairly deep. In terms of reflecting on an idyllic childhood in a pristine rural environment, we find songs like Sturgill Simpson’s “Pan Bowl”, John Prine’s “Paradise”, and Steve Earle’s “The Mountain”. Likewise, these rose-colored reflections on the past can also extend to one’s love life. George Jones’ “If Drinking Don’t Kill Me (Her Memory Will)”, “The Grand Tour”, and “He Stopped Loving Her Today” are all entries into a longstanding tradition of songs featuring a protagonist who can’t stop dwelling on a relationship that has long since come to pass. Also included in this tradition are songs like George Strait’s “Fool Hearted Memory” and “You Look So Good in Love”, and Bobby Helms’ “Fraulein”. Importantly, country music breakup songs often go out of their way to signal that the breakup is not a fresh wound, but something that has been dwelled on for years.
Finally, this importance of connecting to the past also includes the self-referential value that country artists and listeners place on the country music tradition. This is to say that the idyllic rural childhood of the archetypal country song also includes the time one spent listening to traditional country music. In this way, country artists can serve the reconnecting function of country music by referencing country music history in the same way that they can by referencing the rural environment. Songs like Dillon Carmichael’s “Old Songs Like That”, George Jones’ “Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes”, and Randy Travis’ “A Few Ole Country Boys” all feature the artists’ attempts to appreciate or situate themselves within the musical tradition that has served them throughout their lives. What is interesting about this phenomenon is that it can make sense of why traditionalists ultimately relent to the influence of outside musical influences in the end. The Bakersfield scene can reject Chet Atkins’ ‘countrypolitan’ sound for being inauthentic because it wasn’t the music of their past, but (decades later) Sturgill Simpson can name his authentic country album *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music* as an homage to Ray Charles’ countrypolitan classic *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* because it was the country of his past.

While the story above sounds conservative (and it is in a way), progressives also often appeal to tradition in their revising moves. For instance, Hank Williams Jr. makes a revising move in “Family Tradition” by framing his shift away from a more traditional sound and towards a sound more rock and blues inspired as in keeping with the tradition that his father established. Likewise, when Kacey Musgraves’ album *Star-Crossed* was denied consideration in the 2022 Grammys’ country music category on the grounds that it was a pop album, Musgraves didn’t appeal to musical or sonic facts to defend her claim to having made a country album. Instead, she appealed to country music’s self-conception as a ‘family tradition’ by posting pictures of herself
on Instagram with authentic country artists like Loretta Lynn, George Strait, and Alan Jackson (among others) (Aswad & Willman 2021). This should be understood as a revising move which assumes a shared commitment to tradition.

Beyond this, we can see tradition pop up in the justificatory base of other progressive country songs (even if they are not progressive sonically). In addition to the intersectional feminist message of Loretta Lynn’s “The Pill” and “One on the Way” (which examine the ways in which the feminist movement at the time failed to make inroads for rural and working-class women), Margo Price’s “Pay Gap” stands as another feminist country song which appeals to the traditional value of work ethic in order to advocate for women’s equality. Similarly, within the small but significant tradition of LGBTQ country artists, Patrick Haggerty’s 1973 album *Lavender Country* makes a revising move by utilizing the imagery of isolated rural life to tie the freedom from social and financial pressures that country music fans want and expect from life on the range to the freedom of sexual expression.25

Tradition is also acknowledged by progressives when it comes to race. Stoney Edwards’ classic “Blackbird (Hold Your Head High)” appeals to wisdom of the family of the narrator’s youth in recounting the racism that he faced. Meanwhile, otherwise traditionalist artist Tyler Childers’ “Long Violent History” connects protests over racist police brutality in the present to Appalachian union coal miner’s history of resistance (such as in the Battle of Matewan) in order to make progressive moves in the practical identity game. A similar phenomenon occurs in indigenous Australian country artist Harry Williams’ song “Streets of Old Fitzroy”, where he appeals to his traditional Koori upbringing, environment, and values as part of an anti-colonial

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25 For further reading on the relationship between gender, sexuality, and country music, see (Hubbs 2014).
statement. Finally, Merle Haggard appeals to traditional values about work ethic when he criticizes the American ranching industry’s treatment of migrant workers in “The Immigrant”.

