

**Representing truth, creating identity and forming a brand  
through album cover designs: A visual modality analysis of  
*Blue Note Records* and *Factory Records* album covers.**

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Collect two sets of between three and five pieces of visual design that might be taken to represent a particular artist, genre or style, and present a comparison of the *modality* of the images. Try to identify a *modality configuration* for each set of images and relate this to Kress and van Leeuwen's ideas regarding *coding orientation*.

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# 1. Introduction

In traditional linguistics, modality is divided into *deontic modality*, which is concerned with obligation and permission, and *epistemic modality*, which is concerned with the certainty of a proposition. In the social semiotic approach that Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) method of visual grammar subscribes to, only the latter *epistemic* realm of modality is attended to. In this vein, Hodge and Kress define modality as referring to "the status, authority and reliability of a message, to its ontological status, or to its value as truth or fact." (1988: 124) As Van Leeuwen succinctly puts it, "'Modality' is the social semiotic approach to the question of truth." (2005: 160) Crucially though, from the social semiotic perspective, truth is not absolute, but rather context dependent. Hence, social semiotic modality is "not concerned with how true something is, but '*as how true*' something is represented and perceived within a social group." (McMurtrie 2010: 404)

In the interests of a study seeking to better understand the process of branding, an activity that often makes use of visuals in order to build an exclusive relationship between a company and its client base, the issue of how sign-makers represent truth in images is, therefore, of the utmost importance. With this in mind, the various modality choices involved in the representation of truth in visuals will be presented in Section 2, where Kress and Van Leeuwen's system of visual modality analysis will be introduced. (2006) The intention will be to use this system to analyse album cover designs from two different record companies so as to investigate the way in which the visual modality of each cover contributes to each label's particular version of truth, its *modality configuration*, and how, in turn, this configuration contributes to the overall creation of each company's identity, its *brand*.



## 2. The Kress and Van Leeuwen System of Visual Modality Analysis (2006)

### 2.1 Modality Markers

Kress and Van Leeuwen (henceforth 'KVL') (2006) observe that there are certain means of visual expression that, when or increased or decreased, correspond to an increase or decrease in the degree to which an image, diagram or photograph is to be taken as being real. These are what they call *modality markers*, and they are the visual modality equivalent of modal auxiliaries. KVL (2006) have established 8 of these gradable modality markers:

1.) Colour saturation	A scale running from full colour saturation to the absence of colour; that is, to black and white.
2.) Colour differentiation	A scale running from a maximally diversified range of colours to monochrome.
3.) Colour modulation	A scale running from fully modulated colour, with, for example, the use of many different shades of red, to plain, unmodulated colour.
4.) Contextualization	A scale running from the absence of background to the most fully articulated and detailed background.
5.) Representation,	A scale running from maximum abstraction to maximum representation of pictorial detail.
6.) Depth	A scale running from the absence of depth to maximally deep perspective.
7.) Illumination	A scale running from the fullest representation of the play of light and shade to its absence.
8.) Brightness	A scale running from a maximum number of different degrees of brightness to just two degrees: black and white, or dark grey and lighter grey, or two brightness values of the same colour.

**Table 2.1** *Modality Markers*. (Adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 160-162)

However, determining the highest or lowest modality for these 8 markers is not simply a case of looking at whether the value falls at one end of any of the continua or the other. Rather, the degree of modality is determined, for each marker, in relation to different abstract sets of principles or “domains of representation” that govern what constitutes *truth* in a particular context. (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001: 30) KVL (2006), borrowing Bernstein’s (1981) term, refer to these different ontological orientations as *coding orientations*.

## 2.2 Coding Orientations

KVL (2006) distinguish 4 coding orientations: the *naturalistic* coding orientation, which pertains to the common sense way we see the world as defined by the standard of 35mm photography; the *sensory* coding orientation, in which naturalistic standards of modality are exceeded in order to appeal to the senses; the *abstract* coding orientation, which abstracts from the naturalistic standard in order to appeal to an underlying truth; and the *technological* (or *scientific*) coding orientation, which concerns the degree to which a representation can be used as a blueprint.

## 2.3 Modality Configurations

KVL (2006) suggest that the maker of an image can amplify or reduce the values for each of the modality markers so as to more precisely express overall judgements of modality. This, they maintain, allows for a multiplicity of ways in which image-makers can define reality. (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) KVL (2006) refer to this personalized pattern of visual modality choices as being a *modality configuration*.

In this essay, I will attempt to identify a modality configuration for each set of album cover images. However, before doing so, it is worth reviewing some of the limitations of the KVL (2006) method of visual analysis, for any conclusions that I draw must be considered in light of these limitations.

## 2.4 Limitations of the Kress and Van Leeuwen Method of Visual Modality Analysis (2006)

Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) make the valid point that the KVL (2006) framework for visual analysis is predominantly descriptive. Kaltenbacher concurs, stating that a “lack of empiricism is indeed a weak point.” (2004: 202)

Bateman, Delin, and Henschel (2004) make a good point concerning the dangers of deducing the meanings of a piece of visual design, and in turn the stance of the designer, from *post hoc* assumptions made about the design decisions. They argue that it is important to take into consideration the fact that specific restrictions, editorial or otherwise, may well have impacted upon the decisions made by the designer during the method of production of a particular piece of design at the time of its inception. (Ibid.)

Forceville (1999), and Machin (2007), meanwhile, point to the difficulty of interpreting results from a framework in which the modality markers have, as yet, undefined relationships with one another and that are, in themselves, fuzzy categories that represent values falling on a continuum rather than being in binary oppositions to one another.

Finally, Thomas (2014) draws attention to the problem of making claims based on analyses that use a small selection of handpicked examples. In this investigation, in order to counteract this problem, the range of albums chosen for each set were selected from a pre-determined time period, numbered, and then picked according to the results of an electronically randomized generator.

### 3. The Texts

#### 3.1 Blue Note Records

Set up by two German Jews in New York in 1939, Blue Note Records has gone on to become one of the most successful and iconic jazz record labels in the world. As Gayford states, “Other companies recorded wonderful performances, but no other had so strong an identity.” (2009) A major factor in the label’s identity has been accorded to the design of the record covers, prompting Tom Banks to comment that the label’s principle of *uncompromising expression* was realised in both the music and the record sleeve designs, which contributed to the brand as a whole, as well as to the label’s success. (2014)

Featuring photographs taken in-session by part-founder of the company, Francis Wolff, as well as designs by Reid Miles, these Blue Note covers from the 1950s and 1960s are considered by many as being as influential in the world of design as the music on the albums itself is in the world of jazz. Interestingly, though, Dougherty points out that the aesthetic of Blue Note covers, as well as other jazz album covers of the time, “lent an air of racial ambiguity” (2007: 47) that “may tell different stories to black and white viewers.” (2007:52) This latter issue, as well as the way in which the visual choices made in the covers might have contributed to the identity of the label overall, will be investigated in the analysis in Section 4.

