

Jam Sessions as Rites of Passage:
An Ethnography of Jazz Jams in Phoenix, AZ

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the jazz jam session's function in the constitution of jazz scenes as well as the identities of the musicians who participate in them. By employing ritual and performance studies theories of liminality, I demonstrate ways in which jazz musicians, jam sessions, and other social structures are mobilized and transformed during their social and musical interactions. I interview three prominent members of the jazz scene in the greater Phoenix area, and incorporate my experience as a professional jazz musician in the same scene, to conduct a contextually and socially embedded analysis in order to draw broader conclusions about jam sessions in general. In this analysis I refer to other ethnomusicologists who research improvisation, jazz in ritual context, and interactions, such as Ingrid Monson, Samuel Floyd, Travis Jackson, and Paul Berliner, as well as ideas proposed by phenomenologically adjacent thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Karen Barad.

This thesis attempts to contribute to current jam session research in fields such as ethnomusicology and jazz studies by offering a perspective on jam sessions based on phenomenology and process philosophy, concluding that the jam session is an essential mechanism in the ongoing social and musical developments of jazz musicians and their scene. I also attempt to continue and develop the discourse surrounding theories of liminality in performance and ritual studies by underscoring the web of relations in social structures that are brought into contact with one another during the liminal performances of their acting agents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every jazz musician knows the story: sixteen-year-old Charlie Parker steps onto the stage at the Reno Club jam session in Kansas City after waiting in line to play with guest artist Jo Jones, legendary drummer of the Count Basie Orchestra, who is sitting in with the house band. A few choruses into his solo, Parker forgets the chord changes, loses the beat, and freezes up. Jones, showing his aggravation, throws one of his cymbals at Parker, causing the audience to erupt with laughter. Catcalls accompany the young saxophonist as he makes his way offstage, vowing to return one day. He hits the woodshed, practicing day and night for hours, and eventually emerges as a new Charlie Parker—the legendary jazz saxophonist resolutely studied today. Jazz musicians use this and many other stories to teach aspirants about essential concepts in jazz culture—the jam session, pro/amateur relationships, jam etiquette, and the woodshed—and provide a figure of discipline, self-motivation, and success-through-strife, of which to model their own musical lives.

This story has become mythologized over time, having been deployed by films in pop culture to comment on the education and ontology of “the jazz musician.” In the 1988 biopic *Bird*, the story is referenced throughout to contextualize and humanize Charlie Parker’s musical genius, and to suggest that the incident was central to Parker’s transformation into a jazz legend.¹ In the 2014 film *Whiplash*, Terence Fletcher, the ruthless jazz instructor, romanticizes the story, claiming that Jones “nearly decapitates”

¹ Andrew Scott, “‘Sittin’ In:’ Barry Harris’s Use of the ‘Jam Session’ as a Jazz Pedagogical Device,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 16, no. 3 (October 2004) 283.

Parker, causing him to “cry himself to sleep” that night, before coming back from the woodshed a year later and playing “the best mother fucking solo the world has ever heard.”² Fletcher uses this story to justify this kind of feedback between jazz musicians at jam sessions as an educational tool and to demonstrate how “Charlie Parker *became* Charlie Parker.”³ In each case, Parker’s experience at the jam session is depicted as a personal rite of passage. By participating in the jam session, he discovered what he needed to do to succeed both as a jazz musician and as a member of a jazz community occupied by personages such as Jo Jones.

In the decades since the tale of Charlie Parker at the Reno club, the jam session has developed into a structure that musicians depend on to socialize, network, and help refine their craft. Jazz scholars, however, often either overlook and oversimplify the jam session’s position in jazz communities or do not account for its historical variability.⁴ Sociologist William Bruce Cameron, in one of the most referenced academic writings on the jam session, suggests that the jam is a congregate of social illiterates, a result of the jazz musician being “isolated from persons in general society.”⁵ Scott DeVaux and Joseph Peterson, while providing insightful research on contemporary jam sessions, analyze them only in relation to jam sessions of the bebop era.⁶ Only recently have

² *Whiplash*, directed by Damien Chazelle (Sony Pictures Classics, 2014).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ricardo Pinheiro, “Jam Sessions in Manhattan as Rituals,” *Jazz Research Journal* 6 (December 2012): 130, accessed November 20, 2018, doi:10.1558/jazz.v6i2.129. Pinheiro points out that jam sessions are rarely the subject of academic works, and have historically only been investigated through the field of sociology.

⁵ William Bruce Cameron, “Sociological Notes of the Jam Session,” *Social Forces* 33, no. 1 (January 1954): 178–180, accessed October 16, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i344214>.

⁶ Scott DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Joseph Peterson, “Jam Session: An Exploration Into the Characteristics of an Uptown Jam Session” (master’s thesis, Rutgers University, 2000).

scholars such as Ricardo Pinheiro opted for a more critical interpretation of the jam session, using ritual studies to propose that it is a crucial structure in the development of jazz musicians.⁷ However, Pinheiro's research stops short of identifying what *type* of ritual the jam session is, and thus fails to fully elucidate its *process*.

I suggest that these problems are due to an inadequate observational apparatus, and I argue that an apparatus that underscores and illuminates the inherent qualities of the jam session can help us better understand its role in constituting local jazz scenes. I propose that a “rites of passage” apparatus can help underscore the various intra-actions between individual jazz musicians and their local scene, phenomenological “objects” like instruments and repertoire, social structures like the jam session, and jazz traditions at large. Furthermore, in productively mythologizing jazz we can begin to understand the various ways in which ritual symbols and enactments play a part in the ongoing constitution of jazz scenes and in the identities of performing bodies as well as discover the relationships between music as phenomenological/ritual objects and the jazz tradition as co-constitutive forces.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I draw largely upon two works which theorize an ethnomusicology of jazz deeply embedded in ritual and mythology studies: Travis Jackson’s *Blowin’ the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* and Samuel Floyd’s *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* as well as various works from anthropologist and ethnographer Victor Turner. First, I examine how the ritualized analyses of the social and musical practices of jazz suggested by these ethnomusicologists inform my positioning of

⁷ Pinheiro, “Jam sessions in Manhattan as Rituals.”

jam sessions as rites of passage rituals. Next, I draw parallels between Turner's descriptions of ritual events and certain relationships in jam sessions, to which I return in the final chapter.

In the second chapter, I intersect Gilles Deleuze's third synthesis of time with Turner's theories on rites of passage and social mobility to explore how liminality indexes important moments in a person or community's life and constitute multi-layered performances of identity. Throughout this thesis, I employ philosophies from phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and performance studies or phenomenologically-adjacent thinkers like Karen Barad. The purpose of the first two chapters is to provide an analytical tool based on the aforementioned philosophical and ethnographic perspectives with which to investigate the prominent jam sessions of the Phoenix, Arizona jazz scene, and to contribute to recent ritual studies theories of liminality using the same philosophies.

The third chapter is an analysis of three different jam sessions in the greater Phoenix area's jazz scene. Here I draw upon three interviews I conducted with the musicians and educators who created and/or lead these jam sessions as well as my own experience as a professional musician and active member in the local scene. The purpose of this section is to explore highly specific relational aspects within a local jazz scene in order to draw conclusions about the function and general nature of jam sessions in jazz traditions more broadly.

This thesis attempts to continue to develop discourses that intersect jazz studies and ritual studies by scholars like Jackson and Floyd, as well as offer a slight corrective to Pinheiro's recent studies on jam session and ritual. It also attempts to contribute to

discourses surrounding liminality and processes in ritual and performance studies by offering both an analysis of a highly localized and immediate situation from which broader conclusions can be drawn, as well as a diffractive reading of Turner and Deleuze's philosophies that provides a theoretical framework for liminality as a mobilizing process.

CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTING A “RITES OF PASSAGE” ANALYTIC APPARATUS FOR THE JAZZ JAM SESSION

Developing an Apparatus

In his series of books on the history of jazz, Gunther Schuller presents the jam session as simply an informal and diversionary gathering of jazz musicians after hours. Other comments in his book reduce jam sessions (and by extension jazz musicians of the latter half of the 20th century) to economically incentivized essentializations, suggesting that jam sessions ceased to exist after commercialization of them ended in the 1960's.

Schuller uses the following definition of jam sessions in the glossary of both books:

An informal gathering of musicians, playing on their own time and improvising, often exhaustively, on one or two numbers. Jam sessions began as a spontaneous after-hours diversion for jazz musicians who felt musically constrained during professional engagements. In the late thirties, pseudo-jam sessions were organized by entrepreneurs who engaged musicians specifically to 'jam'. In the 1950s and '60s, jam sessions became a rarity.⁸

Schuller, as with other jazz scholars, ignores the jam session altogether as consideration moves further away from the bebop era. His second book, published in 1991, demonstrates a central problem in jam session research: despite being the foremost hub in which jazz musicians have socialized consistently throughout the music's history, the jam session is seen as nonexistent so long as it is not being commercialized.

I argue that Schuller's assumptions about jam sessions are due to an uncritical observational apparatus and that the “literal” truth of a phenomenon (or truths based on

⁸ Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, revised ed. (Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

hegemonic standards or criteria) is an epistemologically simplistic way to analyze phenomena that reduces discursive avenues rather than creates new ones. Instead, new—or at least constructively derivative—categorizations of knowledge can help elucidate what a phenomenon *does*, or what it *could be*. I take a cue from Victor Turner, who pleads for a form of ethnographic practice that pays greater attention to the properties of process, rather than one that analyzes groups of people as static phenomena.⁹ He cites, among others, Arnold van Gennep’s theory of liminality, and develops his own theories of “rites of passage” and “social dramas” to explain the various processes by which communities of people enact social and cultural change.¹⁰ I propose an observational apparatus that draws upon these and other ideas (explained below) to address the jam session’s role both in the jazz scene and in the ongoing reconfigurations of individual jazz musicians, their social groups and structures, and tradition, as well as the relations and entanglements of these subjects.

This perspective is based, in part, on Karen Barad’s agential-realist philosophy. Barad describes her diffraction apparatus as a type of “observational tuning” that is “sufficiently attentive to the details of the phenomenon we wish to understand” in order to get at the meanings of such entanglements.¹¹ Likewise, we should tune our observations to the inherent qualities of jazz music, rather than impose an existing

⁹ Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 33.

¹⁰ Benneta Jules-Rosette, “Decentering Ethnography: Victor Turner’s Vision of Anthropology,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 24, no. 2 (May 1994), 164.

¹¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 73.

framework that presupposes aspects of the jam session. I conceptualize these “tunings” as adumbrations of the phenomenon of analysis. In the same way that a phenomenologically-oriented analysis entails a constant and endless bracketing of existing knowledge and a shift in perspective, attitude, or system of knowledge in order to reveal more information and move toward a more robust understanding of the phenomenon analyzed, we can tune our observation as many times as the “truths” we wish to unearth.

Metaphor as Method

However, a truly new apparatus is difficult to conceive of, which is why I build mine on the performance theories of Turner and Barad as well as other phenomenologically-oriented concepts. To explain, I turn to George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen’s research on metaphor. The authors argue that metaphors are not just merely matters of language, but the way in which we construct understandings of truth. They suggest that truths are not unconditional and absolute but based on parameters and restrictions placed on information and ideas by metaphors. Therefore, truth is relative to a particular conceptual system that is defined largely by metaphors. To demonstrate, they cite President Carter’s declaration of the energy crisis as the “moral equivalent of war”:

The WAR metaphor generated a network of entailments. There was an "enemy," a "threat to national security," which required "setting targets," "reorganizing priorities," "establishing a new chain of command," "plotting new strategy," "gathering intelligence," "marshaling forces," "imposing sanctions," "calling for sacrifices," and on and on. The WAR metaphor highlighted certain realities and hid others. The metaphor was not merely a way of viewing reality; it constituted a license for policy change and political and economic action. The very acceptance of the metaphor provided grounds for certain inferences: there was an external, foreign, hostile enemy (pictured by cartoonists in Arab headdress); energy needed to be given top priorities; the populace would have to make

sacrifices; if we didn't meet the threat, we would not survive. It is important to realize that this was not the only metaphor available.¹²

The authors note that we impose metaphors on things that are not inherently metaphorical (like the background-foreground-ness of objects) in order to orient ourselves to a physical and conceptual world. It is important to note that these are human-created analytical tools (and often imposed by those in positions of power), and that metaphorical concepts are etched into the very way we conceive of the world.¹³ As such, any metaphorical apparatus is always already derived from an existing concept. The “rites of passage” apparatus is a metaphorical configuration based on aspects of the phenomenon of analysis (jazz jam sessions) in an effort to conduct a more “true to life” analysis, in a similar manner as Barad’s diffraction apparatus as a metaphor based on an optical phenomenon, where diffraction represents patterns of difference (as opposed to reflections of sameness).

