Jazz Standard as Archive: Theorizing a Relationship Between Jazz Improvisation and Standard Repertoire

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[Soundtrack: Ornette Coleman. "Free." Change of the Century. Atlantic Records, 1960.]

The jazz standard repertoire remains an enduring part of the tradition of jazz performance and pedagogy. As a jazz musician, I play and re-play the standards continually and I have frequently queried why. Is the continuing centrality of the standard simply a matter of convenience or sentimental attachment? As I began to explore this question, I began to wonder if the distinctive features of jazz improvisation somehow depended on the standard repertoire, and even whether jazz improvisation itself might be thought of as being structured or even produced by that repertoire.

In the course of this article, I hope to persuade you that it can be thought of in this way, and that it might be productive to do so. I aim to explore what the character of the "standard" jazz repertoire is and what it might contribute to improvisation. I approach these questions in relation to a body of literature, through examples, and by reflecting on my own experiences as a teaching and performing musician. My aim is to propose a theory that enables new insights into jazz discourse and creativity in jazz.

There is no precise definition of the "jazz standard." Debates about what tunes can be considered standards are contested, in part because the criteria for a jazz standard changes over time and geographies. For the purposes of this discussion, I am referring to those tunes that are considered common knowledge among jazz musicians and that appear in the pages of the various Real Books and Fake Books. These are tunes that, on the stage, musicians commonly find they have in common and they are tunes that are used in jazz institutions for the teaching of jazz.[1] Ted Gioia has assembled a list of those tunes that he identifies as the most significant in the contemporary era, most of which are as common

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[1] See Faulkner and Becker for the former, Nylander for the latter. Robert R. Faulkner and Howard S. Becker, *"Do you know…?": The jazz repertoire in action.* (University of Chicago Press, 2009). Erik Nylander, "Mastering the jazz standard: Sayings and doings of artistic valuation." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2014), 66-96.

where I live in Brisbane, Australia, as they are in the U.S.[2] A large number of these tunes come from the "Great American Songbook," itself comprised of popular songs written for Broadway and Hollywood musicals and from Tin Pan Alley (c. 1920-50). Gioia also includes in his list, compositions by jazz artists such as Ellington, Miles and Monk, that have become commonly performed by jazz musicians. Alec Wilder identifies these songs as distinctly American, combining African American influences (including the blues, ragtime and other vernacular song influences) and European conventions.[3]

Typically, the jazz standard is situated in the literature as a "vehicle for improvisation."[4] Paul Berliner describes in detail the specific ways that musicians have varied chord progressions and have improvised on standard repertoire. However, in his descriptions there is not much of a sense of how the repertoire contributes to or shapes the character of what is performed. While there are multiple viewpoints expressed in Berliner's book, the overall characterization of the repertoire is in line with European notions of the work in music: the standard is pre-existing, and musicians offer an interpretation and use it as the basis for improvisations.

In *Shaping Jazz,* Damon Phillips calls the standard a "symbolic resource," noting that standards are the glue that connect different styles within jazz.[5] Standards can also be seen as something we share as musicians, and as listeners, a "*familiar soundtrack* against which artistic virtues of personality and idiosyncratic improvisatory charm can be identified and evaluated more easily."[6] Gioia seems to go further, suggesting that standards are "building blocks of the jazz art form", which implies that they are somehow formational, but then doubles back to refer to them as a "springboard to improvisation…and interpretation,"[7] relinquishing them once again to the status of static works. Samuel Floyd says that jazz is more about the improvisation of new "texts," a process that is "communal and cooperative."[8] These two ideas (standard as work,

[2] Ted Gioia, *The Jazz Standards* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[3] Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, Oxford University Press, 2022), 6-30; Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 3rd edition (Oxford Academic, 2021), 6. Amiri Baraka identifies the history of American appropriation and commercialisation of Black culture in *Digging* (University of California Press, 2009), chapter 6.

[4] Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63; Ken Prouty, *Knowing Jazz* (University of Mississippi Press, 2011), 57.

[5] Emphasis in original. Damon J. Phillips, *Shaping Jazz: Cities, Labels, and the Global Emergence of an Art Form.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 13, 16.