## 3.2 Factory Records

Founded in Manchester, England in 1979 by Tony Wilson, Alan Erasmus, and the designer Peter Saville, Factory records prided itself on its musician-centredness and decentralisation. It is also well known for its iconic album covers, many of which were designed by Peter Saville, whose aesthetic has been variously described as “cool, ordered” (Lutyens 2007: 20), “austere, hi-tech” (Ibid.: 20), “stark, graphic” (Gluibizzi 2013: 97) and “minimal.” (Ibid.: 91) Crossley states that, “Saville became...the designer of some of the most famous record sleeves of the era” (2008: 42), while the design critic Paula Carson says that, “Saville’s Factory record covers were the first pieces of art many aspiring designers seriously learned to love.” (Year unknown: 31; cited in Gluibizzi 2013: 97) Hesmondhalgh (2010), meanwhile, talks about how the genre of music known as *indie* prided itself on its cover designs, citing Factory Records as a key example. He goes on to explain how many *indie* record labels, such as Factory, defined themselves in opposition to the prevalent hyper-capitalist body image obsessed aesthetic of that era. (2010) Crucially, Hesmondhalgh points out that *indie*, and thus Factory Records, could only maintain this counter-hegemonic aim through “erecting exclusionary barriers around the culture.” (2010: 38) This particular point will be explored in Section 4 in relation to modality choices associated with the *abstract* coding orientation. (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006)

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Method

4 album cover designs were randomly picked, for each record label, from a range of records released within a given time frame. The first record label chosen was Blue Note Records and the time frame was 1956-1958. These records were all part of the famous 1500 series. The second record label chosen was Factory Records and the time frame was 1978-1988. These records were all part of the famous FAC 1-100 series. For Blue Note Records, only records designed by Reid Miles were considered. For Factory Records, only records designed by Peter Saville were considered. The four Blue Note Records albums are coded B1-B4, and are as follows:

B1: Jutta Hipp – *With Zoot Sims*

B2: Kenny Dorham – *Afro-Cuban*

B3: Lee Morgan – *City Lights*

B4: John Coltrane – *Blue Train*

The four Factory Records albums are coded F1-F4, and are as follows:

F1: Joy Division – *Unknown Pleasures*

F2: New Order – *Movement*

F3: New Order – *Power, Corruption and Lies*

F4: New Order – *Low Life*

The images for all 8 of these albums can be found in Appendix I and Appendix II.

## 4.2 Visual Modality Analysis<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For this visual modality analysis, three extra modality markers were used in addition to the original 8 markers defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen. (2006) These extra three markers are *Hue* and *Purity*, which are taken from Kress and Van Leeuwen's article on the grammar of colour (2002), and *luminosity*, which is taken from Machin's chapter on colour. (2007) For some of the album covers that comprise radically different components, certain modality markers include two scales. Here, the colour green recognises values that were the same for both components.

## 4.2.1 Blue Note Records

<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour --&gt; Black and White)</p> <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour --&gt; Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p> <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified --&gt; Monochrome)</p> <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background --&gt; Blank background)</p> <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour --&gt; Plain, unmodulated colour)</p> <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail --&gt; Maximum abstraction)</p> <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation --&gt; Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p> <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective --&gt; Absence of depth)</p> <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth --&gt; Cold)</p> <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade --&gt; Absence of play of light and shade)</p> <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' --&gt; Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p> <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.1 Modality values for album B1



For album B1, there is a complete absence of contextualization, representation, depth, and illumination. Complete absence of these four values allows the focus to shift on to colour, which is not treated naturally. The colours are highly saturated, minimally differentiated and low in terms of tonal gradation. In addition, the background is completely unmodulated.

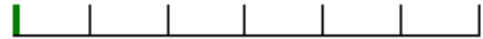
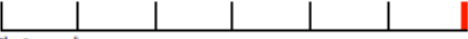

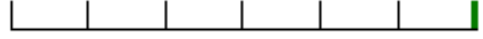

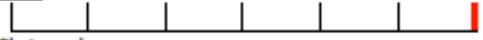





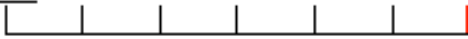





<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour --&gt; Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour --&gt; Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified --&gt; Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background --&gt; Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour --&gt; Plain, unmodulated colour)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail --&gt; Maximum abstraction)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation --&gt; Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective --&gt; Absence of depth)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth --&gt; Cold)</p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade --&gt; Absence of play of light and shade)</p> <p><b>Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Photograph</b></p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' --&gt; Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.2 Modality values for album B2

The entire cover is in a very hot reddish-orange. This colour arguably connotes exuberance, intensity and exoticism. Reducing the colour differentiation to monochrome and increasing the saturation for both the motif and the photograph heightens the sense of the exotic, which is perhaps suggested by the *Afro-Cuban* of the title.

Like with album B1, we have, in the motif, a representation of highly abstracted forms placed on an unmodulated background.

Finally, like we will see in album B4, the musician is presented using a high degree of luminosity. This reduces the otherwise high naturalistic modality of the photograph, ensuring that the musician is presented as somehow otherworldly and, in short, less typically human.

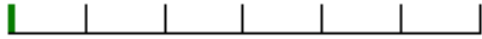










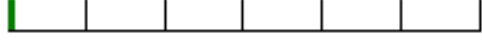
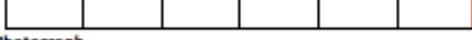


<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour → Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour → Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified → Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background → Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour → Plain, unmodulated colour)</p> <p><u>Background</u></p>  <p><u>Photograph</u></p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail → Maximum abstraction)</p> <p><u>Background</u></p>  <p><u>Photograph</u></p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation → Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p> <p><u>Background</u></p>  <p><u>Photograph</u></p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective → Absence of depth)</p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth → Cold)</p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade → Absence of play of light and shade)</p> <p><u>Background</u></p>  <p><u>Photograph</u></p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' → Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.3 Modality values for album B3

Similar to album B2 and album B4, the choice of hue is made more effective through increasing saturation, reducing differentiation, reducing modulation and increasing luminosity. The effect here is to convey a hallucinatory experience through colour. That colour is a deep saturated red, again suggesting heightened emotions.