Metaphorical concepts are one particular way in which we adumbrate phenomena. By employing different metaphorical perspectives, we make our experience of phenomena coherent—each metaphor allowing new truths to surface but always shifting around the axis of the “object” in question. Lakoff and Johnsen explain that we understand the world and function in it by categorizing truth in ways that reveal some aspects of the objects of experience while hiding or obscuring others:

I've invited a sexy blonde to our dinner party. I've invited a renowned cellist to our dinner party. I've invited a Marxist to our dinner party. I've invited a lesbian to our dinner party. Though the same person may fit all of these descriptions, each description highlights different aspects of the person. Describing someone who

¹² George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 175.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

you know has all of these properties as "a sexy blonde" is to downplay the fact that she is a renowned cellist and a Marxist and to hide her lesbianism.¹⁴

By providing a convincing argument for one metaphorical perspective, we fulfill some truth based on the parameters and restrictions of the metaphor. In the Carter example, all of the statements are logical truths given the rules of the “war” metaphor in place. This was simply one metaphor that could have been proposed out of an endless number, each creating the condition of possibility for certain truths while suppressing or eliding other components that are not aligned with the given framework. I suggest that any and all conceivable metaphors are also adumbrations as properties of the phenomenon analyzed, which can then be bracketed as needed, but are always necessarily inseparable from the phenomenon (in the same way that our phenomenological adumbrations of a physical object are always *of* the object).

I intend my theorizing of a “rites of passage” apparatus to be taken as a metaphor. Linguistic references to ritual, gods, symbols etc. are all taken in the context of the metaphor—on the one hand prescribed by it, and on the other used to actively construct its “rules.” By employing the “rites of passage” metaphor, we can unobscure certain aspects of the jam session with the hope of revealing some qualities about it that stick even if the metaphor is subsequently bracketed or otherwise discarded after the fact. In the same manner that Travis Jackson, by using the metaphor of “ritual” for jazz music, ascertained that jazz music is “ritualized,” we can demonstrate that the jam session is “rites of passage-like.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 164.

¹⁵ Travis Jackson, *Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (University of California Press, 2012).

Co-opting the Term “Rites of Passage”

My situating of jam sessions as rituals is grounded in discourses of the African diasporic aesthetic principle of cultural memory.¹⁶ In *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*, Samuel Floyd refers to cultural memory as the

nonfactual and nonreferential motivations, actions, and beliefs that members of a culture seem, without direct knowledge or deliberate training, to "know"—that feel unequivocally "true" and "right" when encountered, experienced, and executed. It may be defined as a repository of meanings that comprise the subjective knowledge of a people, its immanent thoughts, its structures, and its practices; these thoughts, structures, and practices are transferred and understood unconsciously but become conscious and culturally objective in practice and perception. Cultural memory, obviously a subjective concept, seems to be connected with cultural forms—in the present case, music, where the "memory" drives the music and the music drives memory.¹⁷

Floyd asserts that jazz and other black musics have mythological underpinnings rooted in a shared African American aesthetic and that “successful” works of black music require a foundation of myths that reside in this cultural memory, as well as in cultural symbols, metaphors, and ritual. Ricardo Pinheiro has likewise suggested that the jam session is a ritual event,¹⁸ and Allison Robbins and Christopher J. Wells have demonstrated that the same cultural aesthetics performed in rhythm tap dance are also performed in jazz music, suggesting that the various modes of expressing African American aesthetic and cultural memory permeate many of the forms created and syncretized by black artists.¹⁹ I suggest

¹⁶ “Cultural memory,” however, is not an exclusively African phenomenon.

¹⁷ Samuel Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁸ Ricardo Pinheiro, “The Jam Session and Jazz Studies,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 45, no. 2 (December 2014): 335-344.

¹⁹ Allison Robbins and Christopher Wells, “Playing with the Beat: Choreomusical Improvisation in Rhythm Tap Dance,” (Forthcoming).

that the jam session is inextricably linked to the general mythology of this cultural memory and its ritual symbols promulgated through performance and that “rites of passage” is an appropriate and constructive term to use in the context of this particular musicking event. Furthermore, by allowing myth to be perpetuated, ritual in turn enables its performers to shape both their community and tradition at large.

If, as Pinheiro suggests, we are to describe the jam session as a ritual, we ought to, in order to avoid haphazard taxonomy, outline what type of ritual process it is. Victor Turner’s definition of rites of passage, which is relevant here, is based on Arnold van Gennep’s concept of transitional ritual, marked by the middle phase termed “liminality.” Liminality occurs between states or realities, in a period of *becoming* rather than *being*. Turner states that “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”²⁰ The liminal period is one in which all subjects in the rites are stripped of their hierarchical and hegemonically determined identities, statuses, place, and age (more on this below).²¹ In the following section I explore the different ways in which liminal performers reconfigure the jazz scene, and ultimately the jazz tradition, and how they are reconfigured in turn. First, I will demonstrate how jazz mythology is diffused through the jam session’s ritual symbols, performed rites, and chronicled history as storytelling/myth-making.

²⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 7th ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

Ritual Symbols

During improvisation jazz musicians assume the masks of gods by imitating jazz idols, using stock phrases, practiced licks, and standard repertoire as sacred symbols to contract the past into the present event. Oftentimes jazz musicians learn jazz idioms by learning the style of various “gods” or idols in the jazz tradition. In fact, many wear the mask of one god exclusively by taking on the persona of an idol during formative musical years. In doing so, an initiate situates themselves within the jazz tradition by perpetuating symbols of the general mythos of jazz (language of the idols/gods) in the same way a child gains a foothold on the world by imitating their parents. The constellation of different imitations, as well as the drive to innovate in the face of tradition (see below) is what creates a unique musical personality for the individual.²² These sacred symbols help constitute, in Turner’s words, “a cultural domain that is extremely rich in cosmological meaning.”²³

Likewise common repertoire, or more specifically jam session repertoire, brings past forms into the present performance. Certain standards—often over blues or “rhythm changes” forms, or otherwise common tunes like “Solar” or “There Will Never Be Another You”—provide familiar ground for both the improvisers and the listeners to attune themselves to the performance. More importantly, these traditional forms allow musicians to invoke a piece of the sacred history of their art form and fold their individual or group performance back into it, a process Samuel Floyd refers to as “Call-

²² Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 142-144.

²³ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 5th ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 196.

response.”²⁴ He describes call-response as a kind of “troping” in black art in which old forms are commented on (call) and revised (response) vis-à-vis present forms. Beneath the surface of call-response is cultural memory, the conscious and unconscious internalizations of the music which gives “deeper meaning” to works and performances of music: “Put another way, the execution of Call-response tropes opens the symbolic field where reside the long-standing, sublimated conflicts, taboos, and myths of personal and group emotional experience and our relationships to them.”²⁵

Jam Session as Performed Rite

The jam session provides a ritual stage on which jazz musicians enact social rites. A typical jam session proceeds as follows: After waiting for their turn to play, a musician will join the stage and fill in the role required of them, oftentimes without knowing what musicians or instrumentation they will be performing with (for example: a guitarist may take the stage as the pianist leaves, in which case they will join the rhythm section; or they may take the place of the trumpet player and become the de facto band leader).²⁶ They play one to three tunes, which is quickly decided upon by the participants on stage, and are expected to complete the tune regardless of whether or not they lose the form or chord changes.²⁷ Comparing this to Felicitas Goodman’s observations of group ritual draws parallels: “The ritual is a social encounter in which each participant has a well-

²⁴ Samuel Floyd Jr, *The Power of Black Music*, 95.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁶ Lawrence D. Nelson, “The Social and Musical Construction of the Jam Session in Jazz” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2011), 94, accessed October 28, 2018.

²⁷ Jeffrey Libman, “The Out-of-School Musical Engagements of Undergraduate Jazz Studies Majors” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2014), 76, accessed March 1, 2018.

rehearsed role to act out. It takes place within a set time span and in a limited space, and involves a predetermined set of events. Once initiated, it has to run its course to completion.”²⁸ The musician’s material, which has been rehearsed in the “woodshed,” is put into practice during the limited time they occupy the stage at the jam session. By performing they enact a ritual which, by virtue of its place in the jazz tradition, categorically separates itself from other kinds of performance, such as concerts or gigs.

It is important to note the spatial separation between the performer and the spectator, especially from the perspective of jazz musicians who are new to jam session culture. Performers of the rites use space in order to facilitate liminality, removing the subjects “from the familiar and habitual.”²⁹ The stage physically reorients the performer, setting aside their performance as one removed from their habitual orientation (not-on-stage) by using the physical body and the spatiality of the room. Over time, “on-stage” becomes a habitual orientation for musicians as jam session culture, and specific jam session etiquette, becomes familiar to them. The jam session, an event where the audience is almost entirely comprised of the members of the scene it belongs to, rotates a small group of performers at a time on a ritual platform to enact a traditional ritual in front of their peers. The various facets of jam session etiquette (face to face with the audience, rotating performers, instrumentation, solo choruses taken, amount of songs performed, jam session repertoire, and so on) are the rites carried out during the course of the ritual.

²⁸ Felicitas Goodman, “Dependant Variables,” in *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*, (Indiana University Press, 1988), 31.

²⁹ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 196.

Storytelling

Storytelling is one way in which stories are kept as they are in their medium intact and in a mode that allows them to be passed on. Floyd describes myth and ritual as follows:

Myths are ostensibly historical but largely fictional narratives designed to explain natural phenomena, to give accounts of events of religious, social, and political import, and to pass on the exploits of deities and heroes of particular cultures. Rituals are formal procedures that elaborate and celebrate myths and customs. Concerts, operas, and recitals are rituals, complete with procedures and codes of conduct that make up the ceremonies that carry and celebrate the myths of high culture.³⁰

Jazz musicians use storytelling to pass on significant events in their history and teach important lessons and instruct younger musicians on the values of jazz's cultural memory. Consider the following story:

Tatum spread his hands out over the keyboard, feeling out the instrument. Finding the tension of the keys to his liking, he nodded ever so slightly and rippled off a series of runs. He played around with effortless grace for a short time, gaining speed and tempo. A breathtaking run that seemed to use up every note on the piano led to a familiar theme—Tea for Two. But something strange had happened to the tune. Just as suddenly as he gave them the melody he was out of it again, but never far enough away from it to render it unrecognizable. Then he was back on it again. The right hand was playing phrases which none of the listeners had imagined existed, while the left hand alternated between a rock solid beat and a series of fantastic arpeggios which sounded like two hands in one. His hands would start at opposite ends of the keyboard and then proceed towards each other at a paralyzing rate; one hand picking up the other's progression and then carrying it on itself, only to break off with another series of incredible arpeggios. Just when it seemed that he had surely lost his way, Tatum came in again with a series of quick-changing harmonies that brought him back smack on the beat. His technique was astounding. Reuben Harris stole a look around the room. Everyone was exactly as they were when Tatum first sat down. Fats' drink halted on its way to his lips. Fats sat down as if turned to stone. A wrinkle had appeared between his eyes as he half frowned, half smiled at what he had heard. Nearby, James P was likewise transfixed, small beads of perspiration showing on his forehead.³¹

³⁰ Samuel Floyd Jr, *The Power of Black Music*, 146.

³¹ Ed Kirkeby, *Ain't Misbehavin'* (New York: Dodd Mean, 1966), 148; cited in Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 112.

Floyd describes this story as a passing of the torch—the new school of jazz piano was seemingly ushered in by the sheer magnitude of Tatum’s performance alone.

Conveniently, the “old school” of piano performance are in attendance for this performance, and are even subjected to the common stone metamorphosis motif.

Another commonly mythologized event in jazz history is Duke Ellington’s “rebirth” at the Newport jazz festival in 1956. John Gennari recounts how Paul Gonsalves’s twenty-seven-chorus blues solo brought Duke’s orchestra back to relevance after a recent slump:

Gonsalves stood and launched into his solo. Three choruses in, a platinum blonde in one of the front boxes broke loose from her escort and started spinning wildly, whirling-dervishlike, around the field. Ten choruses in, half the audience was jitterbugging in the aisles, the other half standing on their seats, cheering and clapping with mounting fervor . . . The story of this galvanic performance usually figures as a kind of stock scene of jazz scripture connoting nothing less the resurrection of the messiah. Those less given to hagiography might interpret the event as a triumph of African American performative culture, an eruption of spontaneous jam session–style energy trumping the containment strategies of the jazz establishment.³²

Once again, common motifs are employed to decorate the story as it is retold. While most accounts of the story are verifiably true (we have recordings of the performance and the audience’s increasing energy is unmistakable), the manner in which the event is narrated is what gives it its mythological status.

These stories, including the previously mentioned jam session legend of Charlie Parker, are just a few of the ways in which jazz musicians chronicle their history and infuse it with potent symbolism, once again invoking past forms in present contexts.

³² John Gennari, “‘Hipsters, Bluebloods, Rebels, and Hooligans’ The Cultural Politics of the Newport Jazz Festival, 1954-1960,” *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 134-135.