[6] Nylander, 84.

[7] Ted Gioia, *The Jazz Standards* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

[8] Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 228.

improvisation as new text), are unresolved in a model where standards are just the repertoire that musicians agree to use.

Individually, the standard tunes have distinctive characters, ones that performers seek to bring out in their interpretations, including their improvisations. Jerrold Levinson, says that "[t]hough they are not sentient, musical works are somewhat like *persons.* They possess a character, exhibit something like behavior, unfold or develop over time, and display emotional and attitudinal qualities..."[9] In Berliner's book, Jimmy Robinson is quoted as saying he performs in ways that are specific to a given tune.[10] When Levinson speaks of works unfolding or developing over time, he means simply that works have a duration in which the musical events unfold. But there is a sense in which the jazz standard develops over a longer timeframe. The standard exists across historical periods and in diverse geographies and when musicians perform standards they are engaging with the history of their performance and interpretations.[11] These sources paint a picture of a rich and evolving library of repertoire that exists alongside the development of jazz, an aspect of jazz that is also worthy of celebration and study. However, there remains no adequate theorisation of the link between that repertoire and jazz as performed.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a similar attitude is echoed in the literature beyond jazz studies. Jeff Pressing writes about the "referent" (that which is pre-composed) as a factor in his equation for improvisational cognition.[12] He says that the role of the referent is to increase processing efficiency, allowing the improviser to generate materials in advance and make assumptions about what will happen from moment to moment as well as facilitating group interplay. Schmuckler adds that the referent also guides the "production of expectancies."[13] These writers imply that a pre-composed element constrains creativity. Indeed, Pressing used the word "straitjacket" to refer to the pre-composed component of improvised performance.[14] Other commonly used terminology reinforces this idea: we produce a binary between improvised music that is based on a composition and music that is "free," deploying a signifier that is redolent of

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[9] Emphasis in original. Jerrold Levinson, "Popular Song as Moral Microcosm: Life Lessons from Jazz Standards," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 71 (2013), 54.
[10] Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 293.
[11] Berliner, 204.
[12] Jeff Pressing, "Improvisation: Methods and Models," in *Generative Processes in Music*, ed. John A. Sloboda (New York: Clarendon Press, 1988), 129-78.
[13] Mark A. Schmuckler, "The Performance of Global Expectations," *Psychomusicology: A Journal of Research in Music Cognition* 9, no. 2 (1990), 122.
[14] Jeff Pressing, "Free Jazz and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 203.

Black history and steeped in American ideology.[15] The implication remains that the jazz standard, while important in a historical sense, or perhaps for group identity formation, or as an organizational device, does not contribute anything significant to the musical materials developed by improvisers.

Rather, the standard is seen as something "which the improviser must negotiate."[16] Keith Waters even suggests that it is the attempts of improvisers to *evade* the formality of the standard that have characterized contemporary jazz improvisation.[17] Waters's intent, like the other writers I have cited, is to situate the improviser as a unique creative driving force, but it seems obvious that if all performers wanted to do was slip the straitjacket and evade the constraints of the standard, they would have done so long ago. Let us assume for the moment that there is something more that has made the standard repertoire so engaging for jazz musicians for such a long period of time and in such diverse geographies.

Foucault's archaeological method and specifically the idea of the *archive* provides a mechanism through which we can begin to move beyond consideration of what musicians *do with* jazz standards, to what they do *because of* jazz standards: the way that playing the repertoire contributes to the formation of jazz language.[18] Foucault draws a distinction between *des archives* (plural) and *l'archive* (singular). *Des archives* (plural) refers to the building, library or website that houses a collection. *L'archive* (singular) is the set of statements within that collection and what they might describe and prescribe. In other words, the discourse of jazz consists of collections of statements, as well as the implicit rules for the generation of new statements.

