2. Jazz Research and Online Media

Research on jazz and online media is scarce. The first relevant studies on this topic were published in the late 2000s, but only a few isolated works have been added since then. Consequently, there has as yet been no comprehensive and systematic reflection on jazz-related production and reception practices in digital spaces. Some of the few studies that do exist argue that this is not the fault of jazz scholarship alone, but that jazz musicians have for a long time refused to engage with online media developments. As Haftor Medbøe and José Dias argued in the mid-2010s, "[j]azz has been slow to embrace the power of social media and seems to consistently arrive late at the table be it in the examples of MySpace, Facebook and Twitter" (Medbøe and Dias 2014, n.p.). The authors posit that the jazz sector has historically displayed a preference for maintaining the status quo and reverting to the familiar, evoking the *better times* preceding the advent of the internet. As Medbøe and Dias go on to argue, this skeptical attitude is particularly surprising given that jazz, throughout the many decades of its history, has been continuously and closely linked to innovations in media and technology. These include early talkies, radio, the phonograph record, and developments in recording studio technology that made new forms of sonic expression possible (Medbøe and Dias 2014, n.p.; cf. also Smudits 2007). However, Medbøe and Dias do not provide empirical data to substantiate their assertions on the reluctance of jazz musicians to embrace online media. Consequently, their arguments read more like personal assessments than concrete research findings. The extreme paucity of literature on the relationship between jazz and online media makes it clear that at least jazz research is still skeptical about this topic.

While Medbøe and Dias focus on jazz musicians, a number of researchers have studied the relationship between jazz fans and online media, focusing in particular on the formation of jazz-related communities in digital spaces. The studies in question were all published between the late 2000s and the

mid-2010s, which sets a limitation on the conclusions that can be drawn about the current situation. In a 2010 article on "online jazz fandom activities" (Wall and Dubber 2010, 159), Tim Wall and Andrew Dubber found that jazz fans did not differ significantly from fans of other popular music cultures in terms of their music-related online activities. For example, blogs, forums, web radios, video portals, and early versions of streaming services were utilized to gain knowledge about jazz and listen to music (Wall and Dubber 2010, 161–62). Additionally, relevant research on jazz-related digital spaces has been published by Tom Sykes and Ken Prouty. Sykes (2017) examines the information portal London Jazz News and the Facebook group Gypsy jazz uk (see also Sykes 2013 for details), while Prouty (2012a; 2012b) focuses on the article on jazz published in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia and the forum of the website All About Jazz. Such research shows that online forums are a preferred medium for jazz enthusiasts, particularly for discussing live events (Wall and Dubber 2010, 162). Additionally, by the early 2010s, many jazz fans were already utilizing online portals to learn about and purchase recordings (Sykes 2012, 85). In the 2000s, specific fan and collector practices in the jazz sector also migrated to digital spaces. One such practice is the digitization of rare and hard-to-find jazz records by an online community. This practice, as described by Simon Barber in 2019, involves ripping records and sharing the digitized versions online (Barber 2019, 455). Simon Barber's study references the website My Jazz World, which was online from 2007 to 2010 and enjoyed great popularity among jazz fans seeking obscure jazz records. In short, jazz fans have long been aware of the possibilities of sharing, researching, and listening to music that the internet offers. According to Tom Sykes, online media can be utilized by jazz fans in conjunction with their existing practices, without rendering jazz-related activities obsolete (Sykes 2017, 54–55).