The background presents two shades of tonal gradation: bright and dark. It is as if the *city lights* of the title are either turned on or off. The background is a collage of props that have been chosen to connote entertainment and nightlife. The representation of the city has been reduced to contours of its buildings as well as extractions of neon billboard signs.

In this piece, the *essence* of the city at night is conveyed, in large part, through the use of depth as an affordance. Here the decontextualized language of the neon signs, and the contours of the buildings, is emphasized through the maelstrom of different perspectives superimposed upon each other. The affordance of depth, here, works in combination with the treatment of colour in order to create a feeling of disorientation.



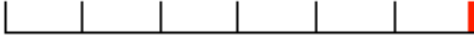

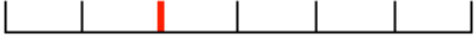






<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour --&gt; Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour --&gt; Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified --&gt; Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background --&gt; Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour --&gt; Plain, unmodulated colour)</p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail --&gt; Maximum abstraction)</p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation --&gt; Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective --&gt; Absence of depth)</p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
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<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' --&gt; Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.4 Modality values for album B4

Similar to albums B1, B2 and B3, the treatment of colour lies at the heart of the meaning potential of this piece. The choice of a cyan/blue hue instead of just a primary blue, and the use of a high degree of luminosity, works in combination to ensure that a sense of cool detachment is achieved rather than just frostiness. The luminosity, like we saw in album B2, also makes the musician seem otherworldly and, in this case, almost god-like. This effect is further enhanced through the combination of a dark blank background, a high degree of representation, and a hyper-real representation of the play of light and shade, with deep dark shadows being cast on the performers face.

The choice of hue arguably amounts to a visual pun in which the title of the album, *Blue Train*, is presented in white lettering, whilst the musician, *John Coltrane*, is presented in **blue**.

## 4.2.2 Factory Records


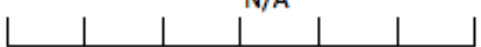









<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour --&gt; Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour --&gt; Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified --&gt; Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background --&gt; Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour --&gt; Plain, unmodulated colour)</p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail --&gt; Maximum abstraction)</p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation --&gt; Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective --&gt; Absence of depth)</p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth --&gt; Cold)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade --&gt; Absence of play of light and shade)</p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' --&gt; Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.5 Modality values for album F1



For this album cover, every modality marker value, except for depth, realizes extreme abstraction. The use of black and white stands in stark contrast to the use of colour in the Blue Note Records covers.



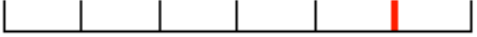
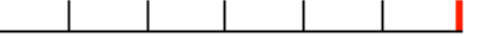
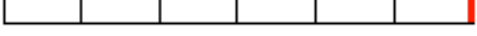
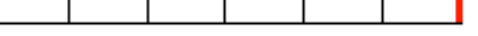

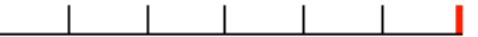
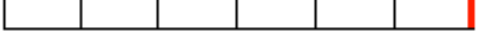
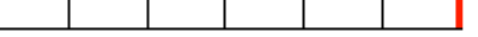

<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour → Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour → Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified → Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background → Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour → Plain, unmodulated colour)</p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail → Maximum abstraction)</p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation → Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective → Absence of depth)</p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth → Cold)</p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade → Absence of play of light and shade)</p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' → Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.6 Modality values for album F2

Like with the Blue Note covers, colours in this piece are highly saturated and minimally differentiated, and the background, like we found in albums B1 and B2, is unmodulated. The key difference is in the purity of the colour chosen, which, unlike the Blue note covers, is hybrid rather than pure. The choice of two colours, blue and turquoise, which are both hues that tend towards the colder end of the colour spectrum, serves to reduce any sense of emotional attachment. This orientation towards emotional detachment is similar to album F1 and constitutes, in both cases, a radical departure from the kind of direct appeal to the emotions we found in the Blue Note albums.

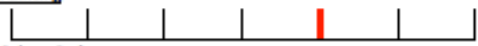
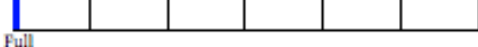



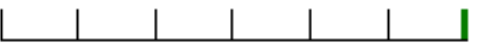
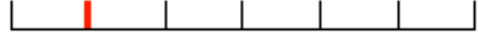
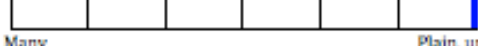




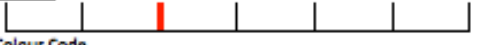
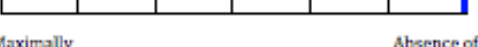
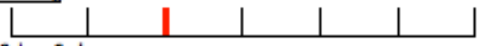
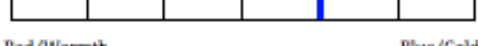

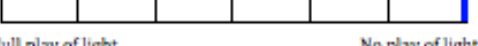

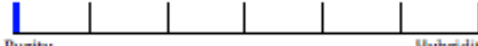
<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour --&gt; Black and White)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour --&gt; Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified --&gt; Monochrome)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background --&gt; Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour --&gt; Plain, unmodulated colour)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail --&gt; Maximum abstraction)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation --&gt; Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective --&gt; Absence of depth)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth --&gt; Cold)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade --&gt; Absence of play of light and shade)</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' --&gt; Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p> <p><u>Painting</u></p>  <p><u>Colour Code</u></p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.7 Modality values for album F3

The meaning of this cover centres on the relationship between the realism of the painting and the colour code. The purpose of including the colour code is to foreground the mimetic process that is actuated through the modality choices made by the painter.

In the painting, differentiation, representation and depth are all close to high naturalistic modality, but illumination, brightness and modulation stray from naturalism. The focus is brought on to the flowers through increasing the representation of shadow on the petals of the flowers, and through increasing the brightness and colour modulation values of the flowers to hyper-real. This effect is enhanced through using a decontextualized background.

The use of a colour code is significant given the fact that two of the principle ways in which the painting exceeds naturalism are related to colour. It is indeed in the realm of brightness and modulation where the biggest differences between the colour code and the painting lie. The plain unmodulated and minimally tonally graded colours of the colour code clash with the finely tonally graded and highly modulated colours of the flowers. This clash is, of course, an integral part of the intended alienation effect brought about by the insertion of the colour code into the *mise-en-scène* of the painting.