This is not all to say that country music is, on average, progressive, but just that its valuing of tradition need not be politically conservative. Rather, as seen in Margo Price’s “Pay Gap” or Merle Haggard’s “The Immigrant”, country artists who advocate for progressive social and political causes (and progressives with regards to country music) do so by appealing to the same traditional values (like the importance of hard honest work and rugged individualism) that conservatives (or country music traditionalists) might. Progressive songs and artists, in this sense, appeal to tradition as a way of situating new signifiers within a context of identification for country music listeners. I take this as some evidence that considerations of tradition are central to the common practical identity of the country music community (whether one is generally a traditionalist or progressive). This is the sense in which the reifying moves of traditionalists are reminders meant to enforce an established commitment rather than novel recommendations alien to the practical identity of progressive country music fans.
Chapter 5 – Why There Are (Almost) No Rap Cover Songs

Work in the philosophy of art has sought to situate the nature and appreciation of cover songs in the larger context of popular music (Magnus et al. 2013; Gracyk 2012/2013). This literature has pointed out that versioning practices differ between genres, and that these genres carry with them their own logic for recording and appreciating covers. For instance, where various kinds of covers proliferate in rock music, there are only ‘versions’ in jazz. Yet, hip-hop stands out among popular music genres for its apparent relative lack of cover songs (Appel 2017; Kruse 2016; Hein 2020). This is despite an otherwise high degree of intertextuality. Rappers and hip-hop producers are more than willing to quote, sample, and refer to one another and artists outside of the genre (Williams 2014). Such borrowing happens frequently enough that some have argued that “hip-hop mostly adheres to [a] unconcealed borrowing aesthetic” (Williams 2014, 204), that it represents an “‘open-source’ culture” (Williams 2013, 167), or that “rap is explicitly an art of appropriation” (Shusterman 1995, 274). We might, then, wonder why a genre known for its many and varied ways of borrowing would feature so few covers compared to other genres.

It is important to point out a few things about the problem that this paper will work to solve (that of why there aren’t rap cover songs). First, this is the question of why rappers don’t cover the work of other rappers. There are, in fact, covers of hip-hop songs by artists in other genres. A good answer to the question will reflect the fact that this phenomenon is one of how rappers relate to one another. As such, we want to avoid solutions which ought to (but don’t) apply equally to other genres, or which might provide rappers with reason to avoid sampling, quoting, or interpolating (which are all seen as legitimate versioning practices). Second, we
should recognize that the norm which works to prevent rap-to-rap cover songs is as much an ethical norm as it is an aesthetic one. The hip-hop community refers to forbidden versioning practices as ‘biting’, and by biting, one is not just producing a work that is worse off on account of that. The community takes that person to have committed an ethical violation. A good account of why there aren’t rap covers should reflect the ethical dimension of the norm as well. These considerations will give shape to our discussion and constrain a successful account.

Here, I argue that there are socio-historical and social-psychological reasons that hip-hop, as an aesthetic practice, developed as an honor culture. Participants in honor cultures place a premium on their reputation and go to great lengths to avoid a reputation for stealing or cheating from others within the community. This, in turn, informs what kinds of versioning practices are undertaken by rappers and accepted by hip-hop audiences. Not only does this provide us with a successful account of why there aren’t rappers covering other rappers according to the criteria outlined above (and is subject to fewer problems than other proposed theories), but it also explains other features of hip-hop versioning practices and predicts features of potential counterexamples.

The first section outlines the factors which tend to lead to the development of an honor culture, how honor cultures function to resolve the problem those factors cause, and argues that the hip-hop community is, indeed, an honor culture; outlining how and why that culture developed. The following section surveys alternative theories of why there aren’t cover songs in hip-hop, the defects with these accounts, and explains why these concerns aren’t a problem for the honor account. The third section looks at a few potential counterexamples and at the issue of non-rap covers of hip-hop songs. Finally, the fourth section relates the reputational norm to other nuances of rap versioning practices.
Hip-Hop as an Honor Culture

To begin, it might be helpful to understand the factors which tend to lead to the development of an honor culture, as opposed to what has come to be known as a so-called ‘culture of dignity’ (Berger 1983). Once we have a clear idea of what conditions enable an honor culture to emerge, and how a system of honor addresses the peculiarities of conflict resolution under such conditions, we can turn to the question of how these conditions obtained in hip-hop and whether concerns about honor are present in the community.

In general, an honor culture emerges as a solution to conflicts within a community. In cases where a third-party arbiter is nonexistent or otherwise unable to resolve conflicts (especially those concerning theft), honor systems develop as a way to regulate behavior between individuals and groups. For instance, given that herding communities tend to develop in mountainous places of low population density, it has historically been difficult for police to respond to raids in a timely manner. Likewise, that herds (which form the basis of a group’s livelihood) can be more easily stolen than farms and are so valuable incentivizes groups to raid frequently and in a costly manner. Without a leviathan to resolve such conflicts, herding communities tend to be more likely to develop as honor cultures than their farming counterparts (Nisbett & Cohen 1996; Cao et al. 2021).