Some of the authors also inquire as to the extent to which the shift of jazz-related activities, particularly those of fans, into digital spaces could potentially influence established jazz discourses that are negotiated offline. While in the pre-internet era, individuals such as music journalists and institutions such as conservatories could be considered particularly powerful discursive authorities in the field of jazz – and certainly still can be to a certain extent – the question arises as to whether or to what extent fans or private individuals can influence jazz-related discourses, given that they are now able to disseminate their opinions and attitudes toward jazz in forums or comment sections of social media platforms, for example. Ken Prouty's work on virtual jazz communities, in particular, addresses a complex array of related issues (Prouty 2012a,

2012b). Prouty enquires into the processes of jazz-specific community-building and knowledge generation in digital spaces. In order to illustrate how digital spaces facilitate the formation of jazz-specific communities and the generation of knowledge, Prouty investigates Wikipedia and All About Jazz as case studies, in addition to Facebook and YouTube, which were already well-established at the time. He demonstrates that these contexts gave rise to their own forms of jazz-related debates, with the Wikipedia article on jazz, for instance, being collaboratively written and continually revised on the basis of sometimes heated discussions. According to Prouty, the primary distinction between public offline debates and those on Wikipedia is that private individuals, not just journalists and academics, have their say in the latter context (Prouty 2012b, 129).

In this context, there is a recurring argument that the balance of power in jazz-related discourses has shifted since the 2000s. Wall and Dubber also argue that online media have made it possible for jazz fans to disseminate their own narratives about jazz more easily, more regularly, and with greater reach than was previously possible, for example, through letters to the editor in professional journals (Wall and Dubber 2010, 162). However, according to Wall and Dubber, hierarchies also emerge in digital spaces, where there are also differences in access to knowledge and music. For example, rare and expensive records are only accessible to those who can afford them. In addition, administrators of forums and operators of internet portals for exchanging and buying records could also be regarded as agents of discourse and taste formation (Barber 2019, 455). Occasionally, researchers argue that the more traditional and potentially taste-forming entities in the jazz sector are increasingly losing their significance. For example, in his work on the production of jazz under the conditions of digitalization, Dean S. Reynolds states that:

> Not only do new media provide adequate alternatives to essential aspects of the traditional recording industry, but they often obviate the need for cultural "gatekeepers" at record labels, newspapers, and other institutions, so that more musicians can deliver more music to larger audiences more quickly and at a lower cost. (Reynolds 2017, 181)

Although Ken Prouty asserts that traditional gatekeepers are not simply becoming obsolete in the age of online media, he also posits that a "fundamental decentralization of jazz discourse" is occurring (Prouty 2012b, 150). While journalists and other authorities would not completely lose their influence, the core

argument goes, the internet would certainly provide constructive spaces for a diversification of discourse participants.

A limited number of studies have examined the experiences of jazz musicians with online media. William C. Banfield asserts that jazz must expand its audience and that young jazz musicians must cultivate new markets (Banfield 2022, 98). This is particularly feasible and imperative in digital spaces, particularly given that there is for the most part no noticeable refusal to engage with online media among young musicians (Banfield 2022, 106). Reynolds also emphasizes, with reference to one of his interviews with jazz musicians, that "jazz musicians are starting to 'think digitally'" (Reynolds 2017, 157). Reynolds then goes on to state, as might be expected, that jazz musicians must now be able to access the internet if they wish to remain competitive. According to Reynolds, it is now common for jazz musicians to distribute their own music via platforms such as Bandcamp and SoundCloud. These two platforms in particular allow musicians to disseminate their own music and curate their own content (Reynolds 2017, 159–62). YouTube is of significant importance due to its audiovisual component, which is why many jazz musicians have begun to post performance videos or live recordings of studio sessions on the platform. The band Snarky Puppy, for example, has benefited to some extent from the use of such videos (Reynolds 2017, 163–65). As Reynolds demonstrates in his interviews, many jazz musicians now utilize digital media platforms for purposes beyond the mere publication of new music or videos. Rather, they "cultivate social profiles" (Reynolds 2017, 176). The practice of posting status updates and photos documenting everyday life on tour or in the studio or sharing Instagram stories has become a regular aspect of the daily business of many jazz musicians. It is therefore unsurprising that those who wish to survive in the music marketplace are not much different from their counterparts in other fields in this regard.