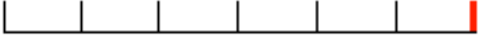



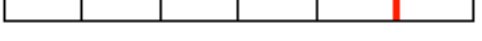

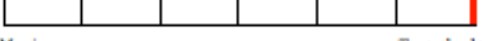

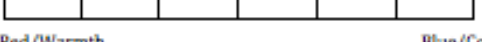


<p><b>COLOUR SATURATION</b> (Degrees of Colour Saturation: Full colour → Black and White)</p>  <p>Full Colour <span style="float: right;">Black and White</span></p>	<p><b>LUMINOSITY</b> (Range from luminous colours to opaque colours: Looks like light shines through the colour → Looks like light does not shine through the colour.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Luminous <span style="float: right;">Opaque</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR DIFFERENTIATION</b> (Degrees of colour differentiation: Maximally diversified → Monochrome)</p>  <p>Maximally diversified <span style="float: right;">Monochrome</span></p>	<p><b>CONTEXTUALIZATION</b> (Degrees of articulation of the background: Maximally sharp and detailed background → Blank background)</p>  <p>Detailed background <span style="float: right;">Blank background</span></p>
<p><b>COLOUR MODULATION</b> (Degrees of colour modulation: Many shades of colour → Plain, unmodulated colour)</p>  <p>Many shades of colour <span style="float: right;">Plain, unmodulated colour</span></p>	<p><b>REPRESENTATION</b> (Degrees of the articulation of detail: Maximum representation of pictorial detail → Maximum abstraction)</p>  <p>Maximum representation of pictorial detail <span style="float: right;">Maximum abstraction</span></p>
<p><b>BRIGHTNESS</b> (Degrees of articulation of tone: Maximum tonal gradation → Two shades of tonal gradation i.e. black and white or just two tones of the same colour)</p>  <p>Maximum tonal gradation <span style="float: right;">Two shades of tonal gradation</span></p>	<p><b>DEPTH</b> (Articulation of depth: Maximally deep perspective → Absence of depth)</p>  <p>Maximally deep perspective <span style="float: right;">Absence of depth</span></p>
<p><b>HUE</b> (Range from Red to Blue: Warmth → Cold)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Red/Warmth <span style="float: right;">Blue/Cold</span></p>	<p><b>ILLUMINATION</b> (Degrees of illumination - articulation of light and shadow: Fullest representation of the play of light and shade → Absence of play of light and shade)</p>  <p>Full play of light and shade <span style="float: right;">No play of light and shade</span></p>
<p><b>PURITY</b> (Range from Purity to Hybridity i.e. pure primary colours to impure diluted colours: Modernist 'Certainty' → Post-Modernist 'Uncertainty')</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N/A</p>  <p>Purity (Certainty) <span style="float: right;">Hybridity (Uncertainty)</span></p>	

Table 4.8 Modality values for album F4

The absence of colour in this album cover, as well as the use of a decontextualized background, allows the focus to shift on to illumination, which is a primary affordance in this piece. The contrast between light and dark is most pronounced on the face, where an unidentified light source coming from the right (as you look at it) creates a hyper real chiaroscuro effect. The play of light and shade also impacts upon the degree of detail of representation, which is lowered due to the body and the left side of the face being engulfed by shadow. The result is a contrast between a highly detailed representation of the face, and a representation of the body that is reduced to just an outline of darkness against a background of light.

