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Vibes at the Village Vanguard: Hauntings, History, and the Construction of Jazz Place

Mark McCorkle, *Western University*

Supervisor: Ansari, Emily Abrams, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Music

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Abstract

There are ghosts that haunt the Village Vanguard. Or at least that's what people say.

This dissertation examines the role of the contemporary jazz club as a site of heritage and meaning making in jazz cultures. I take New York's revered jazz club, the Village Vanguard, as a case study, as it is the subject of many fanciful tales. These stories describe the club's history as alive; the spirits of the legendary musicians from a bygone era of jazz who once performed at the Vanguard are said to haunt the present club's soundwaves. Often described by writers as the club's "vibe," the Village Vanguard's history is said to be living and perceptible to musicians and audiences at the club. Discussions of the club's vibe in written discourse work to represent the club as a heritage place for jazz. Not merely a monument to a dead tradition, the Village Vanguard's vibe offers those invested in the jazz tradition a validating place where they can experience a direct encounter with jazz history—a seemingly unmediated, anachronistic moment of contact between past and present.

This dissertation examines the cyclical relationship between history and the social construction of jazz place. I present an analysis of written discourse from 1957—the year the Village Vanguard established itself formally as a jazz club—to the present that reveals how contemporary jazz clubs are represented as spatial realizations of a jazz tradition. As such, these places are infused with power dynamics, including the social, cultural, and aesthetic politics of jazz cultures. This use of history leverages the past to exert control over contemporary jazz place and establishes social structures that are both validating and exclusionary. I combine discourses of (ethno)musicology, popular music

studies, and cultural geography to dissect the role of place in current expressions of jazz history and identity. My dissertation, ultimately, reveals how meaning making practices in jazz are spatialized and how the places of jazz participate in processes of jazz politics and identity.

Keywords

Jazz, Village Vanguard, Jazz Clubs, Vibe, Place, Space, Time, Landscape, History.

Summary for Lay Audience

There are ghosts that haunt the Village Vanguard. Or at least that's what people say.

This dissertation examines the role of the contemporary jazz club as a site of heritage and meaning making in jazz cultures. I take New York's revered jazz club, the Village Vanguard, as a case study, as it is the subject of many fanciful tales. These stories describe the club's history as alive; the spirits of the legendary musicians from a bygone era of jazz who once performed at the Vanguard are said to haunt the present club's soundwaves. Often described by writers as the club's "vibe," the Village Vanguard's history is said to be living and perceptible to musicians and audiences at the club. Discussions of the club's vibe in written discourse work to represent the club as a heritage place for jazz. Not merely a monument to a dead tradition, the Village Vanguard's vibe offers those invested in the jazz tradition a validating place where they can experience a direct and unmediated encounter with jazz history that blurs the lines between past and present.

This dissertation examines the cyclical relationship between histories and the social construction of jazz place. I present an analysis of written discourse from 1957—the year the Village Vanguard established itself formally as a jazz club—to the present that reveals how contemporary jazz clubs are represented as spatial realizations of a jazz tradition. As such, these places are infused with power dynamics, including the social, cultural, and aesthetic politics of jazz cultures. This use of history leverages the past to exert control over contemporary jazz place and establishes social structures that are both

validating and exclusionary. I combine approaches from music history, popular music studies, and cultural geography to dissect the role of place in current expressions of jazz history and identity. My dissertation, ultimately, reveals how meaning making practices in jazz are spatialized and how the places of jazz participate in processes of jazz politics and identity.

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I am grateful to have a close relationship with so many family members and that their support has helped get me to this point. My parents, Ken and Lori, have always been unwaveringly loving and supportive; this dissertation is as much their success as it is mine. My work would have suffered greatly if not for the support of my wife and best friend, Emily. Throughout this process, there was no one I wanted by my side more than you and your love and companionship are weaved into the fabric of this dissertation.

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Introduction

Jazz and its Places

All music has its places. Classical music has the concert hall and the opera house, rock has arenas and bars (and garages), and electronic dance music has dance clubs and festivals. Connections between musics and their places are well-established in Western cultures and, like everything people do, music is inherently spatial. Edward Casey eloquently argues that

Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.¹

Indeed, all musical acts are spatial acts; playing, listening, writing, discussing, or ignoring, whether intentional or subconscious, any engagement with music is an engagement with place.

The places of music are more than merely locations where music happens. The places of music exist in a co-constitutive relationship with the sounds they hold and together music and place produce significant social and cultural meaning. This is why, perhaps, it can be strange when music is out of its usual place: a hip hop show at an opera house or a metal band in an upscale restaurant present dissonances between widely understood meanings and social functions of the music and of the place. As such, the

¹ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): ix.

places where we make and listen to music reveal a lot about how we understand and relate to that music. Likewise, the music we put into places reveals a lot about the meanings and functions of those places. Not to be taken for granted, the connections between music and place are crucial parts of musical cultures and their broader positions within Western society.

Jazz has occupied many places throughout its history. At various moments in time, jazz has been at home in outdoor public spaces, concert halls, brothels, festival grounds, and elevators. Of all the places of jazz, however, the music seems to be most at home in the jazz club, perhaps the most distinct and unique venue that the music inhabits. This dissertation examines these fascinating places to ask how it is that jazz history and culture is spatialized and what social constructions of contemporary jazz clubs can tell us about our relationship to the music and its history.