Some authors also reflect on the extent to which online media have a concrete impact on the performance of music or the creative practices of jazz musicians. Tom Sykes, for example, argues that new media can certainly create new relationships between users and media technologies and thus influence the production of cultural content (Sykes 2009, 309–10). It is assumed that certain media environments offer music creators specific frameworks that favor the production of certain specific content, which can only be produced in its particular form within these frameworks. Chris J. Cottell presents concrete results of such processes using the example of videos published by the musician Jacob Collier on Facebook and YouTube, as well as transcription videos shared

by jazz musicians on Facebook (Cottell 2021). The Collier videos, in particular, demonstrate how certain media environments can facilitate or enable the production and distribution of certain specific content. In his article, Cottell focuses on Collier's *#IHarmU* videos, in which he edits videos sent to him by fans of themselves performing short vocal or instrumental parts. Collier adds various audio-visual tracks to these videos in a split-screen process, harmonizing with the source material. This has led to the development of a dynamic exchange between Collier and his fans, as well as a distinctive form of audiovisual and musical collaboration. Neither would be possible without the technological and media infrastructure provided by digital platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Cottell describes the "influence of audiovisual content-focused social media platforms on artistic practice" (Cottell 2021, 3) and also argues that a "shift in social understandings of existing musical practices" (Cottell 2021, 3) is also taking place in the context of digital media platforms. There is no doubt that young musicians like Jacob Collier, who are well known for their openness to diverse musical repertoires and towards the possibilities of expanding creative practices in digital spaces, are triggering a new (actually very old) discussion of what jazz may or can be under changing media-technological conditions.

YouTube, in particular, offers a diverse array of audiovisual representations of jazz. As Prouty (2012b, 145–47) notes, the platform encompasses a range of jazz-related content, including live recordings, tribute videos by fans dedicated to renowned musicians, and instructional videos. It is also noteworthy that some jazz musicians are now utilizing a media format that has been employed primarily in pop music culture for decades: the creation of music videos. These videos not only document the music-making process, as is the case with filmed concert performances and rehearsal room and studio recordings, but also feature narrative elements that are not necessarily directly related to the music. Once again, it is evident that such developments would have been inconceivable without the YouTube platform, particularly given the fact that, apart from a few exceptions (Pillai 2018), music videos had only a subordinate role in the jazz sector during the MTV-era. Following the decline of music videos in the early 2000s due to the economic downturn in the music industry, which resulted in a reduction in the budget available for such productions, there has been a resurgence in recent years, particularly on YouTube (see, for example, Vernallis 2013; Dreckmann 2021; Dreckmann and Vomberg 2023; Korsgaard 2017). As evidenced by my own research (Burkhart 2025) on music videos by the band Sons of Kemet, video clips allow jazz musicians

to convey sociocritical messages in an audiovisual format, circumventing the limitations of relying on lyrics or record covers, which was previously a common practice in jazz due to the prevalence of instrumental music without lyrics (Jost 1999, 61; Knauer 2020, 70). As is typical for music videos, complex intermedial reference structures are constructed that are not immediately apparent when watching the clips.

Initial research has also been conducted on jazz on TikTok. Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström (2022, 107–119; see also Kaye 2022; Kaye 2023) found that jazz-related communities have developed on the platform, with musicians – and not just fans – as the main members. The community-run TikTok channel JazzTok was launched during the global COVID-19 lockdowns, and numerous jazz-specific videos on the platform are still tagged with the hashtag #jazztok. The development of JazzTok videos was facilitated by the interactive features available to TikTok users. In particular, the *duet* feature, which allows existing videos to be duetted in split-screen mode, offered musicians the opportunity to find creative ways of interacting with other musicians in times of social isolation (Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström 2022, 114). Thus, a technical feature of the platform not only facilitated collaboration between musicians, but also contributed to the development of platform-specific music-making practices in jazz.