Turner makes a distinction between chronicle (the verbal or written account of factual records) and story. As a chronicle's components are arranged into the form of a "spectacle" or process of happening (beginning, middle, end; inaugural, terminating, and transitional motifs), it becomes story. Oftentimes the mode of framing of the event determines if it is chronicle or story, or the time or "nodal location in the life process of the group or community that recounts them."³³ Moreover, jazz musicians tend to link vivid imagery and metaphor with musical processes. Ingrid Monson cites such examples as likening a walking bass line to walking on the earth, and the groove to "getting into a bubble bath." She explains this preference of language, noting that "there is nothing inarticulate or analytically vague about these statements; metaphorical images are in many cases more communicative than ordinary analytical language."³⁴ Jazz musicians use this type of language and storytelling to transform a theoretically and conceptually complex idiom into coherent forms so that their cultural practices and values can be preserved and re-presented for the future.

Rites, Ritual Objects, and Entanglements

Lastly, the "rites of passage" metaphor draws attention to the intra-actions of the various agents of the jam session event. In these terms, the ritual objects of the jazz tradition and performed rites become constitutive forces rather than static phenomena. By shifting our inquiry to the relations between the objects of the ritual and performed rites,

³³ Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and the Stories About Them," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 148.

³⁴ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 93.

we can see how jazz musicians use the jam session to shape their scene, craft their identities through intra-actions with ritual objects and other performing bodies, and ultimately negotiate their place in the present between a traditional past and an innovation-oriented future.

The enactment of the jam session ritual is not only an exercise in cultural preservation but an effecting and enunciative action. Turner explains that rituals and their symbols “are not merely ‘reflections or expressions of components of social structure.’ Ritual, in its full performative flow, is not only many-leveled, ‘laminated,’ but also capable, under conditions of societal change, of creative modification on all or any of its levels.”³⁵ He suggests that communities carry out “social dramas” in which its members use ritual to “redress” their society after a “breach.” These breaches are usually schisms created between the layers of the norm-governed social relations of a community.³⁶ This suggests that, in many cases, ritual is used to reconfigure society in terms of a breach rather than to strictly reaffirm old values and practices. As new performances create schisms between the normal actions of a community, its members attempt to redress tradition in terms of the new performance. Similarly, Jackson cites Paul Connerton when he argues that rites “constitute one means for their participants to *do things* via their performances and the enunciative force of their actions.”³⁷ It is important to note that tradition, in all of its resonances, is thus a manufactured thing, is constantly changing, and is highly political. Jazz musicians shape their scene in the same manner: by representing traditional improvisational material and repertoire through performance—as

³⁵ Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and the Stories About Them,” 162-163.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Travis Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away*, 141.

amalgams of traditional musical symbols and individual experience—they fold their individuality back into the tradition that was the condition of possibility for their unique musical self (their identity as a “jazz” musician) to exist and operate within its aesthetic to begin with. The aforementioned ritual symbols or objects are the means for individuals to use ritual to intervene with the various societal structures—to change them or their relationship to them.³⁸

Likewise, jam session rites and ritual objects help the jazz musician and scene negotiate the space between tradition and innovation. Jazz musicians are at different times in their development faced with two issues: how to learn the idiom, build a foundation of traditional material, and show that they have an understanding of the material to more experienced musicians; and how to not play the same lines and licks that everyone else plays, or that they hear themselves play constantly, out of a need for self-expression.³⁹ As Floyd explained above, call-response is the *modus operandi* with which jazz musicians employ traditional ritual symbols to create new music. This process is inscribed into the very way that musicians improvise or compose new music: tradition is “called upon” or re-presented, and then “responded to” by folding and intermingling layers of new content into it. In Turner’s terms, this ritual mirrors the social drama: ritual is enacted to call upon old practices when confronted with a breach of new ones; new forms are borne out of the actions of the individuals who employ ritual symbols and, through their performances, carve out a living space between tradition and innovation, leaving marks along the way. However, the process of “tradition which gives form to

³⁸ Ibid., 138.

³⁹ See Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 112.

ritual symbols and performances” cannot quite be turned on its head. Rather, the forms of each are able to be determined by way of their intermingling.

Ritual symbols, storytelling, and performed rites make up the web of boundary-making or discursive practices that are co-constitutive of each other. Karen Barad argues that phenomena do not precede their interaction; “things” emerge from within intra-action. Because of this, properties and boundaries of components are determined in intra-action—through discursive practices—which enact local causal structures (*exteriority-within-phenomena*).⁴⁰ For example, the objects of jazz music are not determined *by* the jazz tradition or performances of it, but in the entanglement of the diverse acting forces in phenomena such as jam sessions. Jam sessions, like rituals, are repeated in order to adapt and reconfigure themselves when faced with new information, and this repetition allows itself and its components to assume coherent forms.

A different analytic apparatus which draws from the performance studies of Victor Turner and Karen Barad turns the analyst’s attention to the relations between the components of the jam session phenomenon as ongoing and constitutive processes. The metaphor of “rites of passage” is one means to categorize knowledge about the jam session in such a way that is true to the mythological cultural memory of jazz music and revealing of the potent poly-symbolic innards of jazz culture. Ritual and sacred symbols, performance rites/performing bodies, and stories are a few of the modes and intra-acting components that set boundary-making processes into motion, constituting themselves and other elements situated in the liminal space between the omnipresent poles of tradition

⁴⁰ Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs*, 28, No. 3, *Gender and Science: New Issues* (Spring, 2003): 801-831.

and innovation. I believe that the above apparatus is a fecund starting ground for different investigations into the jazz jam session. Striving to exhaust this and similar metaphors is a worthwhile and crucial practice in the ongoing phenomenological analyses of jam sessions, each one adding many new adumbrations to a growing body of knowledge on one of the essential structures in jazz music.

CHAPTER 3

RITEs OF PASSAGE AS TIME AND PROCESS: HOW INDIVIDUALS, SOCIAL STRUCTURES, AND TRADITION DEVELOP IDENTITIES THROUGH LIMINALITY

Scholars of rites of passage in cultural anthropology and ritual studies often refer to both the time-altering effects and processuality of the liminal stage of ritual without engaging with various philosophies of time and process. Descriptions of liminality as prolonged present are made without reference, for example, to either Bergson's or Deleuze's present or duration; the subjectification process and identity construction of ritual initiates without reference to Heidegger's Dasein or Deleuze's "cut;" the contraction of past and future into present liminality through ritual symbols without reference to Deleuze's first synthesis of time, and so on. In this chapter, I demonstrate how new knowledge can be produced by bringing Turner, van Gennep, and Deleuze into dialogue by reading them diffractively through one another.

Outlining commonalities between Deleuze's syntheses of time and Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's methods on rites of passage can yield fresh interpretations of the particularities of ritual. Van Gennep and other authors using comparative models for rites of passage, such as Joseph Campbell, intended for their methods to be used *schemas* rather than *laws*.⁴¹ In a similar way, Deleuze often invents concepts that he encourages the reader to use creatively rather than in a dogmatic "Deleuze-ist" way.

⁴¹ Jenny Hockey, "The Importance of Being Intuitive: Arnold van Gennep's The Rites of Passage," *Mortality* 7, no. 2 (July 2002): 212, accessed April 12, 2018.

In this chapter, I examine rites of passage from the perspective of Deleuze's third synthesis of time. Here, I construct a theoretical framework with which to analyze the mobilizing processes of jam sessions in the final chapter. Furthermore, I attempt to differentiate rites of passage from simply the passing of time and define what they *could* be as a unique phenomenon of time and process. I argue that rites of passage are active "cuts" in time, vis-à-vis Deleuze's passive syntheses, which manually contract the past and future into a living present by marking large transitional points in a person's life and that this particular kind of present—liminality—is especially conducive to the subjectification process. First, I give an overview of different aspects of the middle phase of rites of passage, "liminality." Next, I offer an explanation of Deleuze's third synthesis of time and how it operates, theorizing its relationship to liminality. Finally, I explore how liminality, as a particular kind of time and process, might operate within the rites of passage metaphor.

The Qualities of Liminality

Rites of passage are events designed to move the individual from one state of being to another. In his 1909 book, *Le Rites de Passage*,⁴² Arnold van Gennep explains how certain transitional rituals consist of three phases: initiation, liminality, and incorporation. Jenny Hockey describes these as "(1) passage out of a previous phase or social status; (2) an ambiguous time and space betwixt and between fixed positions; and (3) re-entry into a new social position or period."⁴² These events have two functions: to

⁴² Ibid., 212.

mark formative occasions in the life of the individual, such as birth, marriage, birthdays, death, etc.; and to help facilitate the transition from a previous state into a projected future state. In other words, they are enactments of what Deleuze refers to as “cuts” or big events, and they detail a process of becoming. These processes are enforced by way of the middle period, liminality, described by van Gennep as the defining stage of his tripartite schema.

The liminal stage is not a state, but a period between states—a period of becoming rather than being. Victor Turner notes that “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”⁴³ During this period, the individual’s identity is reconstituted in terms of the subject to the self, others, and the larger social structure they occupy. Here, the liminal stage is a process of social restructuring, a period in which the social statuses between members are relaxed, in what Turner refers to as “communitas.” He explains that there is a double-movement of reconstitution between the individual and the ritual: the individual grows by upholding it, and by being upheld, the structure itself grows—through a process he refers to as “anti-structure.”⁴⁴ Thus to describe liminality is to describe a ritual of becoming rather than being, or of process rather than product.

Liminality is also a period in which lived-time is experienced as flowing irregularly, or not at all. Turner refers to the liminal stage, one outside of the regular flow of space and time, as an “eternal now.”⁴⁵ The “eternal now” of experienced or lived-time

⁴³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 7th ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 94.

⁴⁴ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 298.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

can be interpreted as the psychological state of flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi argues that ritual and other activities—such as rock climbing, playing or listening to music, sports, reading etc.—which might be categorized as “play,” may also induce a flow state.⁴⁶ He describes flow as mental state of “optimal experience,” where one feels that goals and feedback are made clear, are fully concentrated on the task at hand, have control over the situation, experience a loss of self-consciousness, and loses immediate awareness of space and time.⁴⁷ Similarly, Turner explains that “this merging of action and awareness is made possible by a *centering of attention* on a limited stimulus field. Consciousness must be narrowed, intensified, beamed in on a limited focus of attention. ‘Past and future must be given up’—only now matters.”⁴⁸ Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow, in slight contradistinction to Turner, is as something that transcends attention, where cognition gives way to the affective force of being “in it.” In other words, flow is a state wherein the individual’s psychic energy, or attention, is focused on one general task, thus acting “unconsciously.” One of the defining aspects of both flow and liminality is a static or nonexistent sense of inner time. Because the individual is so absorbed with the task at hand, all that seems to exist is the content of liminality—an indefinite living present, or “eternal now.” While liminal phases amount to processes of becoming, the *feeling* that time is not moving—or that it is nonexistent—is often present.

Likewise, ritual can be thought of as “flow.” Teresa Reeve notes that, in liminality, “. . . an element of play enters . . . but a serious play that involves

⁴⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 54-67.

⁴⁸ Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*, 87.

improvisation with symbols and innovation of ideas through dreams and trances, riddles and tasks, and the tribal arts.”⁴⁹ Rites of passage achieve this by using ritual symbols—masks, totems, music, improvisation, and even drugs—to partition the event from the flow of everyday life. By marking the beginning and end of liminality with ritual symbols and performances, rites of passage suggest that everything from “now” until the “end” is liminal.⁵⁰ Thus we can define liminality in terms of the way we understand rites of passage as: the middle period of the ritual, demarcated by a beginning and end as “initiation and incorporation;” and as a process of becoming in which the present seems to exist eternally.

The Time and Process of Liminality

It stands to reason that the most effective way to come to understand rites of passage is by understanding what liminality could be. Thus, I pose the following two questions: what kind of process is liminality? and what kind of time is liminality? While I believe that these two can be explored in any order, I will first address liminality as process starting from Deleuze’s third synthesis of time.

Liminality as Process

Rites of passage are active cuts in time as “big events” rather than passive events. Rites function as guideposts for formative moments or occasions in the individual’s life,

⁴⁹ Teresa Leanne Reeve, “Luke 3:1–4:15 and the Rite of Passage In Ancient Literature: Liminality and Transformation” (PhD diss., Notre Dame, 2008), 55.