Similar conditions obtain among street gangs and organized crime more generally. While law enforcement could arrive in time to resolve conflicts between rival gangs in most cases, involving them would almost invariably lead to their coming to know of the underlying crime which these groups are organized around. This leaves the community in a functionally equivalent state to those herding communities. In the same way, the inability of one gang to call the police in the event that they are victimized also incentivizes rival gangs to prey upon them. Likewise,
while referees in soccer and basketball are empowered to rule on fouls, baseball umpires typically don’t govern over interpersonal conflict among players. This has led to the development of an honor culture in baseball (Turbow & Duca 2010). This is just to say that as long there are concerns about fair competition and an inability to call on a third-party arbiter, honor cultures can emerge to regulate behavior even in subcultures.

How do honor cultures work to regulate the behavior of community members? They tend to place considerable importance on reputation, instilling a strong sense of group identity, and through mechanisms of collective responsibility. Here, individual members identify with their respective groups (be they families, gangs, or teams) such that a slight against the individual member is a slight against all members. Given that other group members can be held accountable (because they are collective responsible) for the actions of one member, groups are incentivized to self-regulate. If a member $x$ of group $a$ steals from group $b$, all members of group $b$ are entitled to punish member $y$ of group $a$. Given the asymmetry of such a response, if an individual acts out, that individual’s group is likely to punish them swiftly and harshly to communicate to rival groups that they will not tolerate that sort of behavior from their own members (and thus avoid a reputation as a group of thieves or cheaters). In turn, individuals are incentivized to avoid acting out for fear of this punishment or of being ostracized by their group. This leads to a situation in which groups and individuals are highly motivated to be seen by their rivals as playing by the rules, as being predictable and reliable (in punishing their own members or in responding to slights against their members). The worst thing you can be is a thief or a cheater and the worst punishment you can have is a reputation for cheating, thievery, or frequently causing conflict because it will lead to punishment from all sides or ostracization by one’s group.
Since reputation is such an important commodity, honor cultures tend to develop elaborate and/or varied ways of respecting and using one’s reputation. Upstarts pay homage to more established community members by bowing, kneeling, referring to them by certain titles, or by acting in other circumscribed ways. This communicates to all members of the community that while they do not yet have a reputation for reliability, they understand the rules and respect them. Alternatively, they can risk considerable damage to their reputation by challenging more established members of the community so as to bolster their fledgling reputation. This is a risky maneuver. On the other hand, those with established reputations can extend theirs to junior community members so as to support and endorse them. With the support of a senior member, that junior member of the community might begin to take on their own reputation. These features do not directly play a role in conflict resolution but emerge out of the priority that community members place on reputation.

As we have seen, honor cultures arise in response to a certain judicial predicament within a set of social conditions. What is the evidence that this predicament or this response occurred in the hip-hop community? It might be tempting to say that the honor culture of street gangs followed artists between the two worlds. As we have already discussed, these criminal enterprises are paradigmatic honor cultures. This account is supported by some artists, like Jay-Z who tells us the following:

“…In the streets there aren’t written contracts. Instead, you live by certain codes… A lot of street cats come into the music game and expect a certain kind of honor and ethics, even outside of contracts.” (Jay-Z 2010, 186)

In his autobiography, Rap-A-Lot Records founder and CEO J. Prince provides a similar account of his own emphasis on the honor norms that governed the streets and how these norms served him in his career as a hip-hop CEO: “In the streets, when someone has beef with you, they bring it to your front door… I was used to dealing with those kinds of adversaries. There’s a
strange sense of honor in direct confrontation.” (Prince & Waters 2018, 175) However, the connection between street gangs and hip-hop music is often overplayed if not based in misunderstanding (Neilsen & Dennis 2019; McCann 2017). Much of what rappers say about crime is not strictly autobiographical, so it is unclear the extent to which we should read comments like Jay-Z’s and J. Prince’s as historical (Neilsen & Dennis 2019). What they do tell us, however, is that those working in rap music care about and are sensitive to the demands of honor (regardless of the reason for this sensitivity). This is some prima facie evidence in favor of the norms of honor as operative in hip-hop.