The jazz archive (*L'archive*) is constituted of tunes, solos and even phrases: it includes the standard repertoire and every version of that repertoire that exists in performance. These combined statements, taken together, establish the conditions for the archive itself—what we might more colloquially refer to as the "language of jazz"—as well as structuring the conditions for future statements. For Foucault, the archive is not necessarily the set of statements themselves, but the relationships between them. In order to demonstrate the utility of an archival approach to theorising jazz improvisation, this article seeks to demonstrate the characteristics of a jazz improvisatory language or style, identify those elements

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[15] Albert Murray links the black improviser explicitly to notions of freedom, in "The Hero as Improviser", *Quadrant*, (1972), and freedom from conformity, *Murray Talks Music*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 152.

[16] Ken Prouty, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* (University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 57.

[17] Keith Waters, "Outside Forces: 'Autumn Leaves' in the 1960s," *Current Musicology* nos. 71-73 (Spring 2001-Spring 2002), 276.

[18] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992).

of it that can be attributed to the underlying codes of the standard repertoire, and show that the collected statements (the repertoire and the improvisations on them) establish the conditions for future statements to be admitted into the archive.

It is worth mentioning here that there is an essential difference between the archive and the canon. The canon is constituted by important works (classics), that are "universal" and "timeless", and also inextricably tied to the marketplace.[19] Canonisation is the process by which works, composers, and in jazz, performers, are evaluated and legitimated, a process as old as jazz itself.[20] Gabbard says this happens predominantly through the likes and dislikes of academics while Kodat attributes the process to market logics.[21] We can assume a combination of both is true. Where the canon is about the *products* of jazz, the archive is about the *production of* jazz. The archive includes not only the canonized "classics," but also all of the statements that are determined to be "jazz," including arrangements and interpretations of tunes, the tunes themselves, the improvisations on them, as well as those written and verbal statements about them. Where the canon mythologizes individual artists into products, legitimating them through capitalist or institutional logics, the archive is about the construction of discourse.[22]

If the jazz archive can be said to exhibit a kind of character, and the archive consists of jazz standards and performances, then it is logical to assume that the character of jazz is linked to the jazz standard repertoire. However, I want to examine the connection between statements (repertoire and performances) in more detail and suggest that the standard both structures and produces the language of jazz. That is, for statements to enter the jazz archive, they have to have been developed directly, indirectly, or even oppositionally, in relation to the standard. To put it another way, the enunciative function of any statement is determined by its relation to the archive of jazz standards.

In this conception, the style of jazz improvisers arises out of their musical interrogation of jazz standards, and their engagement with the statements of other improvisers that have accrued over time on those standards. This is implicit in jazz ethnography in which musicians recount their experience of going to jam sessions and trying to play like their heroes and of "making the changes"—improvising in a way that complements the underlying harmony of

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[19] Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses* (New York: Duke University Press, 1995), 3.
[20] Prouty, *Knowing Jazz,* 12.
[21] Gabbard, *Jazz Among the Discourses,* 5. Catherine G. Kodat, "Conversing with Ourselves: Canon, Freedom, Jazz," *American Quarterly 55*, no. 1 (2003), 2.
[22] Disrupting the canon is a valuable but parallel project (see Andrew Kluth, 2019, for example).

whatever is being played, usually a standard tune.[23] Students training to be jazz musicians are similarly encouraged to perform and to improvise on jazz standards,[24] and told to listen to the greats to develop their sense of how to do so.[25] In tandem, they are taught systems of pitch relationships (scales and chords), a seemingly abstract set of musical rules, that is nevertheless a taxonomy developed from the "harmonic/structural components of the repertory."[26] José Bowen adds that each new performance is "heard against the background of previous performances," drawing our attention to the way that tunes develop "… like a set of variations over generations," while Floyd talks about an "internalized and remembered cultural perspective."[27] These observations demonstrate that the standard is integral to jazz pedagogy (both formal and informal), support the idea that successive performances of a standard both contribute to its identity, and are part of the listening experience of jazz.