⁵⁰ Toni Sant, “Liminality and Altered States of Mind in Cyberspace” (New York University, 2001).

by which they might order important events in a series. James Williams explains that “. . . we can situate any event in relation to any other as before and after, not through an external reference to their position on a timeline, but through reference to the before and after of each cut.⁵¹ Important events such as birth, birthdays, graduations, marriage, death, etc. are inscribed by rituals, and in doing so, a person is able to “make sense” of their life in relation to time. This happens both reflectively and anticipatorily. By thinking “it has been five years since I got married,” for example, one comes to understand themselves as a subject with an identity (husband or wife) and an accompanying duration of time (five years) in relation to the big event. They may also reflect on their status before the marriage as a duration of time being “unmarried,” or in relation to an “after” of another event with accompanying identity and duration, or an amalgamation of many at the same time. Likewise, the person can project themselves onto an anticipated self as a “before” or “after” of a future big event. For example: “in six months I will be married,” or “in a year I will have been married for six months.” However, this does not preclude the possibility of passive events to be big events as well. This suggests that rites of passage are *active* events, as they are marked intentionally by either the individual or their social structure, or both, through ritual symbols at social gatherings. Using the example of marriage again: the “initiates” exchange rings which may be interpreted as representing the Ouroboros as an emblem of wholeness and the mastery of the wheel of life with its accompanying ups and downs, surrounded by other ceremonial actions and

⁵¹ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 15.

objects.⁵² Of course, large events can pass without ceremony or ritual, but this simply suggests that *rites of passage* are also anticipatory, since they are marked before they occur.⁵³ Thus we can say that rites are active by demonstrating that we both reflect on *and* anticipate them, and that they mark important events in an individual's life as cuts in time.

The liminal stage in rites of passage is the fracture of the subject/self relationship in Deleuze's syntheses of time. It is important to note that, while I read the third synthesis of time through Turner's liminality due to their future-oriented perspectives on time, for Deleuze, the third synthesis of time folds into the other two in irreducible ways. The first synthesis, that of the living present, contracts the past and future into it as habit and expectation. In the second synthesis, the present is an expression of the pure past as the "least past past." Here, the past determines *how* the present *is*. The subject/self relationship of Deleuze's syntheses of time can be best explained in terms of the I/me construct. Here, "I" is active, as in: "I am writing this chapter." Conversely (but still related), "me" is passive and is in the process of becoming: "she is discussing this chapter with me." The active "I" is in the process of determining "me" through present actions, and has an effect on *how* I become. The passive "me" is my identity—my virtual history of experiences and past actions—which makes the acting "I" possible.⁵⁴ This process is a double-movement between the acting subject and the self in the process of becoming.

⁵² The Ouroboros is a common mythological symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail. Apocryphal interpretations of symbols like these have dominated the layperson's understanding of non-western cultures ever since scholars like Joseph Campbell made this kind of thinking fashionable. I use these simply as examples of widely-circulated knowledge, regardless of their veracity or reductiveness.

⁵³ For Deleuze, "active" and "passive" are not opposed.

⁵⁴ For Deleuze, the "virtual" is not actual, but it is real. It is generative in that it is a potentiality that becomes fulfilled *in* the actual.

The active subject, through the living present, partially determines the passive self which is the condition by which the subject may act. The subject is made determinable by its past, or the self.

Liminality facilitates this subjectification process by creating a physical, psychological, and temporal space through ritual symbols, play, and flow. Deleuze explains that all events are fractures, and in that respect, all there is is liminality. As in: through a living present in which the individual is always in a process of becoming, or subjectification, they are *never not* in liminality. However, we can differentiate liminality once again from the regular flow of time. This fracturing process is urged on by the ritual process—carried out in terms of the individual *inside*, and not removed from, a social structure and its tradition. In Joseph Campbell’s words:

. . . ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual’s life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms. *They disclose him to himself*, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, the chieftain; at the same time rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of archetypal stages. All participate in the ceremonial according to rank and function. The whole society becomes visible to itself as an imperishable living unity (italics mine).⁵⁵

Campbell’s suggestion leans on pre-civilized rituals and archetypes of Carl Jung’s “collective unconsciousness” arguably to a fault.⁵⁶ However, we can still infer that in liminality the individual is constituted in terms of the subject/self in relation to other subjects or objects, social structure, and tradition of a particular society. Moreover, as the

⁵⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 383.

⁵⁶ Joseph Campbell is often criticized for his reliance on Jungian archetypes to explain commonalities between cultures across time and location. He interprets all happenings in mythological stories and rituals as adhering to, and being expressions of, a collection of common ideas that are true across every culture throughout history.

objects, values, and traditions of a society are a part of a virtual past that constitutes a “self” which is the condition for the active subject, it is *through* these things that the fracturing process in rites of passage operates.

In the liminality of ritual, this process occurs in and between three different entities all as intermingling subject/selves: individual, social structure, and tradition. As described above, the individual as subject/self is fractured through an ongoing living present. Victor Turner also describes how social structure is reconstituted by a dialectic between itself and ritual (and the individuals enacting it) as anti-structure.⁵⁷ This process extends from the individual as the most immediate acting subject to a ubiquitous tradition, which is always looming in the background of a society. Social structure and tradition are able to be acting subjects by way of the other acting subjects in their complex. For example, tradition is an active subject by way of the rituals, which help constitute itself through its virtual past, as social structure. Likewise, social structure is active by way of the individuals who enact its rituals. In the same way that the individual’s passive self is constituted by both social structure and tradition and are thus conditions for the active subject, so too are the individual and social structure conditions for the acting tradition, and so on. Furthermore, by enacting ritual, the individual and ritual become both a part of the conditioning self of tradition and its determining subject. This circular description can be better described as a process that is always happening between (at least) these three entities—subject/self, ritual, and tradition—during liminality in rites of passage: the fracture of the subject/self as separate entities by way of the others, and the intermingling of the three fractured entities at the same time.

⁵⁷ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.

Thus, to the question of “what kind of process is liminality?” we can say that it is: a process especially conducive to becoming, as it relaxes the identities of those participating, through *communitas* and flow. It further facilitates this process through ritual symbols and performances which actively mark transitional moments or events of a person’s life. The subjectification of the individual, social structure, and tradition are all constituted in terms of, and by way of, themselves and each other.

Liminality as Time

Liminality is one of many overlapping and co-occurring presents. A spatial metaphor will be constructive here (as is always the case when speaking of time): As I am currently writing this thesis, there is a foreground present of me writing this sentence occurring with a middleground present of me writing this paper occurring with a background present of the entire duration which started when I sat at my desk, and a multiplicity of other imaginable presents overlapping. Each present is in a different metaphorical position in relation to the others, ordered by the way I passively allocate my attention. Each one of these presents is its own duration of time by virtue of its particular context. This context connects a malleable beginning to an equally malleable end through a passing duration of time—as in: this particular present began around when I sat at my desk, and will end around when I get up from it. More importantly, the beginning and end of a duration of time are *a part of* a present, all of which are related by and constitutive of a context (more on this below). The beginning and end of liminality as “initiation and incorporation” outline the passing present of a rite of passage as its own duration connected through a shared context.

However, liminality during rites of passage rituals is a unique kind of present duration in two respects: it is *active*; and no other overlapping and co-occurring presents are *more foregrounded* than it (to continue the previous metaphor). This can be explained by recalling flow and comparing it to a “play” activity. Play, in the sense that Evan Ruud uses it, happens when we organize an activity in a way that actively sets it apart from activities of ordinary life. This ordering is carried out by an active subject—play requires humans who create conceptual and temporal spaces that are derived from the passive nature of activities in “ordinary life.”⁵⁸ In other words, play is a creative act. Rites of passage, as play activities, can then be considered active events from this perspective. During flow, the individual’s psychic energy is oriented toward a limited scope of tasks, so much so, that they experience a loss both of space/time awareness and self-consciousness. While the liminal being may be acting in an infinite number of overlapping, the experience of flow is such that they are only aware of their present liminal experience. We can then say that, from the perspective of the liminal being, this present experience is situated at the extreme foreground of their attention. Liminality pushes itself into this foreground, temporarily ordering all other presents behind it. Thus, liminality is an active duration of time, which purports to situate itself in front of all other passing presents.

Rites of passage actively contract the past and future into the liminal present. During the ritual, the past and future are brought into contact with the present in an

⁵⁸ Evan Ruud, “Improvisation as a Liminal Experience: Jazz and Music Therapy as Modern ‘Rites de Passage,’” in *Listening, Playing, Creating - Essays on the Power of Sound*, ed C. B. Kennedy (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 94.

especially intentional way. The initiate reenacts the symbolic stories of their tradition through totems, masks, symbolic actions and so on. In doing so, they contract a constellation of their own past and tradition—a collective past—into the present. As mentioned above, a jazz musician may play “stock phrases” or licks, lines, and other musical gestures they picked up from jazz greats through transcription, at a jam session. These are totem symbols and masks that are re-presented through the actions of the musician but in an entirely unique way by virtue of their place in the musician’s past, which is conditioning their present performance. During rites of passage, these totem aspects of the virtual past are brought into the forefront of the actor’s conditioned actions. It is through these actions that the initiate projects him/herself onto a future that is envisioned beforehand in terms of their society through these ritual actions and symbols—again: “They disclose him to himself, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, the chieftain; at the same time rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of archetypal stages.”⁵⁹ The future that is envisioned for the rite of passage initiate is expected beforehand, and the ritual is meant to facilitate the transformation. The seventeen-year-old is expected to become an eighteen-year-old, just like the engaged couple is expected to become a married couple.

In short, liminality is a unique kind of duration of time because it actively pushes itself to the center of the individual’s attention. In the liminal stage of ritual, the virtual past is contracted into the present through traditional symbols, and the future through the collective expectations and the norms of a society. However, it is important to note that

⁵⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 383.

liminality is only active in this sense in regard to formal rites of passage rituals, the kind studied by the likes of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. In other cases it may be more or less active or passive to varying different types and degrees.

By understanding rites of passage, we come to a better understanding of the large events that mark formative moments in our lives. Through liminality, the subject/self is brought into contact with social forces that transform the individual, their society, and even the traditions and values expressed through symbols. Liminality itself is a unique kind of time that actively contracts the past and future into it. And as a concept abstracted, but still derived from rites of passage, liminality can be employed to better understand durations of time that reveal important information about the way we might perceive context and identity in relation to process.

Transitional rituals and liminality have been subject to many fascinating interpretations in fields such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology since Arnold van Gennep first provided a framework by which we might interrogate them. However, many possible philosophical investigations of rites of passage still exist, especially from phenomenological perspectives pertaining to subjectification between humans, social structure, and tradition. Furthermore, the above argument of extended periods of liminality can be greatly expanded and much more rigorously fine-tuned—my hope is that my analysis may be a starting point. By bringing time and process philosophy to bear on rites of passage and liminality, my goal is to present tools that may be used to glean new possible interpretations of these concepts.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF JAM SESSIONS IN THE GREATER PHOENIX AREA

In the following chapter I analyze three jam sessions in the Phoenix area jazz scene as a means to make broader observations about contemporary jam sessions and the jazz tradition. The social and musical functions are interpreted as rites of passage and focus on ways in which jazz musicians employ jam sessions to construct their social and personal/musical identities vis-à-vis the values of the jazz tradition and their scene through ritualized and liminal performances of etiquette. The analysis is also relational, in that it examines different specific intra-actions between components that constitute—and are constituted by—the Phoenix scene, as well as the musicians within it. These relations are between the scene and its agents, and *space, repertoire and musical gestures, instruments* and *etiquette*. My observations are informed by both the comments of three prominent members of the local scene whom I interviewed, as well as my own experience as a member of the scene attending these jam sessions.

Interview Subjects

I chose the three musicians to interview based on a few factors: their high level of involvement with the jazz scene in the greater Phoenix area, their reputations as outstanding performers, and their positions as founder/hosts for prominent area jam sessions. All three of these musicians are affiliated in some way with Arizona State University and are also educators. The three jam sessions I researched vary in formality and crowd and fulfill distinct roles in the local scene, although there is overlap in these categories. Likewise, each of the musicians represent a different degree of involvement

with the scene, have varying levels of musical experience, and come from different generations. Two of the jam sessions are hosted at The Nash jazz club in Phoenix and the third at Spinelli's Pizzeria in Tempe (henceforth "Spinelli's").

Jeff Libman and The Nash Sunday Night Jam

Jeff Libman is 41 years old, holds a PhD in music education, currently teaches jazz guitar at ASU, and is one of the most accomplished musicians and educators in the area. He moved to Arizona in 2004 to pursue his Master's degree after living most of his life in Chicago, having spent one year living in New York in the meantime. When Libman moved to Phoenix, he immediately started looking for jam sessions to acclimate himself with the scene—something he was used to doing in Chicago and New York, two of the most dominant jazz areas in the country. He explains how he felt his experience playing and listening to the highly skilled musicians in the New York area could be valuable to the comparatively underdeveloped scene in Arizona:

I had this experience and I saw these people and I interacted with them, I played with a few of them, and I saw them and I saw that level and I remember what that was about. And actually, I did think that was something valuable that I could bring to Arizona from New York which factored into my kind of "I'm new to Arizona, where are the jam sessions, what's going on ...". As soon as people knew me a little bit, it was like "I'm gonna try to do something about the situation." At first it wasn't like that because I wasn't hitting the ground running quite like that, it took a year or two for people to start to get to know me and what I was about, what I cared about. Some of these thoughts I carried around in my head. I'm like "oh the scene isn't as developed here and I'm building my thing back up but I have some ideas and I have some history and I've seen something that is important to this world and not everybody has been there for a while to like, take it in."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Jeff Libman, interviewed by Raymond Lebert, January 24, 2019.