## 4.3 Modality Configurations

### 4.3.1 Blue Note Records

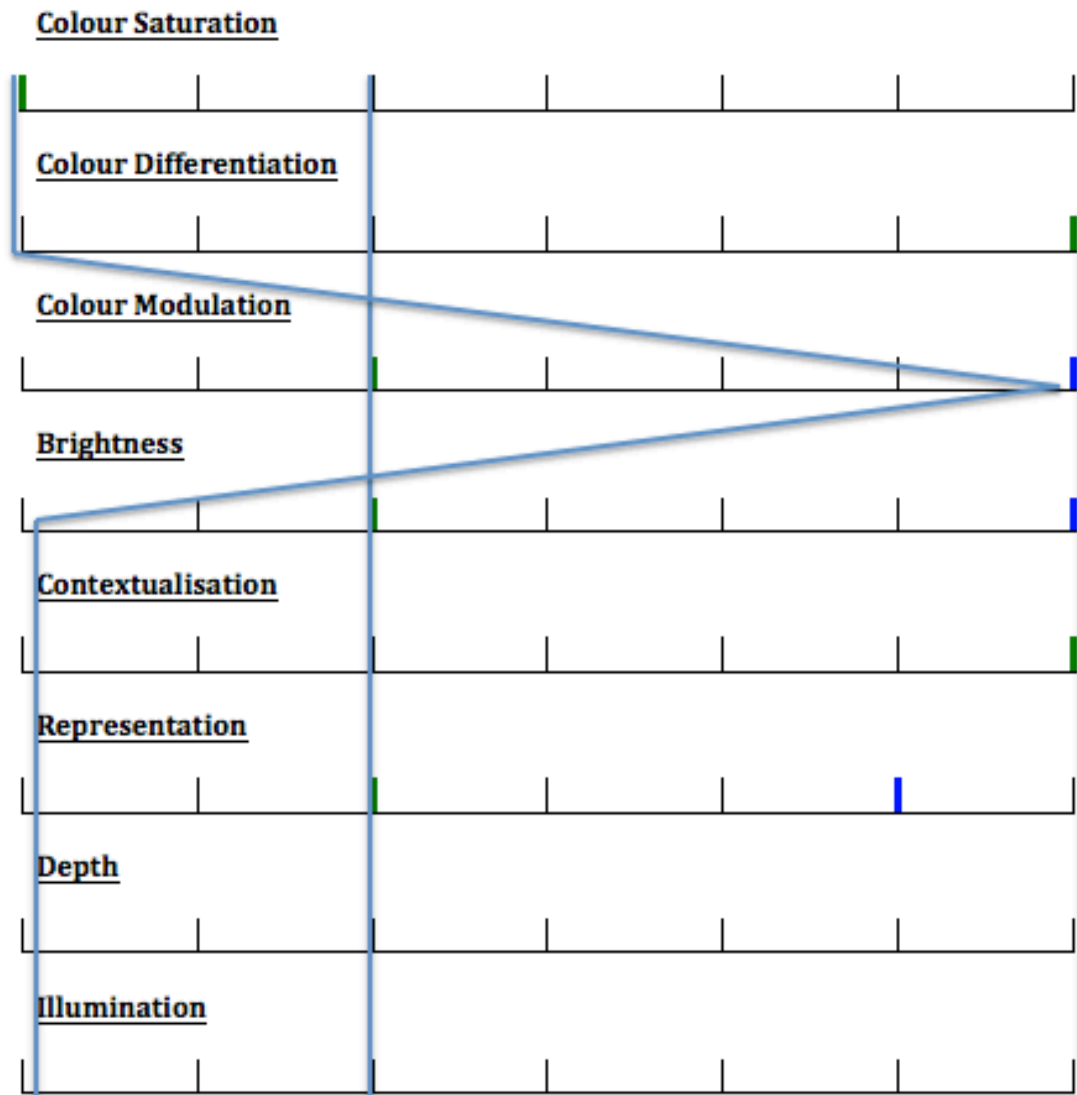


Figure 4.1 Blue Note Records Modality Configuration 1<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The modality marker values in this chart were aggregated from the values of the four album covers and were based on at least three album covers falling within the range of one or two values on the chart for each modality marker. The value with the highest number of album covers realizing it was chosen as the representative value for each marker. It is shown in green. Where less than three album covers fell within the range of two values, for any one marker, no values are shown. **Included** in the aggregations for this modality configuration are the photographs featured in albums B2 and B3. **Excluded** from the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the *motif* from album cover B2 and the *background* from album cover B3, which are both shown in blue. For a marker where only green exists, the blue realized the same value as the green. All values run from exaggeration on the left to abstraction on the right.



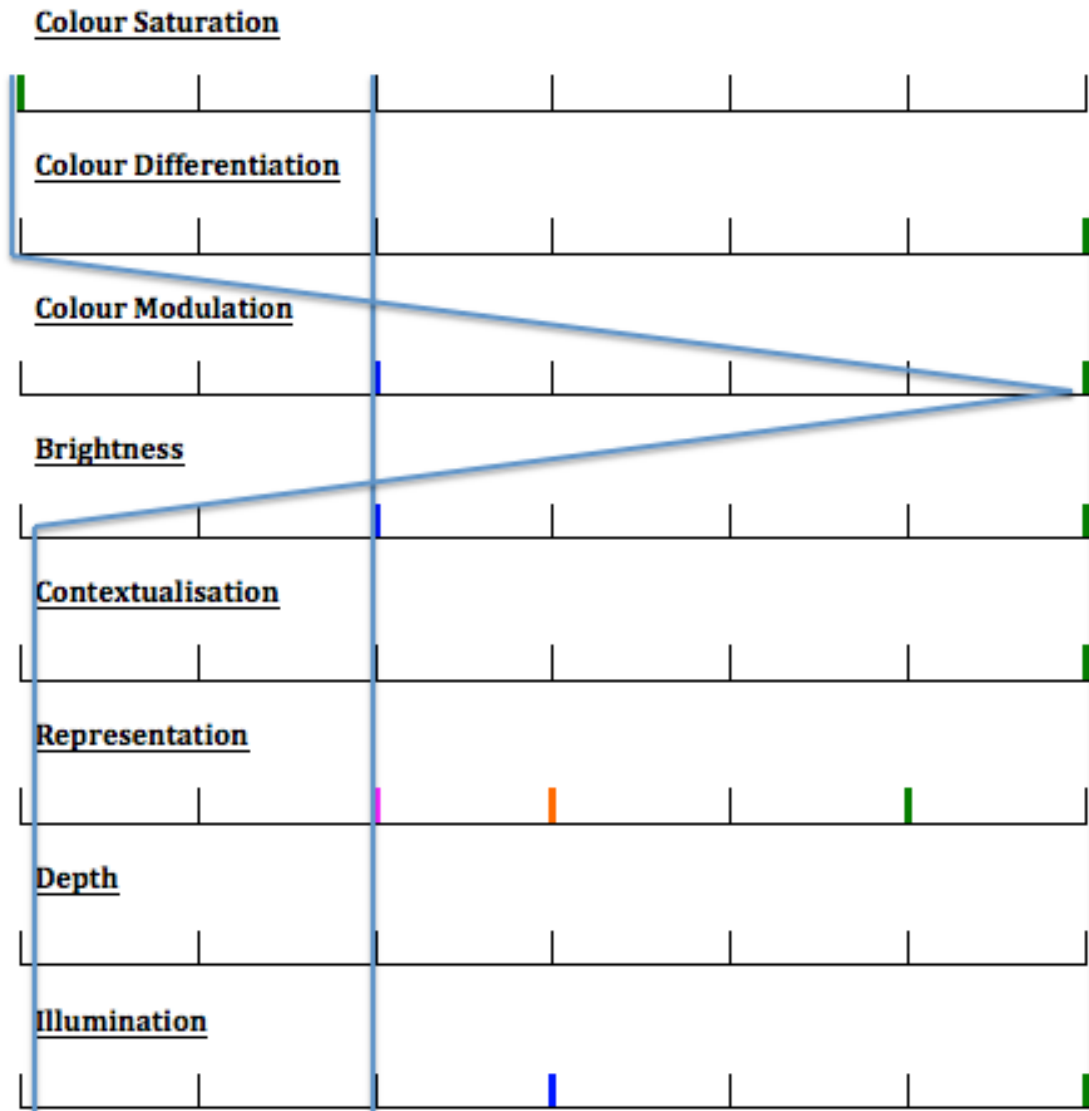


Figure 4.2 Blue Note Records Modality Configuration 2<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The modality marker values in this chart were aggregated from the values of the four album covers and were based on at least three album covers falling within the range of one or two values on the chart for each modality marker. The value with the highest number of album covers realizing it was chosen as the representative value for each marker. It is shown in green. Where less than three album covers fell within the range of two values, for any one marker, no values are shown. **Included** in the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the *motif* from album cover B2 and the *background* from album cover B3. **Excluded** from the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the photographs from album cover B2 and the photograph from album cover B3, which are both shown in blue. For a marker where only green exists, the blue realized the same value as the green. For the *representation* modality marker, the values for the two photographs were different. The value for the photograph for album cover B2 is shown in magenta and the value for the photograph for album cover B3 is shown in orange. All values run from exaggeration on the left to abstraction on the right.