One way that we might consider how all of this acculturation contributes to a distinctive jazz character is to consider jazz in relation to Carnatic (South Indian classical) music, another tradition in which there is a relationship between composition and improvisation. In Carnatic music there is a similar balance of composition and improvisation, and a similar quantity of standard repertoire from which musicians draw. There is also a body of musical theory— including scales and the way in which they should be performed—that is drawn from observations about the archive of compositions and their performance. The Carnatic archive, the 'language' of Carnatic music, has, over time, developed as a set of statements that includes the repertoire of songs (krithis, varnams, etc) and their performances, contributing to an archive that both describes and prescribes what is possible within that tradition. What makes jazz jazz, rather than Carnatic, comes from the structural logic of the fundament: the jazz standard and the historical layering of musical statements on it over time, in contradistinction to the historical layering of musical statements on Persian *Dastgah* or the Carnatic *Krithi*. And if this cross-cultural perspective reminds you of Bruno Nettl's seminal work on improvisation, let us remind ourselves that Nettl spoke of the improviser as always "giving a rendition of something that

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[23] For examples of jam sessions in jazz ethnography, Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*.

[24] Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 56; Nylander, "Mastering the jazz standard," 66.

[25] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 95; Bowen, "The History of Remembered Innovation," 149.

[26] Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 57.

[27] José Bowen, "The History of Remembered Innovation: Tradition and Its Role in the Relationship between Musical Works and Their Performances," *Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 2 (1993): 149, 151. Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 230.

already exists, be it a song or a theoretical musical entity."[28] Nettl himself uses the word "model" to describe the song or musical idea upon which successive improvisations are built. While he never explicitly states the way in which improvisations may be said to be contingent on any given model, it is nevertheless implicit in the differences that he points out between improvising cultures.

The collective language of jazz improvisation emerges, by degrees, through augmentation of the melodic and harmonic framework established by the repertoire. Listening to different versions of the same tune over time demonstrates the way in which a distinctive 'jazz' way of improvising emerges over the decades. Generally speaking, early era jazz improvisers perform variations on the melody in their solos, employing pentatonic or blues scales or arpeggios to fill in the gaps. Later improvisers depart further from the melody and now elaborate on the chord progression.

These performers are playing the "guide tones" that are the distinctive notes in the harmonic progression and augmenting them in a variety of ways. Bebop era players, for example, approach the guide tones chromatically and enrich the harmony, not through random note choice, but by targeting upper extensions of the chords that are already present, and by using substitutions that all still relate to the underlying chord progression of the tune they are performing. For example, when Charlie Parker plays the arpeggio of D-flat minor between the arpeggios of D-minor and C-minor in a turnaround in the key of B-flat, he is employing an "outside" strategy also reinforces the harmonic architecture of the tune by chromatically linking between important guide tones in the chord progression.[29]

Parker employed diverse strategies for enriching the harmony of the tunes he played, and later musicians developed still more diverse strategies towards augmentation of the harmony (using different scales or substitutions), or by playing 'outside' (improvising that deliberately departs from the underlying harmony). All of these attempts happened in relation to, and as a consequence of a need to innovate on the jazz standard. After all, "outside" playing only happens in relation to an "inside." Each new evolution in the performance of a given tune reinforced the primacy of the voice leading of the tune being played. The way in which a jazz musician should do this is reinforced in any text on jazz

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[28] Bruno Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," *The Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1974), 9.
[29] There are many instances of this strategy in Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, (Criterion 1978), including, "Celerity," staff 18, "Mohawk," st. 16, "Mohawk no. 2," st. 9, "Kim no. 2" st. 26, and "Thriving from a Riff," st. 9 & 11.

musicianship and in institutional/educational settings. And, perhaps most convincingly, these melodic ideas, these archetypal jazz statements, do not occur in traditions that are not based on jazz standards.