After noticing that the few jam sessions in the area were not heavily populated, or did not have diverse membership, he attempted to start his own. During his master's education, he created four different jam sessions, although each of them eventually closed down. In 2008, Libman was hired by ASU's jazz studies department, and eventually was recruited as an associate board member for Jazz in Arizona, the non-profit community arts organization that would create The Nash jazz club.

Libman was engaged with The Nash's development from the conceptual phase, and advocated for many of the ideas that would eventually be realized. He suggested opening the venue on Roosevelt Row, an arts district in downtown Phoenix, and hosting free shows every first Friday of the month as part of the city's monthly art walk. He also stressed the importance of keeping the venue all-ages to provide listening and performance opportunities for young people and ASU undergraduates as well as hosting a weekly jam session on Sunday nights open to jazz musicians of all ages and skill levels. Lastly, he advocated for hiring professionals who also taught in the community to host the jam sessions so that education-minded musicians were mentoring the less experienced ones. Libman took charge of starting the Sunday night jam sessions, and in 2012, when The Nash officially opened, he hosted them regularly until a steady stream of hosts was established. Today, Libman hosts the jam session sparingly so as not to conflict with his booking role at the Nash, although he does perform on its stage occasionally.

Lewis Nash and the "Lewis Nash and Friends" Series

Lewis Nash is 60 years old, is Professor of Practice in Jazz at Arizona State University, and is one of the most prolific drummers alive today, having recorded five

albums as bandleader and over 400 as a sideman with such jazz legends as Tommy Flanagan, Joe Lovano, Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry, and Ron Carter. The Nash's name was chosen, with his blessing, in order to honor the Phoenix native and connect the new venue to an important local figure. "Connected with what was already there," explains Libman, "'The Nash' is great because it's connecting to something more local, and Lewis is a great part of Phoenix jazz history that predates The Nash, and the name was a continuance of that."⁶¹ Nash returned to teach at ASU in 2016, and in 2018, hosted The Nash's first "Pro Jam Session."

The "Pro Jam Session" was an attempt to encourage local professionals, a demographic that rarely frequented the Sunday night jams, to attend jam sessions. This jam was created to address this issue, even though jam sessions tailored specifically to professionals are not typical in the jazz tradition today. As Libman explains: "a 'pro' jam session is not a thing. So this is the Nash trying to solve its problem of 'professional musicians do not come out to jam in Phoenix, how can we change this, because we feel this is important.' So we started this pro jam hosted by Lewis Nash. I thought 'if anybody can change this, it's Lewis Nash.'"⁶² Unfortunately, the pro jam was not as successful as he had hoped it would be. The pro jam quickly turned into the Sunday night jams—attendees were largely comprised of younger jazz musicians with little jam session experience, although it did attract some younger professionals.

The solution came with a conceptual shift, and the pro jam was re-introduced under another title: "Lewis Nash and Friends," a curated, once a month show hosted by

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Nash and a house band of local and non-local professionals, with jam participation by invitation only. Nash illustrates how this series was created to keep the skill level high while maintaining the spontaneity of the jam session, all while keeping with the educational philosophy of The Nash:

The idea was we wanted to get away from the influx of minimally experienced high school players who are just learning how to even speak the language. Younger inexperienced musicians who aren't ready to be up there improvising on that level yet, and then singers who have a lot more listening to do—to the horn players and improvisers—to understand what motivates improvisers and creative soloists to want to play at a jam session. Generally, I will ask how many people are here for the first time for a jam session, and there will be a lot of hands that come up. And maybe somewhere in the middle of the proceedings I might, during a pause, or maybe things are being handed over to different musicians, I may take that opportunity to ask them “ok so...is it what you thought it was going to be?” (laughs). And you know I get a little more input from them. That way there's education going both ways. We're getting “why would people want to come to this?” and that's a good thing I think.⁶³

By communicating with the audience in this way, Nash can provide insight into a world of spontaneous improvisation to an audience who might be less familiar with jazz, as well as receive feedback on an event that is still developing conceptually and logistically.

Libman and The Nash are still trying to figure out how to use the “and Friends” series to motivate more local professionals to be involved with Phoenix jam session culture, but in my experience, this jam session has succeeded and then some on two fronts: there is rarely an empty seat, and the music is always exceptional. The educational philosophies of The Nash and the habits of local professionals created the need for a new jam session to fill a lacuna in Phoenix's growing jazz scene. The third jam session, created by Matt McClintock, originated out of a need to appeal to a different, but related crowd: young professionals affiliated with ASU and the surrounding community colleges.

⁶³ Lewis Nash, interviewed by Raymond Lebert, January 30, 2019.

Matt McClintock and the Spinelli's Wednesday Night Jam

Matt McClintock is an accomplished 24-year-old drummer who moved to Arizona from Reno, Nevada in 2012 to pursue his Bachelor's in Jazz performance. He is currently finishing his Master's in jazz performance, is one of the most employed drummers and teachers in the scene, and is generally considered to be one of the most talented musicians in it as well. In 2018 he created the Wednesday night jam session at a bar about half a mile away from ASU called Spinelli's.

The Spinelli's jam session was conceived, like the pro jam session, partly in response to the Sunday night jam session at the Nash. The idea was to create a space for dedicated young professionals in the scene around ASU who wanted to hear and play high level jazz with their social group—mainly students and graduates of the jazz performance program at ASU, although attendance at the university is not strictly required to be a member of this community. Its close proximity to the university, and the way it invokes late night jam sessions in the tradition of jazz, were also significant factors. McClintock explains that he started the jam,

really so we could have a jam session in Tempe, a jam session that wasn't at The Nash. Because it's close, a place for ASU students. My original idea was actually to start a late-night session, I wanted to have a 12-2am session or something. And I live right by Spinelli's and I drive by and see that they're open until 5am, so I figured they might be cool with that. I think it's important that it happens later at night, that its close by. It's really just more about the vibe of having a late-night session. Kind of rebellious in nature. And it's more like, diehard musicians will show up to play all night and that will create a space where the music making feels good.⁶⁴

Because of the Nash's educational philosophy and all-ages policy, ASU students and alumni took to a local bar right next to the university to create a space where high-level

⁶⁴ Matt McClintock, interviewed by Raymond Lebert, February 7, 2019.

jazz can be created and enjoyed by their social circle. He expressed the importance of having a place for the community that revolves around ASU, where members are able to socialize and grow together musically. Because of its close affiliation with the university, attendance varies depending on school events and people's schedules, although the jam session has been very successful so far. In any case, a familiar and dedicated crowd can be found at Spinelli's on Wednesday nights, even when the undergraduates have to wake up early the next morning for school.

In summary: all three of these figures are productive forces in the greater Phoenix area's jazz scene and represent different generations of musicians. Each jam session fills a particular role or niche, whether to provide the city's first jazz club, create a platform for top-level professional jazz to be heard, or establish a gathering place for the up and coming young professionals to congregate and grow the scene that closely orbits the university. The first was created as a response to an underdeveloped scene in general and the others are more specialized, fulfilling very particular needs in the scene—a good sign of a growing and multifaceted community.

In the next section, I offer an analysis of the three jam sessions described above, demonstrating how the social and musical identities of jazz musicians are constituted through rite of passage interpretations and performances. The rites of passage metaphor is used to examine three different phenomenological relations or processes of the jam session event: space, repertoire and musical gestures, and instruments as prosthetic continuances. These findings are used to make broader comments on the components of jam sessions and their particularities in consideration of ideas from Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as more general ideas about jazz culture. The liminal

theoretical framework of the previous chapter is then used to analyze the etiquette of each jam session as ritual performances that are embedded in co-constitutive double-movements. The three musicians I interviewed provided valuable insight into the ways in which jam sessions facilitate these processes and fulfill these roles in jazz scenes today.

Analysis

Space

Walk into The Nash on most nights and you will find the venue's logo just to the side of the performing band, always within the audience's frame of vision, bearing the slogan "Jazz Happens Here." These words are more than just an obvious description of what sounds are currently being heard in the venue—they also seem to suggest a claim to centrality, and appropriately so. As mentioned above, The Nash is the only dedicated jazz venue in the greater Phoenix area. If, in the future, more jazz venues are opened up throughout the city, the meaning may change, but for now "Jazz Happens Here" seems to invoke a cozy and familiar kind of feeling that I, as a jazz musician, or as someone seeking jazz, am in the right place, that this is a space set aside for jazz.

The name "The Nash" itself is nestled within a web of intertextuality. As mentioned above, it is a reference to the legendary Phoenix native, and connects the present to Lewis Nash's past. The Nash is not just given a place within the history of jazz by virtue of it being a jazz venue but is given mobility through its connection to a living, breathing member of its tradition. On the level that the name is directly referencing the person, The Nash's identity changes as Lewis Nash's identity changes—and vice versa. The venue's identity also changes depending on who is inside it—what bands or artists

perform and add to its history and prestige; the prominent members of the jazz community, or social forces who—for whatever circumstances—decide to play or not to play on a given night; or the demographics who frequent it, often dependant upon the type of music, night of the week, or relationship to the night’s performers. The Nash’s name is given mobility by those who are able to interpret its name and make these interpersonal and intertextual connections.

Spinelli’s, on the other hand, is a bar, and

it’s just kind of a typical bar too! And so it’s freeing. I think that our generation kinda likes those places because its like it feels like there aren’t that many rules. Some other jams can be so stiff. And so when you go to the jam, I mean, a lot of people think the jam session is just kind of a party, and it really is! But it's like a party for musicians. You know?⁶⁵

Spinelli’s connects itself to the jazz tradition in another way: it invokes the excitement and spontaneity of the late-night jam sessions and cutting contests of pre-1960’s New York. The bar was not created to house jazz music, but it has become home to it nevertheless; it represents the irregularity with which a party of four by chance runs into acquaintances and becomes a party of six, then a party of eight, and so on. But its repetition ritualizes it, gives it form and allows it to take shape and be shaped by its members. As McClintock explains, the Spinelli’s jam session was not meant to be an educational space, it was meant to house the growing creative and social deluge of the young professional scene—a deluge that had been seeping out of the doors of the practice rooms and classrooms at ASU, out of the windows and crevasses of the late-night jams at its members’ house parties, and contained finally at the bar on Mill avenue. Spinelli’s was, in fact, a culmination of years of trial and error—ASU undergraduates and alumni

⁶⁵ Ibid.

had been trying to create a regular space for jam sessions outside of the “formal” education of the university since I entered the scene in 2012. The notion of being in a bar late at night with friends and classmates, playing for each other and socializing away from the critical eye of teachers or older professionals is an appealing one for the younger professionals in the Phoenix jazz scene.

Spinelli’s and the Nash both manipulate the performance space in different ways to blur the performer/audience distinction. The stage at Spinelli’s is a makeshift one, every Wednesday night before the jam starts, the house band pushes aside the booths and tables on the platform where they will be playing. This stage-space is generally reserved for whomever is performing at the time, although musicians might leave the stage to sit after soloing, or audience members might occasionally sit near the piano player on one of the relocated booth seats, maintaining the “concert stage” ritual of the western canon while also blurring its boundaries slightly.⁶⁶ The Nash, on the other hand, has no raised stage, a feature that Libman was an advocate for in the conceptual stages of The Nash:

My two other favorite places to see jazz in town were The Lost Leaf and Kazimierz at the time, two places that don’t have a raised stage, and I always liked those places. It felt intimate. The feeling was like—and I guess I *am* a performer so maybe I’m reading too much into this—it kinda felt like you were playing when you weren’t playing, like you were a part of it, like you weren’t separated artificially “these are performers people, you’re supposed to worship them, you are supplicants, you go down here.” And the whole thing we were looking to do with this intergenerational jazz club was kind of about this model where there were all these intermediary steps where you were moving up in your career—and it wasn’t this thing where you just “flip” like you’re one of these people and now you’re on stage with those people—it was meant to feel more egalitarian. And I also think it feel more intimate. So you could be watching a big band, and there could be a baritone saxophone like four feet from you! You can watch the whole show like that! So creating a little bit more of an inviting,

⁶⁶ Travis Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away*, 144-145; Samuel Floyd Jr, *The Power of Black Music*, 146.

connected experience for the audience, not going with the “sacredness” of the raised stage.⁶⁷

To him, the ground-level stage embodies the inclusive philosophies of The Nash from both the audience and performer’s perspective. The stage, which is physically indistinguishable from the house floor, is liminal in both space and concept. While the divide between the audience and performers is still maintained, having this physical distinction softens the barrier between the two parties, creating a feeling of intimacy or empathy. For the audience member, the stage represents equalization—the performer is both spatially and metaphorically on a similar level as them. Lawrence Nelson also notes this kind of equalization at jam sessions in general, suggesting that jazz musicians both disregard and discourage differences in social status throughout the duration of the encounter.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Bobby Alexander explains that within a community, ritual performance “relaxes some of the requirements of status differentiation when, in its transitional stage, it moves participants from a former social identity or condition to a new one.”⁶⁹ Whether guided by the social etiquette of Spinelli’s makeshift stage, or by the “egalitarian” floor-level stage at The Nash, each venue manipulates the performance space to suit the needs of jazz’s ritualized character and relax the social boundaries of its performing bodies.