The stance of the image-maker towards the representation of the musician in three of these album covers (B2, B3, B4) encourages us to identify with a truth that is, I would argue, constitutive of a white perspective. The point made by Dougherty that I raised in Section 3 concerning the aesthetics of the album covers lending an “air of racial ambiguity” (2007: 47) that “may tell different stories to black and white viewers” (2007: 52) is pertinent here.

Dougherty, citing Jon Panish, states that, “whites tend to decontextualize the musician and place him in an heroic position.” (1997; cited in Dougherty 2007: 51) In the modality choices made in these three album covers we can see how this has been achieved. By way of orienting to the *abstract* coding orientation in terms of decontextualization and reduced colour differentiation, and by way of orienting to the *sensory* orientation through using increased colour saturation, the high degree of naturalistic modality otherwise achieved by the inclusion of a photograph, is lessened.

The reasons for doing this were twofold. On the one hand, at a time when jazz musicians were starting to be taken seriously as artists as opposed to just performers, there was a need for a greater degree of authenticity, here represented by Francis Wolff’s highly detailed photographs of the musicians ‘in set’. On the other hand, at a time of heightened racial tensions, the prospect of using photographs of black men to market records to a largely white audience was a hard sell.

It is my contention that the use of colour on these covers was, in this sense, politically and economically motivated, realizing a convenient compromise between the (white) market’s demand for authenticity and, simultaneously, the need to lessen the impact of there being a black musician on the cover. As Dougherty states, “the musicians’ race was often downplayed in order to appeal to a wider audience.” (2007: 49) Hence, we are expected to take these representations as *real* only insofar as the assumed ‘we’ is white, and even from a white perspective the proposition is a necessarily ambiguous one. From a black perspective, no doubt, these covers would have constituted an idealized version of the real world as they saw it at that time.

The modality choices associated with colours on these covers also served to build the identity of the record label. Using a combination of high saturation pertaining to the *sensory* coding orientation and low colour differentiation pertaining to the *abstract* coding orientation, a tone for the *mood* of the album was able to be established, and it is the degree to which this mood is conveyed that constitutes a further way in which we are to measure the truth of the proposition. Furthermore, these highly saturated monochrome colours came to be directly associated with records released on the Blue Note label, meaning that the repeated use of these particular modality choices came to define the style and, in turn, the brand of the whole record label.

### 4.3.2 Factory Records

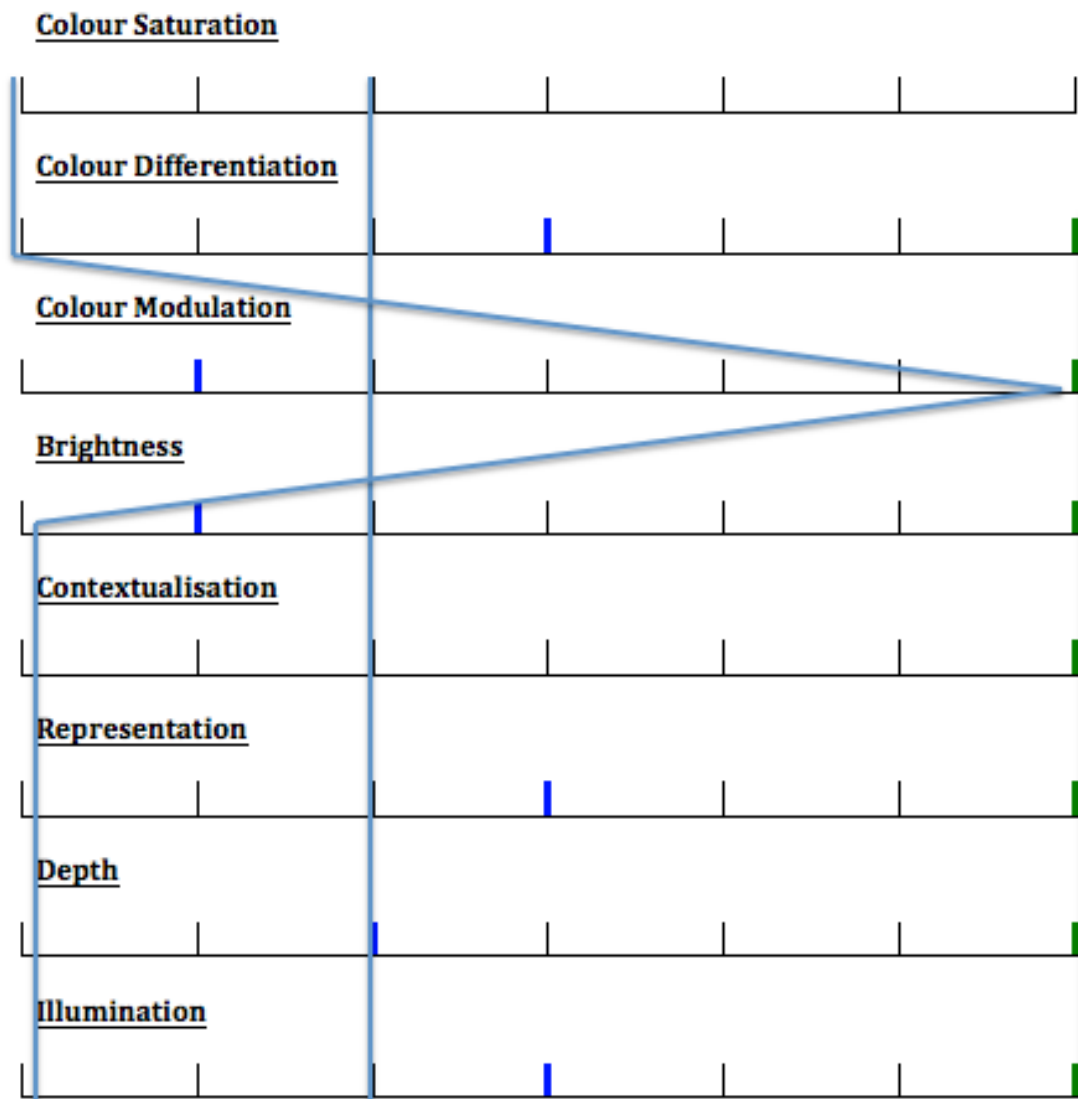


Figure 4.3 Factory Records Modality Configuration 1<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The modality marker values in this chart were aggregated from the values of the four album covers and were based on at least three album covers falling within the range of one or two values on the chart for each modality marker. The value with the highest number of album covers realizing it was chosen as the representative value for each marker. It is shown in green. Where less than three album covers fell within the range of two values, for any one marker, no values are shown. *Included* in the aggregations for this modality configuration is the colour code taken from album F3. *Excluded* from the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the painting taken from album cover F3, which are shown in blue. For a marker where only green exists, the blue realized the same value as the green. All values run from exaggeration on the left to abstraction on the right.