The development of the discourse within the archive happens in relation to both the jazz standard and the various improvisations on it over time. The claim is not that everything you can hear an individual performer play on a particular standard can already be found in the original composition, but that the standard evolves to encompass the variations themselves. "Body and Soul" is not only the composition by Green, Heyman, Sour and Eyton. If an original score even exists anymore, it would be irrelevant.[30] "Body and Soul," in the archive of jazz, is an assemblage of statements that includes the original composition, along with Coleman Hawkins's "Body and Soul," Coltrane's, and Chris Potter's. "Body and Soul" is that segment of the archive that contains the musical statements connected to its performance. While a listener new to jazz hears Chris Potter's *Body and Soul* as a complete and finished "work," the experienced jazz listener hears the historical accretion of statements attributed to "Body and Soul" underlying and speaking through Potter's interpretation. Albert Murray even argues that the improviser *should* be informed by the whole history of jazz, and their individuality is a testament to what they do and do not like about it (their aesthetic preferences).[31] The improviser then is a "moment of individualization" in a process, rather than an architect of progress.[32] They are not developing a new work but are engaged in an "ongoing dialogue."[33]

The process described above, the enrichment of the archive over time as new approaches are developed around the performance of standards, is reflected in the typical pedagogical approach. Learning standards is almost universally considered to be a necessary part of being a jazz musician. At the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, where I teach, it is often not the ambition or end goal of the students to perform jazz standards, yet they, and we their teachers, rarely question the pedagogical validity of using jazz standards as the basis of instruction. We are well beyond the point historically where we can claim that the standard is only useful because the songs are held in our collective memory: today's students are learning standards *so that they can learn jazz*. The standard is the gateway for students to learn about functional harmony, melodic embellishment and as a consequence, what constitutes jazz improvisation.

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[30] Rawlins points out that chord symbols that improvisers rely on to produce their interpretations, were often provided by publishers rather than the composers, in Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, (Oxford University Press, 1972/2022).

[31] Albert Murray, *Murray Talks Jazz*, (University of Minnesota Press), 171-172.

[32] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" *Partisan Review 42*, no. 4 (1975), 604.

[33] Murray, *Murray Talks Jazz*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 168.

Through the performance of standards, they are being enculturated into the discourse of the archive and learning the underlying codes that will enable them to "pass" as a jazz musician. Standards are also the basis of the vast majority of published pedagogical methods further reinforcing the idea that the development of a musical personality can be validated as "jazz," based on understanding the range of acceptable creative approaches to the standard.

But what of improvisation on contemporary compositions, or fusion, or free jazz?

"Free jazz" implies a "liberation from musical conventions."[34] The tautology, however, is already present in the name "free jazz"—if something is free jazz, it is somehow also understood as jazz; if it is not jazz, we call it "free improvisation." We can productively borrow Derrida's notion of *différance* here to illustrate this idea and to delve into the musical implications.[35] Derrida used the term in a linguistic sense in which words can only be defined in relation to words that already exist. Each new musical idea rearticulates and reinforces what already exists while it asserts its point of difference. In fact, we know that musicians deliberately play with *différance*, deploying ideas that are deliberately novel, but in doing so they rearticulate what is common—the jazz language that makes up the archive. Just as playing is only "outside" in relation to an "inside," the "free" in "free jazz" only gains meaning when we understand what improvisers are free from. Principally, they are free from the standard repertoire and its constraints. And yet, as David Ake points out, Ornette Coleman's music takes much of its meaning from its resemblance to bebop and other jazz forms.[36] It does so by troubling the link between the repertoire and performance, and by reappropriating the signifiers of jazz discourse—swing, instrumentation, instrumental roles, setting, audience, and the logic of the phrasing. So, while Coleman's work seeks to be free of "the changes," it is not free of the logic of jazz improvisational language—he improvises freely against the backdrop of a blues or rhythm changes, improvises on no changes at all, or he improvises on changes that he composes at the time of performance. In each scenario, his improvisations draw heavily on the discursive logic of the archive and establishes its identity through its *différance*.

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[34] Jeff Pressing, "Free Jazz and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 202.
[35] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, (University of Chicago Press, 1982), Chapter 1.
[36] David Ake, "Re-Masculating Jazz," *American Music 16*, no. 1 (1998), 30.