A more plausible story might be that the nebulous and potentially expensive status of intellectual property with regards to sampling might also have played a role in shaping hip-hop as an honor culture. It might be that rappers did not expect to find justice through the intellectual property laws in instances where other rappers steal from them, given that they themselves might be accused of stealing from the sampled artists. This puts them in a similar bind to that of street gangs or organized crime. Without the ability to rely on the leviathan when it comes to intellectual property disputes, we might find an honor system of conflict avoidance through reputational enforcement. This sentiment is stated in a more general way when Erin I. Kelly argues that “behind rappers’ desire to settle the score often lies a firm belief that the law does not, and doesn’t aim to, protect them. If the law doesn’t protect you and won’t deliver justice, you may have to protect your own honor and reputation…” (Kelly 2005, 84)

Importantly, this story isn’t just a speculative one. As Amanda Sewell points out, rappers very rarely sue one another (Sewell 2014). The exceptions to this can be illustrative as well. Sewell recounts the story of Marley Marl filing a lawsuit against Snoop Dogg for sampling from Marl’s track ‘The Symphony’. Snoop Dogg’s response was point out that Marl’s track itself
contained unlicensed samples from an Otis Redding song (Sewell 2014). Likewise, Public Enemy filed a copyright infringement lawsuit after DJ Premier sampled a Public Enemy song on the Notorious B.I.G.’s “Ten Crack Commandments”. DJ Premier responded with an extended recitation on the Gang Starr song “Royalty” in which he accused Chuck D (of Public Enemy) of snitching and complained that he had taken the matter to an outside party instead of abiding by the internal conflict mediation rules of the community. Both of these cases provide us with some evidence that there is pressure in the hip-hop community to avoid intellectual property litigation and for wronged parties to work out their differences without appeal to a third-party mediator. Further, the Snoop Dogg case shows us that this is enforced in part by concerns over further litigation due to sampling. Beyond this, there is evidence to suggest that the amount of sampling and the kind of sampling that artists engage in is strongly influenced by the situation around its legal status. As new court cases resolve, artistic practices change in response (Sewell 2014). This is just to say that there is evidence that the concerns that animate the Snoop Dogg and Public Enemy cases also impact artistic decisions. Why, then, should decisions about covering other artists be immune to these concerns?

Importantly, the conditions which lead to the establishment of an honor culture need not persist for concerns about honor to continue in that community. Despite the fact that police in the American South have resolved the issues in response time caused by isolation and low-population density, the lasting effects of the honor culture which emerged out of Scotch-Irish herding culture in Appalachia continues to perpetuate an ethos of honor in the region to this day (Nisbett & Cohen 1996). This means that hip-hop might continue to be an honor culture even when so-called when issues of intellectual property law are resolved.
In addition to self-professed concerns about honor and honor-conducive intellectual property laws around sampling, we may have more reason to think that rap music is an honor culture. Given that honor cultures traffic in reputational currency, it should be no surprise (if hip-hop is an honor culture) that we find the same struggles to establish a reputation by challenges to a more established member of the community in rap music that we find in honor cultures generally. Established rappers must worry about upstart rappers writing and releasing diss tracks in order to build their reputations. This is detailed in songs like Jay-Z’s “Most Kingz”. Likewise, the same practice of established members of the community lending credibility to the reputation of less established community members that we find in paradigmatic honor cultures is seen among rap artists. Relatively unknown rappers can secure a ‘co-sign’ from more famous or established rappers by having that artist perform a verse on one of their tracks, thus bolstering their credibility and reputation in the community. These are hallmarks of honor culture’s emphasis on reputation and its regulations for building and maintaining it.

Finally, we also frequently see group identification in hip-hop despite it being a genre driven primarily by individual artists. For instance, artists often come together to form collectives that are neither bands nor record labels (e.g.: Screwed Up Click, A$AP Mob, Odd Future, etc). These collectives allow individual artists to pool reputation and to respond collectively to disses to individual members by other artists and collectives. Outside of these collectives, we also see heightened identification with one’s record label (as compared to rock and pop music), and conflicts between artists on different record labels often end in conflicts between multiple artists on those labels. This is just to say that we find a discourse about honor and many of the social hallmarks of an honor culture in the rap world, and this should give us further reason to think that hip-hop is an honor culture.
Before going into more detail about how this resolves the problem of rap cover songs, we should first look at alternative accounts. On one such account, rappers do not cover other rappers because there is a norm of autobiographical fidelity. Here, hip-hop demands that artists ‘keep it real’, which is to say that they are authentic. In order to be authentic, hip-hop artists must only talk from their own lived experience. This is the norm of autobiographical fidelity, and it is endorsed by Imani Perry when she says that “the rapper… is both subject and artist… often the artist is imagined in the popular realm as doing nothing more than verbally expressing his or her experiences, self, and ideas.” (Perry 2004, 39) Many scholars believe that this norm of autobiography is a feature of hip-hop aesthetic practice (Perry 2004, Appel 2017; Albrecht 2008). Further, some suggest that if there is a norm of autobiographical fidelity, then it might explain the prohibition against cover songs in hip-hop. Nadav Appel argues that given that rappers are expected to report their own experience, a rap cover song would not occur to artists and not land among hip-hop audiences, as it would simply report some other person’s experience (Appel 2017).