⁶⁷ Libman, interview.

⁶⁸ Nelson, *The Social and Musical Construction of the Jam Session in Jazz*, 90. Nelson defines an encounter as a joint activity of singular focus that is sustained only through the duration of the task. Although the encounter ends when the activity ends, members will often repeat the exercise in order to strengthen and develop their social group

⁶⁹ Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited: Ritual as Social Change*, 2-18. Alexander goes on to explain how Victor Turner views liminality as representing the “possibility. . . of standing aside not only from one’s own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements.”

Generally speaking, jazz musicians have historically chosen physical spaces that suit the social and musical needs of their community, holding jam sessions at either bars or jazz venues. Pinhiero, in his study on jam sessions in Manhattan, explains that they

take place in specific venues—jazz clubs and bars—which are important places for jazz performance in Manhattan, where they play a crucial role in the process of establishing the professional reputation of musicians. These places are vital for the musicians’ artistic development, enabling them to achieve visibility in the context of the jazz scene. They are generally organized in a way which enhances the central role of the musicians in jam sessions (like in regular jazz concerts).⁷⁰

Although Pinhiero’s argument is slightly circular, it still emphasizes that in the social context, jam sessions exist for musicians in a community to interact with one another in physical spaces that are conducive to socialization. As such, they also act as the social focal point for jazz musicians, giving them a necessary vehicle to enter the workforce as professional gigging musicians.

Social Capital in the Jazz Scene

Jazz musicians who are looking to play their music professionally, however, must negotiate a competitive job market in which social capital is as important, if not more, than education. Libman explains the importance of practical experience for the musician looking to make a career with jazz:

So one of the things that's different about being a jazz musician than a lot of other fields is, you have to put yourself out there. I mean there are fields where you go to a prestigious university, you go through a four-year program, somewhere in the middle of your senior year there's a job fair at your university. And there are people just looking to pick you off and take you to their firm right upon graduation. And you don't have to do that much outside of the school to be in demand. Jazz-wise, practicing and getting good at playing your instrument or singing is not enough. There need to be connections that are built. And with the way that jazz is often played in small ensembles, you have to meet a bunch of

⁷⁰ Pinhiero, “Jam Sessions in Manhattan as Rituals,” 134.

different people to play in different ensembles, maybe sometimes you're a leader, and sometimes you're a side-person working with some other leader in the band.⁷¹

While a certain level of musical competence is required in this field, social presence is what creates jobs for jazz musicians—something that is not always possible with a university education alone. As a member of the Phoenix area jazz scene, the number of gigs I am scheduled to play often directly correlates with the number of times I make appearances at jam sessions or other events. In some cases, I may be hired for a future gig the same night I attend a jam session, regardless of how well or how many tunes I play.

Libman likewise notes that jam sessions function as a kind of platform to learn marketable skills and build social capital:

School has been super important to several generations of jazz musicians at this point. And the majority of the finest jazz musicians in the world, the overwhelming majority of them, went to school to study music somewhere for some period of time post high school. But that's a part of the equation. The other part of the equation is the stuff that people do outside of school. These things where like, I went to jams and I didn't just start playing. I had to talk to people...The skills and the time that goes into this...it's not simple. Jam sessions are an important place to do this, they're an important place to work on your memorization, to play with people you don't know, to gain entrance and stature into a jazz community. You learn about how a thing works all around the world, here in Tempe or Phoenix, then you develop a skill that you can take with you to hundreds of cities around the world. There are people that are not getting out into the community, they're just practicing and I'm like "what are you going to do with this? Do you think that you're going to graduate and then something is magically going to happen? I want people to know you. This is important for you developmentally. You need to get out there and do that." Jam sessions are a great opportunity to do this. You have to get out there and do these other things, jam sessions are a part of that.⁷²

As he describes, a jazz musician's professional success hinges on the face-to-face interactions available at such social hotspots as the jam session. The jam session can also

⁷¹ Libman, interview.

⁷² Ibid.

act as an entry point into a scene, and as such, they often rely on jam sessions to penetrate the social structure of an unfamiliar jazz community.

By performing in a jam session for the first time, the neophyte is able to establish their social identity within the community. During the performance they cross through a liminal state (from “otherness”) into an identity as constituted by the intermingling of the values and identities of the other musicians with their own. Martin Heidegger’s *Dasein* can be used here to describe a basic “jazz musician” ontology.⁷³ For example, I may be a jazz musician insofar as I do things that are associated with being a jazz musician—playing or listening to jazz music, attending jazz related events, and performing jazz, to name a few. Furthermore, my configuration as a jazz musician would be incomplete without objects that are normative and contextual to jazz, what Heidegger calls “ready-to-hand,” like my guitar, the other instruments present at a musical event, or “equipment” in general. Finally, the other *Daseins*, or musicians I play or socialize with, as well as the audience, or even those I have learned from either directly through instruction, or indirectly through recordings, all constitute a lived world of jazz: the being-in-the-world of a jazz musician. If I were to stop interacting with any of these components or engaging with any other activities, objects, or people associated with being a jazz musician, I would cease to be one. In other words, my identity is an assemblage of the various things, people, objects, processes, and ideas that I interact or engage with regularly and repeatedly. Before a community hears me play for the first time, however, they have

⁷³Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarriere and Edward Robinson, reprint ed. (Harper Perennial Classics, 2008).

nothing with which to associate me in regards to being a jazz musician other than what they might intuit from the way I comport myself.

The first performances at a jam session, then, can serve as a point of orientation; here “initiates” are able to attune themselves to the social and aesthetic values of the community. As mentioned above, Libman sought out jam sessions upon arriving in Arizona in order to enter the scene and eventually develop a social and musical presence. Nash also reflected on his early days in Arizona and the process of moving from neophyte to established member by attending jams sessions.

I can remember my earliest days around Phoenix...there was a drummer named Dave Cook, a pianist named Prince Shell, and Charles Lewis...those guys were very instrumental in helping to instill confidence in me. Like if I would go to a jam session, let's say when I first met them, and they're probably saying “who is this kid?” (laughs) “he's got a decent sound but he's got a few things to get together...” and you go back the next week: “oh it's that kid again...maybe we'll get him up onstage...” and you go back again “Hey!” (laughs). So that familiarity is established, and then you're able to go up and demonstrate your ability, your level, and then they know kinda how to work you in.⁷⁴

It was not enough that Nash attended the jam session once, but that he returned to repeatedly to demonstrate his willingness to learn from the more prominent social figures. McClintock also points out that at more exclusive jam sessions like Spinelli's where the community is comprised of a smaller body of returning members, aspects of performance and music-making began to take a definite shape over time as like-minded musicians, or musicians with a common experiential thread (in this case ASU), continue to attend the jam session:

The reason why we all come together is because we all play music and we have similar musical tastes, and that comes through in the music, and that's what sets Spinelli's apart from The Nash jam, because you have a certain thing that you're going for, but it's hard to get four people whoever they are to do what you want to

⁷⁴ Nash, interview.

do because your musical visions are just so different. And so I think that's a big part of it too is that, at ASU, we learn how to swing, and we all are kinda into the same, I don't know, hundred or so records, we're all kinda spinning the same records. And so we know like when we come through to the session, we're gonna be playing in a certain style. And the music will go anywhere, we're open to that too, but there's a common mindset in that regard as well. We all learned from the same source so we all have similar things going on. And so our conception of jazz is similar.⁷⁵

This “common mindset,” is a localized version of a general body of performance components in the jazz tradition like common repertoire, preferred tempos, intros and endings, and style, which are articulated at cultural hotspots like jam sessions. Here, new musicians on the scene learn these values and are in turn articulating their own for the community.⁷⁶ These components signify the values of both the neophyte and the other musicians, and the jam session is the symbolic template through which these values intermingle.⁷⁷

Repertoire and Musical Gestures

Jam sessions generally feature a more specific body of jazz repertoire, with each jam developing its own localized body over time. Libman explains that memorizing jam session repertoire is a principle rite that jazz musicians must navigate:

They're not all the same, but jazz jam sessions live in a narrower band of musical styles than jazz as a whole. And jazz jam sessions generally speaking are based on the memorization of music as kind of your key to admittance. That's how you get

⁷⁵ McClintock, interview.

⁷⁶ Bobby C. Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited: Ritual as Social Change*, ed. Susan Thistlethwaite (Scholars Press Atlanta, Georgia, 1991), 3. Alexander comments that societies use ritual to “instruct their members in various organizing principles and values.” “Intros and endings” are two of the most important aspects of nonverbal communication in jazz performance. These are musical gestures that signal the tempo and style during the introduction, and ending type and placement during the last four to eight bars of a tune. Many are universal, but preferences in regards to which ones to use in my experience are highly localized.

⁷⁷ Teresa Leanne Reeve, “Luke 3:1–4:15 and the Rite of Passage In Ancient Literature: Liminality and Transformation” (PhD diss., Notre Dame, 2008), 56.

welcomed on the stage, you know some tunes by heart and you're functional on said tunes and can keep the form. It's music that people have to be able to know, enough people need to be able to know, and not rehearse with each other then come in and play in unique combinations that amass on the night of, sometimes organized by a jam session host. So I'm playing in a style which is a lot out of swing and bebop and hard bop and to some genres of what is called Latin jazz, Afro-Cuban jazz, Brazilian jazz, a narrower band of what I might play in some other experiences.⁷⁸

Libman's description suggests that knowing tunes that are likely to be called at a jam session is required for participation in the first place. Ingrid Monson also notes that, in general, successful participation in jazz ensembles requires knowledge of standard tunes, since improvisation is always done within context. Not knowing a tune that all jazz musicians are expected to have memorized can also be embarrassing, or worse, could damage a musician's reputation or prestige.⁷⁹ Each jam session also develops its own set of standard tunes that are established through repeated use, demonstrating the ideology of its members.⁸⁰ I found that jam sessions with more varied members, like the Nash jams, tend to play a wider range of tunes that are acceptable for general use, and ones with a more homogenous crowd, like at the Spinelli's jam session, play specific tunes that are representative of the aesthetic values of that particular community. For example, during the handful of times I attended the Spinelli's session, I noticed that not only did the same ten songs or so get called more than others, but some musicians themselves had very particular preferences for repertoire. One younger sax player would call "There is No Greater Love" as the first tune he played every time. On the other hand, one of the most

⁷⁸ Libman, interview.

⁷⁹ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* 183-184.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 120. Monson uses Raymond Williams's definition of ideology as "an articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs of a kind that can be abstracted as the 'worldview' of a particular group," to explain the way that jazz musicians transform or "signify" on existing repertoire.

respected sax players would call at least two Thelonius Monk tunes a night, which resulted in fewer people being able to perform since the songs are less well-known, in which case the “veterans” would play for the audience to the excitement of everyone. At The Nash, most of the repertoire I played or watched others play was comprised of tunes universal to jam session repertoire, such as “Autumn leaves,” “There Will Never Be Another You,” or various blues heads, oftentimes eschewing recording-specific rhythmic hits. These tunes are still performed at the Spinelli’s jam session, especially by less experienced musicians, but more complex tunes in the oeuvre of such composers as Wayne Shorter or Thelonius Monk are common as well, almost always including rhythmic hits or harmonies specific to recordings that the group frequently listens to. The various jam sessions in a scene, as social and cultural hot-spots, articulate their group’s ideology, as well as the scene’s complex of ideologies, partly through their choice of repertoire, which is always developing based on the individual and group ideologies of its members.

While the repertoire that a jazz musician has memorized is essential to assimilating with a jazz scene in general or a particular jam session’s social group, the *way* that musicians improvise over the repertoire is equally important. McClintock expresses that a jam session is not just a place where people can learn how to play jazz or specific tunes, but also to learn *how* its members play,

These people that you’re on the bandstand with right now. And you need to be at a certain level to be able to do it. The bandstand is such an important place of taking care of each other and supporting each other. Jam sessions to learn how to play? Sure. Or maybe jam sessions to just celebrate the music. And the celebration is richer and deeper when the music is better, And you’re playing with people that have a richer and deeper understanding of jazz.⁸¹

⁸¹ McClintock, interview.