There are those who would rather draw a border around jazz at that point (or at various other points in the history of jazz) and state that there is not enough similarity for Coleman's music to be called jazz at all. Now that time has passed, most of us would consider his music to have evolved in relation to the archive, and to have an enunciative function within the archive. My suggestion is that differentiation occurs at the point where the influence of "other" musics plays an equal or greater role in the formation of the improvisational gesture. For a musician who draws predominantly on the archive of the European avant-garde, it is more likely that their improvisations will be heard as produced by and contributing to that archive, and most likely are stylistically distinct from jazz. We usually refer to this music as "free improvisation," a genre that is related to, but not necessarily part of jazz. Of those performers known as free improvisers, it is often the ones who have performed jazz standards who are revered by jazz audiences and musicians, including Anthony Braxton, Evan Parker, Derek Bailey and Mary Halvorson. Within their output, performing standards becomes indexical of jazz, a sign that we are to understand their work within the context of the jazz archive. In the fusion realm similarly, it is almost a cliché that performers discuss the importance of developing a jazz language through learning standards. The improvisations of fusion artists are steeped in jazz discourse, and the more that they are not, the more open they are to accusations that their music is "not jazz." There is an opportunity to examine the extent to which this common reference informs the improvisations of these performers through transcription and analysis of their improvised solos.

Today, many jazz musicians perform more original compositions than jazz standards but even so, the jazz standard is still imbricated in the compositions that they select and the improvisations that they generate. There are a variety of ways that these musicians signify their ongoing relationship to the archive. Many include a jazz standard or two on albums that are otherwise full of original music, a deliberate gesture that invites the listener to consider the musical statements as part of the archive. Musicians offer similar invitations to the listener by including contrafacts (a new melody on a standard song structure), or, by writing original compositions that reference or reproduce the tonal conventions found in jazz standards. Listening to these recordings of original compositions, it is plain that the vocabulary, the language, the archive of jazz, figure prominently in the musical choices. When we attend to the improvisations of these contemporary musicians on their original compositions, we are still hearing "jazz-style" improvising. Indeed, if musicians wish to be perceived as jazz musicians, there is an imperative to reflect the archive of jazz in their compositions and improvisations. Our determination as a community of listeners and practitioners of whether new statements can be heard in relation to

the jazz archive, is based on whether we can hear the standards, or the discourses that have sprung from the standards, in the playing.

Because jazz is a collective endeavour, the archive is contingent on the historical and geographical moment and dynamically responds to any re-evaluation by the communities of those who are invested in it.[37] New works and new performers can be regarded as part of the archive in the moment that they are making music, or they may be admitted or excluded retrospectively. Duke Ellington's work was highly original for the time, but was easily reconciled as being a part of jazz performance as it drew on the archive of jazz, its language and style, to generate new ideas. The harmony is familiar and functions in a similar way to the tunes in the Great American Songbook, gaining energy from the harnessing of improvisation, both in their construction of composed melody, and by facilitating the musicians to contribute statements that become part of the fabric of his works. Ornette Coleman's work, while more contested at the time, has become a part of the archive of jazz as it has been rationalized in terms of its similarities and differences to the underlying structures of that archive, and as members of the community validated its inclusion by picking up on the musical ideas in his work.

Projects of original compositions can similarly enter the archive and effectively become jazz retrospectively, once they are understood within the flow of history: when they are legitimated by the ideas that come after them or when their meaning is resolved by becoming adopted by other musicians in other places and contexts. John Corbett invites us to imagine the arhythmic avant-garde drumming of Ronald Shannon Jackson taking place in 17th century Austria. "The rarity of Shannon Jackson," he says "is only measurable in relation to the frameworks for comprehension that constitute the discursive regime at a given time and in a given culture."[38] Or to misquote an idea widely attributed to Miles Davis that itself seems to paraphrase Derrida: "It's not the jazz you play that's wrong—it's the jazz that gets played afterwards that determines whether what you played will be admitted to the archive."

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[37] Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 18-43.
[38] John Corbett, "On the Musical Subject: Sound Politics and the Body of the Performer in the Era of Recorded Music" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1994), 4-5.