There are at least two problems with such an account. The first problem is that we may have reason to think that autobiography is not strictly necessary in the genre. For instance, The Coup’s “Me and Jesus the Pimp in a ’79 Granada Last Night” rather straight-forwardly falls in the broader musical tradition of murder ballads. In this case, Boots Riley raps the story of a narrator who murders his father, an abusive pimp who had (himself) murdered the narrator’s mother. Importantly, this story has no resemblance to Boots Riley’s own autobiography as his father was an attorney. Likewise, this song does not suffer from any demerits (ethical or aesthetic) on the basis of rap’s norms. Audiences didn’t reject the song, it caused no controversy
within rap’s aesthetic practice, and it doesn’t strike the discerning rap audience-member as bizarre or inappropriate. If rap music has an autobiographical norm, then we should expect this song to be some violation of it. Of course, the moral presented at the end of the song certainly reflects Boots Riley’s own ideas about the world, but if the endorsement of a song’s moral is all that is necessary to achieve the requisite level of authenticity to render the song acceptable to rap audiences, then it seems like rappers ought to be free to cover any song that they endorse the moral of. Another song, Geto Boys’ “Mind of a Lunatic”, details the narrators’ engaging in sexual assault, murder, necrophilia, and indiscriminate killing sprees. Again, we find that a norm of autobiography that would work to exclude covers ought to, just as well, exclude the possibility of a song like “Mind of a Lunatic”.

The second problem with the norm of autobiographical fidelity as an account of why there aren’t rap cover songs is that it fails to capture the ethical dimension of the prohibition. That is, it may be that hip-hop views autobiographical fidelity as an aesthetic merit, but this does not explain why we should think less of an artist who makes a cover song as a member of the community. On this account, the artist has made bad art but they have not done bad. As such, it fails one of the conditions that we put on any successful account: that it should capture the ethical dimension to the norm at work. We might think that hip-hop audiences think that artists have an ethical obligation to themselves to stay authentic, but the discourse around biting casts the bit artist as the victim, not the biter.

Ethan Hein and Adam J. Kruse also both endorse concerns about keeping it real as the reason for the lack of rap cover songs (Hein 2020; Kruse 2016). Yet, while both authors think about keeping it real in the context of authenticity, they do not explicitly endorse autobiographical fidelity as the key to hip-hop authenticity. Instead of Appel and Perry’s
autobiographical norm, Hein follows Kruse’s contention that authenticity requires originality. On this account, covers are frowned upon because covering involves copying a preexisting work and this fails the norm of originality.

However, we should wonder whether this account can meet the two conditions we outlined for a successful theory. Namely, 1) why is this should be seen an ethical violation in addition to an aesthetic violation and 2) why are sampling and interpolations so widespread. As mentioned already, copying someone’s rap isn’t just an aesthetic demerit. Stealing someone’s lines is a form of ‘biting’ and is frowned upon for moral reasons within the hip-hop community as much as it is for aesthetic reasons. However, we are probably not inclined to think that failing to be original is an ethical problem.

With regards to the second concern, we should recognize that the norm at work governs how hip-hop artists relate to one another, and not how they operate in general. That is, hip-hop’s versioning practices are nuanced. You can’t cover another rapper, but you can interpolate the music in full as the backing track to a rapper (as Puff Daddy did on “I’ll Be Missing You” with The Police’s “I’ll Be Watching You”). The problem with a general norm demanding that hip-hop artists ‘be original’ is that it must explain why it is original to produce “I’ll Be Missing You” but not an equivalent song which interpolates a hip-hop song.

Capturing the rap-to-rap nature of this norm also requires that we recognize that the norm only binds hip-hop artists. It is true that hip-hop listeners and artists value originality, but the same is true for singer-songwriter music and that does not stop James Taylor from covering other artists. The originality thesis does not tell us why originality demands this specific versioning practice or why it does so only in this specific genre. As such, the norm of originality fails both conditions we placed on a successful theory.
Here, the norm of reputation that comes with an honor culture can provide us with a better account of the prohibition against covering. On this view, artists don’t want a reputation stealing the work of other artists, just as herders don’t want a reputation as raiders. Hip-hop artists’ reputations are built off of their success in playing by the rules of the community and those reputations can be destroyed by claims of biting (that is, dishonorable versioning or theft). Covers are seen as a form of biting because hip-hop artists and audiences are especially sensitive to theft when compared to other genres (because it is an honor culture). Since covering could be construed as theft, it is potentially very costly, hip-hop artists avoid it. This gives an ethical dimension to the norm and it explains why this norm only governs the way in which hip-hop artists relate to one another. This is a regulation for how members of that community interact. It does not bind artists outside the genre so as to prevent them from covering hip-hop artists and it does not prevent rappers from interpolating or sampling works outside of that community.