In the case of the Spinelli's jam session, most of its regulars tend to share similar jazz language. Since most of its members are from the same jazz performance program at ASU, they are likely to be exposed to the same jazz improvisation courses. A majority of these courses are taught by Michael Kocour, the university's director of the jazz studies, who plays and teaches a very practical, intuitive, and comprehensive style of jazz improvisation that includes common riffs and bebop line-making in the style of Barry Harris, from whom he learned.

In the case of the Phoenix jazz scene, and particularly at Spinelli's, the ASU jazz program is a source of shared knowledge vis-à-vis a broader tradition of jazz music. Kocour himself is one of the most formidable social and cultural forces in the scene, frequently attracting students from outside of Arizona. In fact, many students and alumni cite him as the reason for choosing to attend ASU, including Libman, and he was one of the points of contact for Lewis Nash before he was hired by ASU. Kocour, as an inheritor of Barry Harris's school of thought, has passed down a particular style of playing jazz that is understood by the majority of professionals in the scene—a style that is even more specific than the already idiomatic and derivative material common to all jazz musicians. For example, not only are bebop lines conceived of similarly, but riffs, long form improvisational approaches, repertoire preferences, chord voicings, and so on, are all equally shared and understood. Some of these materials have even been written down and circulated throughout undergraduates and alumni, such as Kocour's long list of big band riffs (which we affectionately referred to as the "riff-tionary"). As a result, there is often a

strong sense of cohesion at Spinelli's when, for example, all four members on stage know the riff that the pianist is referencing and are able to respond accordingly.⁸²

This sense of cohesion, which is one of the primary aesthetic ideals when participating in jam sessions, is described by Penny Katz and Sanna Longden in their sociological study of jazz jam session in terms of the “cybernetic-growth model.”⁸³ They found that during the duration of jam session participation, the musician develops the ability to respond to immediate feedback, that is, intuitively acting and adapting to both the music and the other musicians on the bandstand. When the task is complete, each participant's capacity for growth expands in terms of four different categories: *adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and pattern-maintenance and extension.*⁸⁴ Nash explains how the relationships between rhythm section players is crucial for reaching this ideal, what he calls:

Providing a feeling of forward momentum. Some bass players will have a weightier feel when they play time. With other players it feels very light and you don't feel the weight of the bass, almost like they're playing guitar. Sometimes you might want a more pointed attack from a walking bass, and sometimes you might want a softer, more round attack on the downbeats or in general from the bass. And the same thing from the drums. We're able to shape our sound and the

⁸² This is not to say that the musicians at Spinelli's rely solely on their common education for success on the bandstand—many of the musicians that play there are some of the most talented in the scene and are able to cohere with those who do not attend Spinelli's.

⁸³ Penny Katz and Sanna Longden, “The Jam Session: A Study of Spontaneous Group Process,” *Social Work with Groups* 6:1 (October 2008): 45, accessed November 16, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1300/J009v06n01_05.

⁸⁴ Mills, *The Sociology of Small Groups*, 39. Mills notes that, among other indicators for growth, a person displays “receptivity to a wider range of information about himself” [*sic*] and increases “flexibility in modifying his ideas” and “beliefs.” They also increase their “capacity to perform in an expanded repertoire of roles and variety of social relations without suffering diffusion of . . . identity.” through immediate action; rearrangements of roles as constituted by the relationship between the individual members; and observations “which formulate ideas about themselves as actors,” or consciousness. In short, the participant first brackets their individuality through full absorption in the group activity, with the immediate goal being that of group success. Then, during the activity, each member responds to feedback which reconstitutes the roles identified with them in relation to the other members.

ways that whatever is required in that moment musically, we know how to change what we're doing in order to arrive at that sound or that feeling.⁸⁵

Nash describes reaching this ideal in terms of what can be done by the musicians with their instruments throughout the duration of improvisation. The relationship between the musician and their instrument can also grow, break down, or change depending on various circumstances.

Musician-Instrument Relationship

On one of the nights I attended the "Lewis Nash and Friends" jam session, Nash grabbed the mic next to him during a blues and began scat singing a solo. This solo was particularly impressive, not just for its sophisticated lines, tasteful phrasing, and technical difficulty, but also because he is a drummer, and drummers are rarely associated with singing. In our interview, I asked Nash if he believed that learning to sing helped his drumming, and he responded,

I'm sure it does. I'm absolutely sure it does. A lot of times when I'm soloing, it'll have a certain kind of linear, melodic, inkling or direction. And I think it also helps me beyond soloing, it helps me when I'm playing time or accompanying someone because what I might do is...well let's say you're playing a guitar solo, and you're leaving space...you're just breathing, musically speaking...now some drummers may just feel like "here's a space, let me just insert a fill here." What I might think is: I'm already following the arc of your line, so when you pause, I might think "well I'm going to continue that line the way that it was going" and then maybe do something that's linear, that's more related to what you were actually playing, rather than just filling the space that was left open where you stopped playing.⁸⁶

The phenomena that he recounts above are a kind of multi-instrumentality that is not uncommon among jazz musicians. By practicing another instrument, in this case his

⁸⁵ Nash, interview.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

voice, Nash was able to improve his drum playing—the linear, melodic, and phrasal habits he learned from singing, as well as his ability to better discern the melodic tendencies of linearly-oriented instruments, all bled into his drum style.

While many jazz musicians experience a kind of bi-musicality inherent in the tradition by transcribing and imitating other instruments or playing styles outside of jazz, sometimes they demonstrate it by filling in a need at jam sessions.⁸⁷ Several times at Spinelli’s one bass player switched to piano to fill out a group, and in one instance I ended up playing bass lines on guitar because there were no bassists available. As with Nash’s example above, playing other instruments in jazz music attunes you to your secondary one when you are playing your primary one. This is valuable since, especially for rhythm section players, jazz musicians need to be aware of what the other instruments are doing as much as possible in order to interact with them and maintain the quality of the “groove.”⁸⁸ By playing and hearing jazz from another perspective, jazz musicians are able to nurture a more multifaceted connection to their instrument and enrich their understanding of jazz on the bandstand.

However, in some instances a musician’s relationship to their instrument can deteriorate or break down altogether due to injuries, forcing them to develop other jazz-related skills. In Libman’s case, a neurological injury in his picking hand left him unable to play his instrument for much of his undergraduate career and continues to bother him today. He explained that he would still attend jam sessions when he lived in New York, however, in order to socialize:

⁸⁷ Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 163.

⁸⁸ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, 83.

It was as if I had self-selected into the jazz community but my body wasn't allowing me to pursue it in the way that I wanted to pursue it, but I had already kinda decided I was a part of this community. First of all, I enjoyed listening, and observing, and meeting people, and there were happenings in this period of time where, for example, I wrote some music and it was performed by very good young New York jazz musicians in the same places I would go to jam sessions at. But for me, like you know one of my buddies hosted a jam session at Cleopatra's Needle on the upper West side that I think was on Saturdays at midnight to 3, and it was in my neighborhood so I'd be like, "oh if I'm not doing anything maybe I'd just go over to Cleo's" and I'd watch and just hear these great young players—some of which are the jazz stars of today. Yeah it was just kinda like... partially it was like where the hang is, and it was a bar restaurant and I could get food or a drink. There was a lot of enjoyable things going on. . . . But yeah that was still kind of my community to a degree, and the jam session was one of the places where it was happening.⁸⁹

Listening and watching are two musical skills that he was able to work on in spite of his ailment, and he could still develop a social presence in the scene by attending jam sessions. He also suggests that even though he could not play at the jam session, he could still develop jazz related concepts in his head that he would be able to translate to his instrument later:

Without the sound of jazz in your head, there is no jazz. The theory, the sheet music, the instrument, is not enough. It has a rich performance practice. You have to have the sound in your head. So not only did I have the sound in my head, but I was seeing some of the best 22-25 year old musicians in the world kinda duke it out jazz-wise.⁹⁰

Berliner refers to this phenomenon as the relationship between the "singing mind" and the body. He explains that, in some instances, an improviser may "pre-hear" an idea in their head and realize in their body after, and in the same solo the body may lead by playing familiar vocabulary patterns while the singing mind concentrates on what is ahead.⁹¹ Libman conceptualizes his own improvisation as being directed by his singing

⁸⁹ Libman, interview.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 217.

mind, choosing viable musical options based on what his hands are capable of on any given night, even if it is not the first idea that comes to him:

I don't one hundred percent think I've ever felt that pure extension of self that I believe an instrument feels like to other people. I know sometimes I feel closer than other times. I think the kind of musician I want to be is the kind of musician who has a musical idea in some form of consciousness, and then that is realized in sound that other people can perceive. It's slightly different than "there are these great works and I want to be able to realize these things." It's a little more internalized and I think maybe the improvisers mindset has to be a little more like that because, for the improvise, even if we know that we are embodying a language which has history and tradition and includes borrowing and all that stuff, it is still organized in the moment by the individual. But I want to have thoughts, musical thoughts, that I hope are good thoughts. Jazz musicians I guess are like race car drivers, they have to make fast thoughts that work. So you have some kind of an editing mechanism in real time. So I feel like to some extent I'm always passing my imagination through a filter.⁹²

Other times the relationship between the musician and their instrument may change based on the circumstances of the performance. Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorizes ways in which familiar objects become extensions of our perception by becoming habitual.⁹³ For example, a blind person may perceive the world through their cane—the tactile sensation of the cane tapping an external object as felt through their hand is not an interpretation as such, it happens intuitively as the cane becomes familiar. The “sound” that a jazz musician identifies as uniquely their own, which is comprised of their instrument and all the gear and bodily actions that goes into making it sound a certain way, are how they “acquire” a world of jazz. When circumstances do not align with the habitual body, the relationship between the jazz musician and their instrument can break down, whether that means using different vocabulary because of a broken string, playing fewer lines due to suffering from stiff hands at an outdoor gig in cold weather, adjusting

⁹² Libman, interview.

⁹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, [1945] 2013).

their playing style to compensate for a venue with too much reverb, or using another musician's instrument.

In jam sessions, drummers and bassists often have to manage not being able to use their own instruments, which tests their ability to quickly build a habitual relationship with another person's instrument, and sometimes leads to a breach in etiquette.⁹⁴ Nash explains the struggles of playing on another player's drum set:

Now as a drummer, over time I became less enamored with jam sessions...because we all have different set ups, and some guy's legs are longer than others, and arms are longer or shorter than others, and they like the cymbals higher or lower than others, and so and so's cymbals I don't really have control over like I have over my cymbals. At least with the horn players or guitar players they're able to have their own instruments. Piano players don't have that luxury so much. And if you sit in on bass, you know a guy might have their string up really high or too low, or his end pin doesn't move and it's not the right height. So there's a lot of variables. My point being, as a drummer, there seem to be more variables involved which could make it not as pleasurable an experience as you might if you have your own set up and your own stuff. You know the guy tunes his snare drum really loose and you like a more tight sound, so you just can't really get to your stuff.⁹⁵

He notes that his jam session experience is less enjoyable if he does not feel like he has control over the instrument he is playing, a sentiment that is not uncommon since many musicians in general are very specific about the way they want their instrument to feel and sound. Drummers and bassists often adjust the spatial arrangement of their instrument to accommodate their physical body as well as their sound preferences, and an unfamiliar relationship to the instrument can decrease the amount of vocabulary they are able to realize in the moment. Drum sticks, however, are a more personal component of the drum set, possibly due to being physically in the hand of the drummer and the way

⁹⁴ Other instrumentalists may have to negotiate similar problems, however. Oftentimes at Spinelli's I would have to turn my guitar much lower than I would normally keep it since the house amplifier was one that produces too much feedback with my guitar.

⁹⁵ Nash, interview.

that they interface with the set in general, and are not shared among drummers at a jam session. McClintock explained to me that he always brings his own sticks unless he is friends with the house drummer. He recalls one jam session when he was younger where he asked to use another drummer's sticks and the gesture was interpreted as a breach of etiquette:

People can be kinda competitive. Another drummers might say “why would I let you use my sticks? You didn't bring your own sticks? I'll just go up and play for everybody. They wanna hear me more, and I wanna get a gig out of this jam session. So why would I let you play? No you can't use my sticks.” That was the feeling I got from that kid when I asked to use his drumsticks.⁹⁶

In McClintock's experience at this jam session, his request to use another musician's drum sticks, something more personal than a drum set, is interpreted as a breach of etiquette. The kind of feedback that he received from the other drummer, what is commonly referred to as “vibing” in Phoenix's scene, is an essential part of the informal education embedded in the jazz tradition and the public sphere of jazz performance in general.