IMPLICATIONS

Understanding the history and evolution of the archive allows us to make a significant shift in the way we understand the narrative of jazz. The idea of the archive allows us to focus on the transmission and transformation of knowledge over time, rather than just individual improvisers. In jazz scholarship we reify improvisers, however the "improviser-as-creative-genius" is a peculiarly modernist paradigm. I don't necessarily want to deny individual creativity or agency. Instead, I aim to acknowledge that the archive establishes a set of relations between statements without which the contributions of any single artist cannot be understood. Instead of analysing the musical outputs of Charlie Parker to find out what he produced, an archaeological approach asks, "what are the preconditions that enabled Charlie Parker to do what he did?" An archaeological method thus intentionally decenters the individual creator or author in the narrative. Foucault's own description of the author (which we can consider synonymous with "the improviser") is that they are a "privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas."[39] Of course, Charlie Parker is an exceptional "moment" in jazz. But he can also be explained by what was happening at the time and his improvisations contextualized to the extent that they relate to the archive and received validation from other musicians and audiences.[40]

The question of how something is validated as jazz goes beyond a discussion of musical development to include the social and cultural context in which the music is made.[41] My approach here invites the criticism that it does not deal with the bodies of performers and is somewhat old fashioned in its focus on a corpus that somehow exists in isolation. The archive does not exist in isolation, of course, and I am not suggesting that our determination of the character of jazz is somehow free of structural inequality. Whereas discourse is about statements, the archive is about the relations between statements and those relations are structured to reproduce dominant power paradigms. It is important to understand that an archival view of jazz, even a dynamic archive, reflects racial, gendered and other inequalities, and has itself been formed through problematic legitimating processes.

In the jazz setting, there are multiple legitimating processes: jazz is the music that is performed by "jazz" musicians, in jazz clubs, at jazz festivals: is recorded

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[39] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" *Partisan Review 42*, no. 4 (1975), 604.

[40] In addition to studies of performers, there is also opportunity for a phenomenological perspective that could unpack how a given performer negotiates the archive in the construction of their own interpretation of standard repertoire.

[41] See for example Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 2011.

for release on a jazz album: or is taught in jazz institutions. So while new jazz statements are legitimated by their relationship to the jazz language of the archive, those legitimations occur within a system of social practices that mirror the racial and gendered inequalities that we find in jazz and other institutions. The historically gendered and racialized nature of the publishing industry, of Tin Pan Alley, of performance circuits, and of the performers themselves, are mirrored in the archive: that is, dominated by cisgendered African-American and Caucasian males. The discourse of jazz, and the archive itself, and particularly the legitimating processes involved in archive formation, have excluded women and other marginalized groups, and have appropriated and commercialised Black culture.[42] The archive, as an underlying code, as a progenitor of social practices, is bound to reinscribe the same social inequality that it reflects. However, the recognition of the jazz standard as an archive is a project that may further open the door to a critical queering that Kumbier and others have written about.[43] That is, when we acknowledge the archive of jazz as being constituted by all of the performative utterances that constitute its discourses, rather than as the domain of incontestable geniuses, we also identify the forms of structural prejudice that govern the structuring of statements within that system of knowledge production. It is another means by which we can expose the past to critique: works are legitimated through the sense they make in relation to an archive that is predominantly male and through commercial legitimation that has gatekeepers who are predominantly white males, a status quo that once identified, can be productively challenged.

In this article, I have attempted to persuade you that there are grounds for rethinking our traditional approach to jazz scholarship. As a discipline, we have been thinking about the social practice of jazz musicians and the value of their statements without considering the archive that produces them. This shift in perspective provides a means by which we can interrogate the complex web of statements that comprise the archive, the relationship between statements, and across performers and time periods. In addition, this theory provides a critical decentering of jazz within the world of music. Jazz is not the normative condition for improvisation—it is not what happens when creative geniuses improvise removed from the world and isolated in the proverbial woodshed. Jazz is what happens when creative musicians improvise *on jazz standards*, just as Carnatic music is what happens when creative musicians improvise on Carnatic ragams and krithis. If I have made my argument convincingly, it may seem

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[42] Amiri Baraka, *Digging* (University of California Press, 2009), Chapter 6.
[43] Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014).

unspectacular—it will reinforce a lot of what we intuitively understand about what constitutes jazz—but it may also provide a mechanism by which to trouble hegemonic discourses within jazz studies, and still yet further illuminate the creative process.

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