Thus, rappers are free to inhabit non-autobiographical roles in their songs so long as they are not attempting to (or incidentally) passing off someone else’s reputation as their own (whether that is their reputation for technical skill in rapping or their persona). This caveat allows us to explain why Lupe Fiasco’s “Hip-Hop Saved My Life”, in which the entirety of the song is a recounting of the life of fellow rapper Slim Thug, is written from a third-person perspective. Lupe Fiasco is free, under the rules of an honor system, to honor another’s reputation and legacy, but that same culture of honor provides very strong incentives not to risk inadvertently passing off this biography as his own. This risk is mitigated to some degree by clearly indicating in the song that the artist is telling the story of another person’s life (through the use of the third-person perspective). Importantly, if rap had a norm of autobiographical fidelity which prevented covers, then that same norm should have prevented “Hip-Hop Saved My Life” as well. On the honor
account, it is not so much that there is expectation that artists talk about their own life, but that they don’t (actually or in appearance) pass off someone else’s persona or work as their own.

Potential Counterexamples

Despite the apparent lack of cover songs in hip-hop, there are still some potential counterexamples to this rule. It is worth pointing out that if these counterexamples are problematic, they are problematic for any account. Counting these as covers and placing any importance on that is to work to deny the problem in the first place, not any proposed solution. However, the account that we have so far provided should not be read as barring rap cover songs entirely but as explaining why there generally aren’t cover songs in rap music. The norm of reputation is a norm like any other, and just as people routinely violate moral norms, they can also violate aesthetic and ethical norms in their aesthetic practice. An honor culture is a system of structures and incentives that generate a pattern of behavior. This does not mean that, regardless of the circumstances of each individual case, it will produce the same results. Despite this, the norm of reputation can still predict things about these counterexamples that other accounts cannot, which I take as some evidence in its favor.

Horace E. Anderson Jr. points to two examples as among the closest that rap has to cover songs (Anderson Jr. 2011). The first is Snoop Doggy Dogg’s “Lodi Dodi”, which is sometimes said to be a cover of Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew’s “La Di Da Di”, and the second is Pharoahe Monch’s “Welcome to the Terrordome” which is said to be a cover of Public Enemy’s song by the same name. In the case of “Lodi Dodi”, Snoop Dogg is quick to mention Slick Rick (who wrote and performed the rapping on the Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew song) in the opening of the song. This seems to be an effort to make clear that he is not only aware of the original, but aware that the audience is as well. We can see this as some effort to ensure that his
homage to “La Di Da Di” is not read as an attempt to cash in on Slick Rick’s reputation. Likewise, the lyrics and instrumentation have been altered (significantly in the case of the instrumentation) from what we find in “La Di Da Di”. This is not to argue that “Lodi Dodi” isn’t a cover, but that between the changes and explicit preface referencing the original, the song seems like it endeavors to pay homage to the original in a way that is explicitly aware of and sensitive to the reasons why covers don’t typically happen in rap music. Thus, that Snoop wants to make clear that the song is an homage and not an effort to pass Slick Rock’s work off as his own renders the song more an exception that proves the rule rather than a counterexample.

Further, the tendency to pay homage to those with established reputations is entirely explicable (not just permissible) on the honor account.

Likewise, with regards to “Welcome to the Terrordome”, we again find an entirely different instrumentation beneath Monch’s rapping and significant alteration of the lyrics (Pharoahe Monch only performs the first verse from Public Enemy’s song and replaces the third, fourth, and fifth verse of the Public Enemy song with a second verse of his own). Without the explicit preface that we find in “Lodi Dodi”, “Welcome to the Terrordome” might be a stronger counterexample to any account of the norms which prevent covers in rap music than “Lodi Dodi”. However, there is still something that the norm of reputation can say about the song.

First, both of these songs are incorporating elements from two of the most famous and iconic songs in the history of rap. It would be quite surprising if audiences took either as completely original and, as such, there is probably little risk for either artist in audiences interpreting these as attempts to cash in their predecessors’ reputation. An article in the hip-hop magazine Complex addresses this point when discussing biting: “as a general rule, the less well known the line and the less obvious the origin, the more likely a rapper is trying to pass it off as
their own without credit.” (Pigeon 2016) In contrast to this, both the autobiographical fidelity and originality accounts provide us with no explanation of why covering only iconic songs and shouting out the original artist early in the song might make a rap cover song more palatable to artists and audiences.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that it is not uncommon for non-rappers to cover rap songs. While I have argued that these covers are not counterexamples because they are not violations internal to the hip-hop community, they might still be able to teach us something. Often these take the form of acoustic or indie-pop covers of rap songs by white artists. While they are common and popular, they are not free of aesthetic or ethical controversy. Representative concerns about this trend include a worry that the songs give cover and an excuse for white artists to use racial slurs, concerns about appropriation, and the tendency for the covering artist and/or music critics to view these covers in a condescending way (that the white indie artist is typically seen as contributing a depth and nuance that the critic takes to be absent in the original) (Hess 2005; Hein 2020; Bassil 2014).