As Hannah Judd demonstrates, jazz-related memes have been prevalent in digital spaces for some time (Judd 2022). In her article, Judd delineates the dissemination of what was known as *the lick*. This is a brief melodic segment that has been shown to occur in numerous jazz improvisations. To identify instances of the lick, a Facebook group was established in 2010, in which group members typically shared YouTube videos of jazz recordings featuring the lick. Following the musician Alex Heitlinger's publication of a compilation of several recordings on YouTube in 2011, which included this melody segment, the lick evolved into a viral phenomenon (Judd 2022, 397). Since then, not only are jazz improvisations featuring the lick being compiled on various platforms, but numerous musicians are also playing the melody segment themselves and incorporating it into humorous contexts. For example, the musician Adam Neely published a video on his YouTube channel in which he plays the lick on an electric bass for five hours without interruption in continuous repetition (Judd 2022, 407). The lick has long been known beyond jazz circles. This example provides a compelling illustration of the potential for online media to facilitate the dissemination, creative processing, and humorous framing of jazz-specific content (for further discussion, see Galloway 2023; Spencer 2023).

Despite the dearth of literature on jazz and online media, a plethora of potential research topics has already been identified. Some of the aforementioned researchers advocate for further and more comprehensive research on jazz in digital spaces. It is posited that jazz research could benefit from this, as the observation of online media-specific jazz phenomena promises valuable insights into reception practices that would otherwise remain unexamined. As Tom Sykes argued as early as the late 2000s: "[J]azz scholars' understanding of new media and the analysis of its relationship to jazz should lead to a better understanding of jazz audiences and their modes of consumption" (Sykes 2009, 394). Ken Prouty presents a comparable perspective, contending that the examination of online discourses can advance the role of jazz studies as a means of gaining insight into contemporary debates that are not initiated or controlled by established gatekeepers:

> What virtual communities do offer is the opportunity for a wider group of jazz people to engage in this ongoing and long-standing conversation, across vast geographic and demographic spaces. For scholars of jazz, the virtual jazz world also affords us a window through which we can observe – and participate directly in – these conversations as they take place, more rapidly and more broadly than before. It's an ever-shifting work in progress, much like the music itself. (Prouty 2012a, 83–84)

While Sykes' and Prouty's arguments are compelling, this book will not focus on the sphere of jazz reception, as the two authors et al. have done in their studies. In the age of digital media platforms and the creative practices that emerge on these platforms, it seems advisable to examine the contexts of jazz-related production in digital spaces. This should reflect on the extent to which jazz is popular on specific platforms, how musicians use these platforms to present their music, and whether certain logics inherent to these platforms might even contribute to the emergence of new aesthetic practices. The research outlined above on music videos by jazz musicians, the #IHarmU videos, and the JazzTok community suggests that digital platforms can certainly influence the aesthetic practices of jazz musicians. It is imperative that we investigate the concrete effects of platform-specific socio-technical interactions between musicians and media technologies on the creative practices of jazz musicians. This investigation should include an exploration of creative processes and a description of the artistic objects that emerge in these contexts.

Previous studies on jazz and online media have lacked an in-depth reflection on the economic, technological, and political backgrounds of digital platforms. The implicit thesis of Prouty and Sykes et al. that online media would lead to an increasing democratization of jazz-related discourse must be critically re-examined in the age of digital platforms. It is important to note that the majority of the aforementioned writings were published ten to fifteen years ago, at a time when the academic discourse on the platformization of the internet was still in its infancy. Consequently, the lack of reflection on the cultural power that can be generated by platforms may, to some extent, be due to the age of the publications referenced in this chapter.

It is now widely acknowledged that platforms are commercial enterprises with their own specific functional logics, business models, visions, and worldviews. Consequently, they always operate against the backdrop of specific ideologies (Smit 2022, 478). In addition, there are the largely opaque logics of algorithmic filtering which is used by platforms to sort and prioritize content. Research in recent years has shown that these logics are anything but neutral or even inclusive, especially with regard to categories of social difference such as *race* and gender. For example, Noble (2018) and Bishop (2021) have demonstrated that algorithmic filtering is not inclusive of diverse perspectives. It is imperative to reflect on the economic, technological, and social aspects of this phenomenon in order to gain a deeper understanding of both the socio-technical transformations that occur in a platform context and the influence of platforms on music-making practices and the representation of music cultures in digital spaces.