Feedback

The jam session, as an informal public performance, is an essential medium for the jazz musician to cultivate personal growth. The public realm, with its multitude of unique human perspectives, offers the potential for growth in ways that would be impossible in privacy. Hannah Arendt explains that

being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects

⁹⁶ McClintock, interview.

and perspectives. . .this family ‘world’ can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators.⁹⁷

The jazz musician who converts their practice material to the concert performance directly from the woodshed risks performing it from a singular perspective only. The jam session is just such a place where one is able to rehearse outside of a vacuum.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi expounds on Arendt’s position, stating that in the public realm, “individuals get objective feedback about their strengths and weaknesses.” He further suggests that in public performance “the hidden capabilities of an individual are allowed to surface” and that it is “the best medium for personal growth, creativity, and self-revelation.”⁹⁸ In the jam session, musicians are able to synthesize practice material and receive feedback from their peers, actualizing the objects of their practice routine and more effectively developing their musical capabilities.

Jazz musicians rely on this feedback from their community at social events to help them improve and develop their own critical perspective. Paul Berliner notes that students of jazz “come to value the processes by which individuals establish their own identities through interacting with peers and predecessors alike.”⁹⁹ Not only do they require past models, such as recordings, but also present and immediate ones, accessible through socialization. He further explains that a large part of a jazz community’s social and intellectual life is the exchange of feedback between its members.¹⁰⁰ This feedback

⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 57.

⁹⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 275. I would argue here that one receives subjective feedback from multiple perspectives rather than “objective feedback,” but the point remains constructive. Feedback may also inhibit growth and bury capabilities, although that topic is outside of the scope of this thesis.

⁹⁹ Paul Berliner 147

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 274

could come from musicians exchanging licks, ideas, and tips directly—a “guitar hang” usually occurs at least once before the end of the night outside of Spinelli’s—in which case the more experienced musicians act as mentors to the less experienced ones, something that Nash explains is a natural part of jazz communities:

It's a beautiful thing. And I know that everyone doesn't feel that way, but I find that, more and more, the experienced players do get joy from sharing...there's something about sharing anyway that's fulfilling you know? And so there will always be those curmudgeons that don't want to share anything, want to be cranky and frowning and growling all the time...I don't want to be around them that much anyway (laughs). And I must say that my experiences overall in jam sessions is more often good and rewarding and fun than the opposite. I haven't had a lot of negative jam session experience. I think it's just the nature of them that lends itself toward positive things.¹⁰¹

While it might be easy to conclude that Nash’s good experiences at jam sessions are due to his talent, in my experience what he describes is accurate. The Phoenix scene is largely very inclusive and welcoming toward beginners, an attitude that I and many others make a point to pass down to new jazz musicians. Some even embrace this role, making sure to actively share information with students who return to jam sessions eager to learn:

More experienced musicians will start to then share anecdotes, share insights into how to approach things, because they see that you’re serious. If you come once then they don't see you for months and months and you come again and you sound the same or you sound worse, they're not gonna share much with you. But if you show a desire, a willingness to learn, a willingness to listen, a motivation to be a part of the scene...¹⁰²

Other times it may come through audience/performer interactions like the kind that Berliner describes where, for example, Barry Harris would stand next to pianists at jam sessions to watch their hands and steal chord voicings, and other signs of approval like

¹⁰¹ Nash, interview.

¹⁰² Ibid.

yea-saying.¹⁰³ Feedback can be exchanged on the bandstand as well, as more experienced musicians are spontaneously assigned the role of “mentor” to less experienced ones during the heat of improvisation. Nash explains:

That’s one of the pluses about jam sessions I think, is when the more experienced musicians don't have hang ups or egos to the point where they won't participate in something where less experienced players are playing. I feel like, if I can help someone get to that next level, even by doing something real simple as just playing a clear ride cymbal pattern so they can hear where the time delineation is...if I just do that rather than trying to play the hippest most complicated, syncopated accents ever, that they don't have a chance to grasp...because we know as professionals and experienced players we’re always going to have an opportunity to stretch out and dig deep and go for it, so to speak, so why not in this instance help someone get to another level?¹⁰⁴

This behavior is contrary to the practice of “paying dues” that Berliner describes in his research on jam sessions.¹⁰⁵ This may be because attitudes at jam sessions have changed over time—he refers to jams in 1957—and there simply is not enough documentation of contradictory behavior at jam sessions, or it could be a part of the general attitude shared among musicians specifically in the Phoenix scene. In either case, young or learning improvisors, especially those who have a critical opinion of themselves, “take heart in praise received from experienced players and reflect on weaknesses revealed through criticism.”¹⁰⁶ Other times they may (and sometimes should) reject someone's advice. In these cases, their individuality is called into question; personal aspects of their playing such as vibrato speed or phrasing style. Jazz musicians eventually learn to be critics

¹⁰³ Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 129. Samuel Floyd Jr, *The Power of Black Music*, 181. I use this in the context that Floyd uses it here to describe audible shouts of approval that make up moments of aesthetic unity between the audience and performer communications.

¹⁰⁴ Nash, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

themselves by receiving feedback from others, which helps them temper their self-criticism and form a more “objective” opinion about their own playing.¹⁰⁷

Etiquette

The three jam sessions examined all consist of repeated performances unique to them, which constitute a general etiquette. At the Sunday night jam session, participants are required to write their name and instrument on a list so that whoever is hosting the jam session is able to call musicians on stage and put together a coherent group of musicians between songs. This is mainly due to the irregularity of both the musicians hosting as well as the participants—as explained above, many different hosts are hired for this jam session, and it is open to anyone who wants to participate. Conversely, at the Spinelli’s jam session, there is no microphone for a host to rotate performers—it is done tacitly. Each instrumentalist notes how many songs whoever is playing their instrument on stage has played and removes their instrument from their case when they want to “queue” up, usually after the second of three songs the person on stage has performed. The players on the stage and in the audience all acknowledge the order with which musicians take out their instrument and adhere to this system for the most part. Since most of the participants at this jam session are either acquaintances or friends, musicians rotate seamlessly and freely. Finally, at the Lewis Nash and Friends jam session, participation is by invitation only—musicians are picked by Nash during the second set of the night based on who is in the audience.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

By selectively choosing who plays in his jam session, Nash is in a position to alter the cultural capital of musicians in the audience. Henry Kingsbury notes those with perceived talent bestow “talent” as a label onto others through verbal performances in social interactions.¹⁰⁸ Nash, who is considered to be a musician of superlative talent, confers talent onto those whom he chooses to play on stage. “Talent,” as a form of capital, can be considered to be within the realm of cultural capital. As Bourdieu explains, capital is converted—from cultural capital to social capital, then economic capital—with economic capital as the root.¹⁰⁹ While economic capital is not the sole motivator for all jazz musicians, it is an important factor when considering the circumstances of the professional gig economy. Young professionals then are especially able to benefit from the “And Friends” jam sessions, either to expose themselves to exceptional improvisation as a model, or to take part in this unique performance of jam session etiquette.

The unique etiquette of each of these jam sessions determines the various relational phenomena within them. Etiquette, such as choosing which repertoire to play at a particular jam session, is constituted by the values of that jam session as one social unit. Likewise, the etiquette behind choosing repertoire at a jam session is only possible with repertoire in the first place, and as such, these are co-constitutive forces. Etiquette itself is comprised of repeated ritualized performances carried out by social units in order to re-

¹⁰⁸ Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 59-85.

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (1986): 54.

present past actions in new contexts, all framed within the normative values of the unit.¹¹⁰ Etiquette, in other words, is the enunciated or performed ideology of a social group.

The jam session rites change and adapt to suit the values and needs of the members who participate in them. As each member of the community experiences a shift in status by performing, they also engage with an ongoing dialectic between the social group and the rites that are likewise always in a state of fluctuation. In a study on contemporary rites of passage, James Bossard and Eleanor Boll found that rites grow out of a dynamic tension between old and new values. They argue that this is in contrast to rites in pre-civilized societies that often feature little change over time, “reinforcing individual stability” at the cost of inhibiting social change.¹¹¹ This idea can be productively compared with the structural-functional model of small group sociology which states that individuals must use whatever resources are at hand to adapt to the demands of a social group.¹¹² In this model, the goal of the members is of *survival*, rather than *growth*, thus social groups are in service of ritual, or social structure, not the other way around. Victor Turner, however, disagrees with the structural-functional model, arguing in favor of a less conservative interpretation of ritual. He suggests that social life is constituted by the need for community *as well as* structure, and that social life is formed “out of the ongoing give and take of countervailing social forces.”¹¹³ In other

¹¹⁰ See “social dramas” above.

¹¹¹ James H. S. Bossard, and Eleanor S. Boll, “Rite of Passage-A Contemporary Study,” *Social Forces* 26, no. 3 (March 1948): 247-255, accessed November 5, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2572047>. Their interpretation of “pre-civilized” societies in this way is more likely due to ideas of or about these societies, not the societies themselves.

¹¹² Theodore M. Mills, *The Sociology of Small Groups*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 34.

¹¹³ Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited: Ritual as Social Change*, 3. Victor Turner refers to this as “ritual anti-structure.”

words, ritualized performances are also at the service of the members of a society, and adapt to suit the needs of its community.

Etiquette, as ritualized and performed ideology, is a mobilizing force behind change in the various layers of a social group. As explained above, I conceive of liminality as movement “by way of” a phenomenon’s acting agents: a social unit is mobilized by the performing bodies within it. Similarly, a community or scene is mobilized by the performances of the social groups within it—in this study, jam sessions. The “smaller” units, however, are also affected by the “larger” ones, since they present normative actions and ideals and as such are equally constitutive. The identities of the jazz tradition, jazz scenes, and jam sessions, are all made fluid and mobile by the equally fluid identities of the musicians and their performances, and vice versa.

All of the various relations between components of jam sessions and their acting bodies have a co-constitute relationship with the Phoenix area jazz scene. The three jam sessions I examined and the responses from the musicians I interviewed point to the specific relations which I have analyzed, although many more may exist. As a public platform, jam sessions produce *communitas*, or group liminality, through which the individual is able to develop their sense of self in relation to these social forces. This public forum also allows participants to synthesize practice material by responding to different kinds of feedback in immediate action. By doing so, they gain skills that enable them to respond to the various types of new feedback demanded of small group sociology, thus cultivating personal growth and identity construction. Interpreting the social and musical aspects of jam sessions through a rite of passage perspective demonstrates the ways in which they develop their own identities, as well as the identities

of the musicians who perform them, through ritualized performances of etiquette. Finally, analyzing aspects of these local jam sessions provides valuable information when considering the functional and relational role of jam sessions in the jazz tradition today more broadly.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that the jam session is both an essential component of the jazz tradition historically, and one of the most important structures through which to build a jazz scene today. I began by suggesting a new analytic lens from which to examine jam sessions based on metaphorical language that unobscures constructive qualities of jazz music, using ideas grounded within its mythological foundation. This lens is based on Victor Turner's concept of rites of passage, employing its defining feature, liminality, as a means to understand the "inbetweenness" of the identities of jazz musicians and their scenes.

Second, I combined Gilles Deleuze's futural perspective on time with the liminality of rites of passage rituals to describe the ways in which people create a "timeline" based on formative events in their lives. I then developed this perspective by once again turning to Turner's theories on social processes and suggesting how exactly the various layers of a society can be co-constitutive as agents *for* and *by way of* each other.

Finally, I provided a functional analysis of jam sessions in general, using the framework developed in the first part of this thesis. This analysis focused on the ways in which jazz musicians develop their social identities and the necessity of jam sessions in jazz culture and then turned to the individual and musical role of jam sessions. Here, I suggested different ways in which the jam session enables the individual jazz musician to find and craft their musical voice. In this analysis, I examined relational aspects of the three jam sessions located in the greater Phoenix area, highlighting four different phenomenologically-oriented components of the jam sessions: space; musical gestures

and repertoire as musical objects; the instrument and the way its relationship as a prosthetic continuance of the body changes; and etiquette as the repeated or ritualized performances of the ideologies and values of the different layers of a community, starting with its performing bodies. By analyzing specific aspects such as these, I drew conclusions about jam sessions historically and today, specifically about their function in the jazz tradition and the constitution of a jazz scene.

I began this project in an attempt to fill a lacuna in jazz jam session scholarship and to bring jam sessions into contact with more contemporary philosophies that tend to the identities of humans, objects, and social structures. Further research is needed to understand the role of jam sessions in general—as I explained above, my perspective is only a partial adumbration—and to discover ways in which post-secondary education might take advantage of the “informal” learning model of the jam session. Furthermore, more research should be dedicated to examining the role of state universities in the development of jazz scenes today. All three cases I analyzed, for example, are connected in various ways to the university proximal to their locations. While the purpose of this research was to explore a local scene in order to understand jam sessions more generally, I believe that similar research should be done in drastically different jazz scenes in the world for the same purpose—beginning with specific and localized studies first in order to eschew reductionist and overly-centralized ethnography. This thesis is also by no means a comprehensive examination into the different phenomenological and performative relations within a local jazz scene, let alone jazz scenes abroad.

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