Importantly, these are not hip-hop covers and the covering artists are not members of the hip-hop community. If the norm which works to prevent covers in hip-hop is one of maintaining one’s standing and reputation within a community, we wouldn’t expect it to have any force outside of that community. As such, it is perfectly consistent with the honor account that these non-rap covers exist. Further, if the norm is one of how members of community ought to interact, then in cases where these covers are seen as ethically problematic we should expect to find that they are so for different reasons than rap-to-rap covers, which is precisely what we find. This is just to say that a good account of the norm at work in preventing rap covers of rap songs ought to be narrow enough that non-rap covers of rap songs aren’t bound by it and, if they are
problematic, then it is for the reasons that people they are. Here, the norm of reputation succeeds as well.

**Versioning Practices in Hip-Hop**

Beyond the examples mentioned above, the ways that rappers can and do borrow from other sources are varied and nuanced. As mentioned above, a violation of acceptable versioning practices is often referred to as ‘biting’. Biting covers things ranging from outright plagiarism to adopting the general sound (vocal or instrumental) or stage persona of another rapper. On the other hand, the rules of biting allow things like sampling, quoting or reappropriating particular bits of lyrics, and/or rapping over the instrumental track from another song. Thinking of rap music aesthetic practice in terms of the genre being an honor culture may help us understand the norms surrounding biting as well as those governing covers more specifically.

In a similar vein, we find mixtape tracks like J. Cole’s “Royal Flush” and “Knock Knock”. In rap music, mixtapes are not merely curated cassette tapes of various artists’ songs. Instead, they are typically free albums put together by one artist which are often supposed to work as promotional items between more official studio releases. There may be some original songs, some unreleased scratch recordings, remixes, and/or freestyles. As opposed to albums, mixtapes are more likely to feature shorter songs that consist only of an extended verse. In the case of “Royal Flush” and “Knock Knock”, we sometimes find songs incorporating elements from other songs or merely featuring the artist rapping over the instrumental track from a song by another artist. Both of these songs fall into this category, with “Royal Flush” drawing on Big Boi’s song of the same name and “Knock Knock” drawing from Monica’s song of the same name. In some cases, tracks like these could not only feature the instrumental of the original presented without modification, but also leave the original chorus in place, or feature the artist
rapping new lyrics to the same rhyme-scheme and cadence that the original artist used on their original verses (that is, using the original artist’s ‘flow’).

Like ‘Lodi Dodi” and “Welcome to the Terrordome”, these tracks are usually to be understood as an homage or tribute to the original where there is little risk of the artist being seen as attempting to cash in on the original artist’s reputation given the popularity of the song and given the level of background knowledge about the genre that artists expect from mixtape audiences as opposed to those who only engage with their official studio albums. Indeed, the fact that tracks like these are reserved for free mixtapes further supports this reading as any confusion about credit for the song results only in increased clout for the artist as opposed to them earning money the way that they would if the song was a cover on an official album. Likewise, while these songs sometimes have the same title and instrumentation as the original, they are understood by audiences as distinct songs. For instance, in order to introduce “Dead Presidents II”, a song that features the instrumental track and chorus of Jay-Z’s song of the same name, J. Cole discusses an interaction with a listener about an earlier mixtape track (“Dead Presidents”) using the same instrumental and chorus. The retelling of this story and how it motivated J. Cole to produce “Dead Presidents II” takes place during the outro of the preceding track, “Lights Please”:

“Allright, if y'all… heard the first [mixtape], The Come Up… then you would have heard part one of this joint right here. It's ‘Dead Presidents’, you know classic… that's classic [Jay-Z] shit. So, I did it, threw it on the first mixtape, this is about a year ago… and there was always this one [listener] that stuck out to me … he was just… like, 'Yo, you didn't come right man. If you gon' come on ‘Dead Presidents’ son, you gotta come, hard son, you gotta come harder than that son’… that shit always stuck in my mind, so doing this next, you know, doing this The Warm Up I was like, damn, I gotta get on it again, I gotta do it again.”

It is clear from his comments that the listener understood J. Cole to be rapping on “Dead Presidents” not rapping “Dead Presidents”. This is to say that Cole takes himself to be
performing a different song which uses the original track as a backing track. Insofar as we think a cover is the same song as the original, Cole’s statements give us reason to think that he doesn’t take himself to be performing a cover.