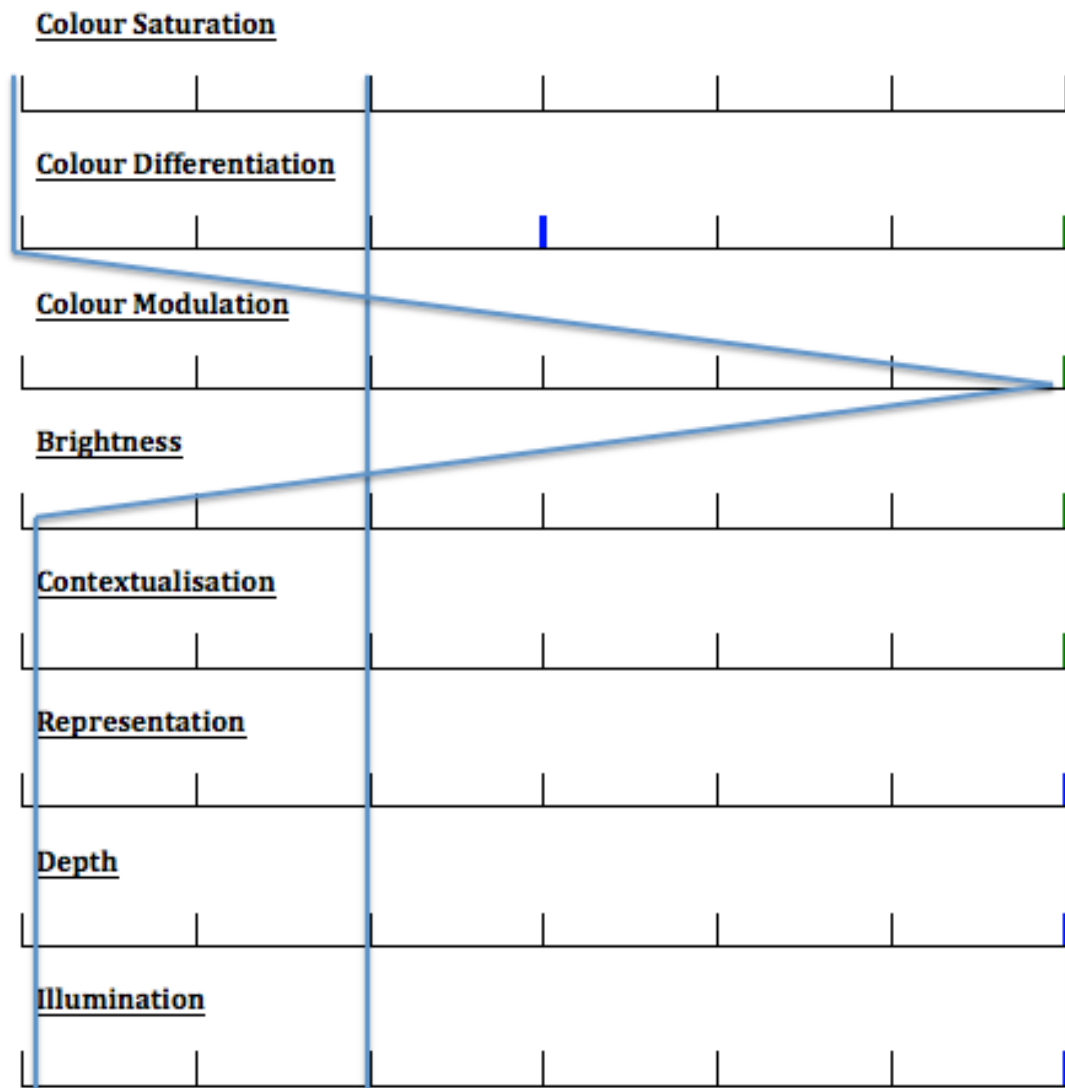


Figure 4.4 Factory Records Modality Configuration 2<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The modality marker values in this chart were aggregated from the values of the four album covers and were based on at least three album covers falling within the range of one or two values on the chart for each modality marker. The value with the highest number of album covers realizing it was chosen as the representative value for each marker. It is shown in green. Where less than three album covers fell within the range of two values, for any one marker, no values are shown. *Included* in the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the painting from album F3. *Excluded* from the aggregations for this modality configuration are the values for the colour code from album F3, which are shown in blue. For a marker where only green exists, the blue realized the same value as the green. For *representation*, *depth* and *illumination*, I have shown the values for the colour code (realized by the blue) for the sake of clarity and illustration. All values run from exaggeration on the left to abstraction on the right.

The kind of relationship set up between the colour code and the painting in the cover to album F3 is revealing of the attitude Factory Records has towards the way in which reality should be represented on their album covers. To quote Tagg, “In realism...it is the product that is stressed, and production that is repressed...All that matters is the illusion.” (1999: 270) In the case of F3, the intention is to reveal this illusion in the service of producing some deeper truth rooted not in the appearance of things, but rather in the construction of their appearance. Hence, in this view, it is the production that is stressed, and the product that is repressed, and this can be seen in the modality choices made in all of the album covers, which often tend towards the *abstract* coding orientation.

In the case of F2, the choice of high colour saturation and low colour modulation pertains to the sensory coding orientation, but the illusory appeal to the senses that is usually brought about by this combination is undermined through the hybridity of the colour chosen, hence drawing attention to the way in which saturated colours can be, and frequently are, used to attract and seduce customers in the market place.

In F1, meanwhile, the role of production in the representation is freed from human intervention altogether. Here, what we are provided with is a de-contextualised image of a wave-graph recording the pulse of a dying star. For a stance where modality increases the more human intervention is reduced, the decision to use a maximally abstracted set of modality markers in the service of representing an image that was not even created by a life-form constitutes the ultimate pronouncement of veridicality.

If we consider KVL’s (2006) view that modality is interpersonal, we must also consider who the intended addressee of such images might have been. These four album cover images, which predominantly pertain to the *abstract* coding orientation, arguably represent an attempt, by the record company, to appeal to an elite subgroup of listeners who almost certainly oppose the mainstream hegemonic norm. In this sense, as mentioned in Section 3, the label is guilty of doing what Hesmondhalgh referred to as “erecting exclusionary barriers around the culture.” (2010: 38)

Additionally, through drawing attention to the processes of representation, the record label pre-supposes an audience that is already familiar with the mechanisms and

methods of representation and, thus, more likely to be open to the questioning and doubting of those methods as suitable ways of presenting reality.