This example also illustrates that, in addition to paying homage to the original, artists take on some risk in using a classic of the genre as a backdrop for their own verses on their mixtape. The audience is supposed to read the new mixtape track as a kind of extension of the original in which we recognize the up-and-coming artist as of comparable skill to the artists featured on the original. On the other hand, it might do damage to the artist’s reputation if they fail to deliver on the promise of comparable skill. The mixtape track introduces a conversation among rap audiences in which we are asked to consider the artist against the comparison class of rappers on the original version. In some ways, this practice serves the same reputation-building function that challenging another (more established) rapper to a rap battle or extended beef via diss-track would without the potential risk to that (more established) rapper’s reputation. This is to say that mixtape tracks are not only compatible with, but explicable in terms of the practices of honor cultures and the value that they place on reputation.

Finally, we might wonder why the norms and conditions that tend to prevent cover songs from being made in hip-hop don’t apply equally to sampling and the use of instrumentals on mixtapes. The first thing that can be said is that sampling is cooked into the genre in a way that is assumed rather than argued for. This difference is illustrated when no properly acculturated hip-hop listener thinks that Kanye West performed the horns on “Touch the Sky” (sampled from Curtis Mayfield’s “Move on Up”), nor do they read Kanye as trying to assert that he did. Once again, the norm at work governs the interactions between members of the community. It does not
act on how hip-hop artists relate to works outside the genre or how artists outside the genre relate to hip-hop songs.

This is reflected in how these versioning practices change with regards to using music from inside the genre. For instance, we still find that using another artist’s instrumental without modification is reserved for specific contexts (like mixtapes) where the honor and reputation of all parties can be preserved. Likewise, if a rapper’s song drifts too closely to another’s musically (without it appearing on a mixtape or giving proper credit to the original artist), that rapper will take heat for the transgression. For example, when audiences noticed the similarities between Drake’s “Hotline Bling” and D.R.A.M.’s “Cha Cha”, this was seen as Drake slighting (that is, biting) D.R.A.M. Biting need not be lyrical, and it can extend to production as well. The norm of reputation can explain this in a way that the norm of autobiography can’t. What would it mean for an instrumental to be autobiographical?

Finally, while rap music is (as this moniker suggests) a rapper-forward genre, producers are not free from the demands of honor. It may be true that the hip-hop community at large holds Drake responsible for the biting of D.R.A.M. and not Nineteen85 (the producer of “Hotline Bling”), producers have their own concerns amongst one another. For instance, in discussing the experience of female hip-hop producers, Joseph G. Schloss tells us that “many of the expectations for social interaction in the producers’ community are associated with masculine codes of honor.” (Schloss 2004, 58) Schloss goes on to argue that this code of honor forbids (to varying degrees) producers from sampling a work that has been recently sampled, sampling from anything other than vinyl records, sampling other hip-hop tracks, sampling culturally significant work of considerable respect, sampling from compilation albums, and/or sampling multiple parts from the same record. This model valorizes the ‘adventurous hunter’ who puts in the work to dig
through record bins in a brick-and-mortar store to find obscure albums from which to sample (Straw 1997). The adventurous hunter thus builds their own reputation through effort and by avoiding the appearance of riding on another’s coattails. This is all just to say that hip-hop versioning practices and ethics are complex and nuanced, and while sampling is permissible, it is still heavily regulated by the demands of honor.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we have at least three reasons for thinking that hip-hop arose from conditions conducive to the emergence of an honor culture, and that these influences did carry over the norms of honor (including its emphasis on reputation). First, such an honor culture would better make sense of rap music’s relative lack of cover songs than a norm requiring autobiographical fidelity or originality. It accommodates rap murder ballads (like “Me and Jesus the Pimp in a ’79 Granada Last Night”) and tribute songs (like “Hip-Hop Saved My Life”) in a way that a norm of autobiography doesn’t. Likewise, the norm of originality fails to explain why originality demands hip-hop’s unique scheme of versioning practices or why other genres which value originality don’t have corresponding prohibitions against covering.

Second, the norm of reputation has predictive power when it comes to exceptional cases, which allows us to better understand why the artists made the choices that they did. That is, we can understand Snoop Doggy Dogg giving a shoutout to Slick Rick in terms of the rules that govern hip-hop’s honor culture whereas a norm of autobiography or originality does not have the resources to explain why this would be likely to occur on a rare rap cover song (nor why rap cover songs would tend to be of iconic tracks). Finally, that rap music constitutes an honor culture gives us similar insight into the more nuanced versioning practices associated with hip-hop (including norms about interpolations and sampling).
References