These album covers, then, are a site of hegemonic struggle in terms of trying to revise the way reality is presented, and they are also part of a clever branding exercise that intends to appeal to an elite subgroup of listeners through the choice of abstract modality values realised within each cover, for as KVL state, “the ability to...read texts grounded in this coding orientation is a mark of social distinction.” (2006: 165)

## 5. Conclusion

In this essay I have sought to show how the visual modality choices made in four Blue Note Records album covers and four Factory Records album covers contributed, in each case, to the creation of a *modality configuration*.

The *modality configuration* identified for the Blue Note covers primarily appealed to the sensory coding orientation. It helped to create a white vision of jazz, one in which the performers race was played down through the use of luminosity and saturation, as well as the choice of hue. It was also suggested that the use of a single unifying highly saturated colour contributed to the visual identity of the label.

The *modality configuration* identified for the Factory Records covers primarily appealed to the abstract coding orientation. The modality choices made across the four albums were done so with the intent of revealing the mechanisms of realist representation. The appeal to the *abstract* coding orientation was also part of a branding exercise designed to foster a sense of elitism amongst the consumers of the label's records, most of who sought to define themselves in opposition to the mainstream hegemonic norm of the day.

However, whilst this analysis has revealed many interesting findings, far too many of the claims that have been made here rest on subjective interpretation of a limited number of examples. Kaltenbacher points to the use of multimodal corpora as a means for putting multimodal research on a more empirical basis in this respect, citing the work of Baldry, Thibault and Taylor. (2004)

Notwithstanding, the degree to which visual modality analysis can be accommodated by such corpora is arguably open to debate, for modality analysis is still, in the words of Van Leeuwen, "ultimately an interpretation." (2005: 164)



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**Appendix I: Blue Note Records Album Cover Images B1-B4**

**B1: Jutta Hipp – *With Zoot Sims***



**B2: Kenny Dorham – *Afro-Cuban***





**B3: Lee Morgan – *City Lights***

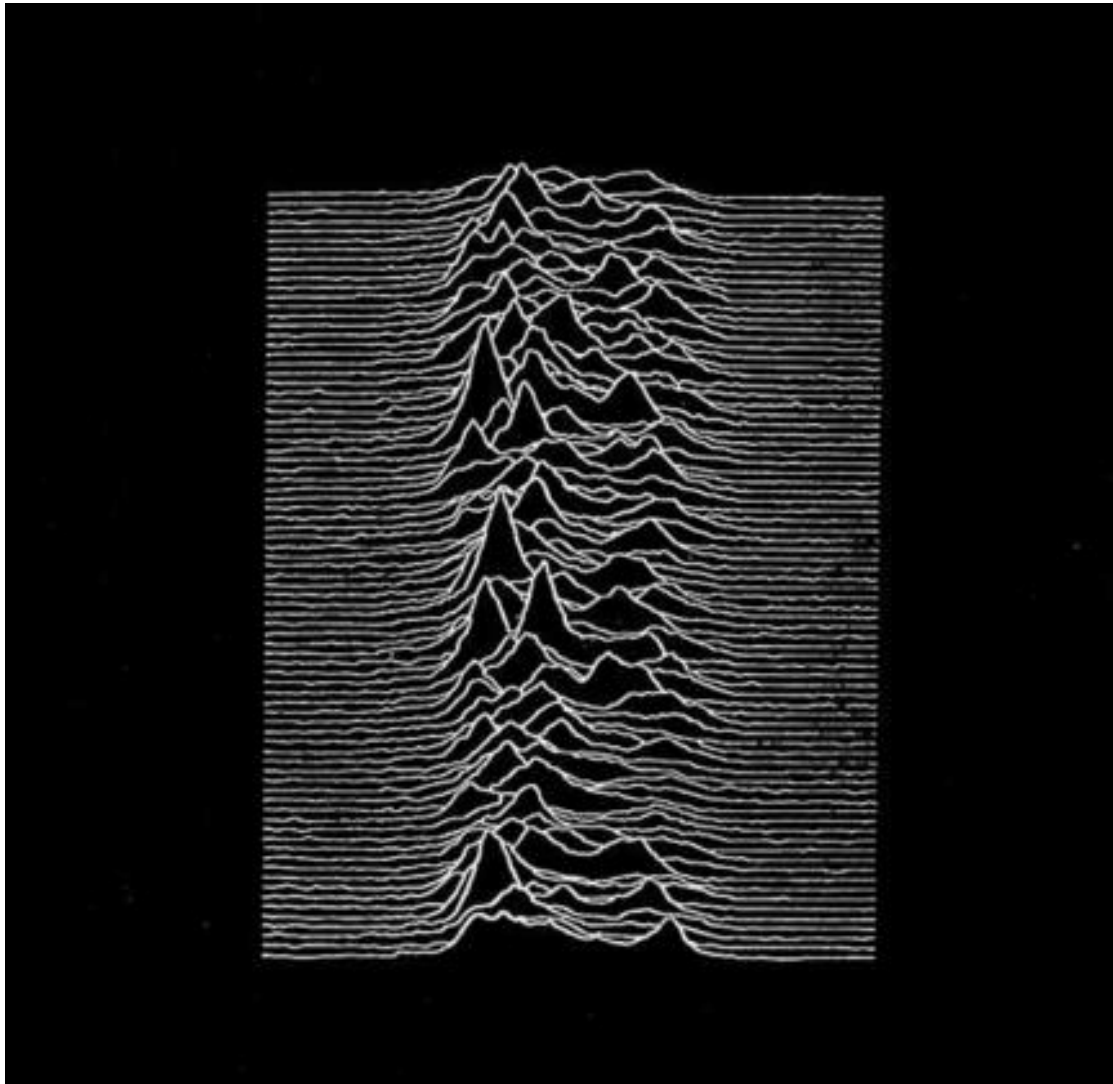


**B4: John Coltrane – *Blue Train***



**Appendix II: Factory Records Album Cover Images F1-F4**

**F1: Joy Division – *Unknown Pleasures***





**F2: New Order – *Movement***



**F3: New Order – *Power, Corruption and Lies***



**F4: New Order – *Low Life***