Representations of jazz clubs in popular discourse open a window into understanding their construction and function. Contemporary depictions of jazz clubs describe a common scene: a dark staircase that leads down to a dimly lit, smoke-filled basement where hip patrons are surrounded by walls covered with photos of jazz legends. The room emanates coolness, and the club's dingy aesthetic is a throwback to a bygone era of jazz and society. Such colourful, nostalgic representations depict jazz clubs as hallowed places in the jazz tradition that are rich with history. This construction of jazz place dominates current representations of jazz clubs in jazz discourse and popular media and is the result of a nearly century-long tradition of spatializing jazz.

Of all the acclaimed jazz clubs in the music's history, one of them is particularly legendary: the Village Vanguard. One of the oldest, most revered, and most storied places in the history of jazz, the Village Vanguard operates today in the same building in New York's Greenwich Village where it opened in 1935. The club began as a nightclub featuring a variety of entertainment acts and became a jazz club in 1957 when the owners began exclusively programming jazz. In the same year, live albums began to be recorded at the club, disseminating the place and its music to a global audience. From this point onwards, discourse about the Village Vanguard would increase substantially in quantity and the club would soon become recognized as one of the premier venues in contemporary jazz. With its central position in jazz history, then, constructions of the Village Vanguard are rich texts for examining jazz audiences' and musicians' relationships to the music and its places.

Written stories about the Village Vanguard often describe a scene similar to the common depiction of jazz clubs noted above. This is not an image that the club merely inherited, however: the Village Vanguard is one of the primary sources for that popular depiction and is one of the clubs that established what is now considered the norm for contemporary jazz clubs. In written discourse about the Vanguard specifically, writers often present a nostalgic representation of the club and use evocative and ornamental language that construct the place as sacred ground in the jazz tradition. In these representations, the club's decorated history and its role in jazz history are central. Further, the club's history is said to be "alive" at the venue, as writers describe the club as holding the "ghosts" or "spirits" of the jazz greats who played there in the past. These phantasmic agents that live at the club affect and impact its present as they are said to

partake in the club's daily functions. As it is constructed in written discourse, the Village Vanguard is haunted by its own history.

The history that is said to live at the Vanguard and the tropes that help construct it are encapsulated in one word that regularly appears in discourse about the club: "vibe." This word has recently become ubiquitous in popular culture, but despite its widespread usage it remains difficult to define. Vibe can be synonymous with "ambiance," "feeling," or "mood;" it can refer to a connection between people; it can describe a distinct or coherent aesthetic ("a whole vibe"). Vibes can be good or bad, high or low, angry or chill, and the word can be used as a noun or a verb ("the band has a good vibe;" "not stressing just vibing"). Vibe means many things across many different contexts: at the most fundamental level, as a writer for *The New Yorker* describes it, the word denotes "a linguistic shortcut for the ineffable."²

In discourse about the Village Vanguard, though, vibe has a specific and consistent usage. Here, vibe refers to the presence of the past in the club and the feelings of connectedness to jazz history that it evokes. It describes the history that haunts the club and all of the meaning that it holds. Vibe summarizes the club's historical meaning and all of the features that make the club exceptional. Above all, the Village Vanguard's vibe refers to a living and perceptible history of the club, a heritage that lives on and that can be felt in the club. As a central part of the club's discourse, utterances of its vibe function to construct the Village Vanguard as a place that bears the history of the jazz tradition

² Kyle Chayka, "2021 in Review: The Year in Vibes," *The New Yorker*, December 5, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/2021-in-review/the-year-in-vibes>

while also offering a first-hand experience of that history to its patrons.³ It is always being worked on, developed, and changed, and, to borrow Doreen Massey's description of space, the vibe at the Village Vanguard represents a "simultaneity of stories-so-far."⁴

In this dissertation, I explore the meanings of the vibes at the Village Vanguard. I examine the Vanguard's vibes discourse throughout the club's history to demonstrate how the club has become a heritage site in the jazz tradition. I argue that the vibe lies at the center of Vanguard's construction. I examine how vibes discourse works generally to create feelings of connectedness to the past and consider particular ways that the vibes are said to be sustained and evoked. Through the vibe, I uncover the particulars of how the past is used to influence the present in jazz cultures. Not restricted to the past, however, the vibe is also speculative in that it imagines just futures for the history of jazz. As such, the vibe is a powerful place-making force that contributes to the Village Vanguard's function as a heritage place in jazz.

In that it is a central part of a place-making process, the vibe is inherently geographical. Places are socially constituted and ever-changing. They are never static, nor a blank slate upon which humans live. Place is a dynamic and impactful force in everyday life that is infused with cultural values. The Village Vanguard undergoes a

³ The word "vibe" has seen usage in other jazz contexts, as well. It is, of course, sometimes simply short for "vibraphone." Also, Alex Rodriguez discusses how "being vibed" is commonly used slang in jazz cultures that refers to social ostracization as punishment for performing poorly or in a way deemed unsuitable in a given context. See Alex Rodriguez, "Making Jazz Space: Clubs and Creative Practice in California, Chile, and Siberia," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2018): 171 – 173. Though perhaps a strange coincidence, I do not believe that this meaning of the word "vibe" has any substantial connection to its use in discourse about the Village Vanguard.

⁴ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005): 32.

constant process of revision and (re)construction with every word published about it and every note played on its stage. As such, the club is an ever-moving target. This dissertation follows this target across time and space, examining how the club is constructed in discourse and the varied meanings that it holds.

If there is one overarching thesis in this dissertation, it is this: the Village Vanguard functions, culturally, as a heritage place for jazz, a site for a living history of the tradition. As constructed in discourse, the Village Vanguard is a place where jazz aficionados can gather to share their collective knowledge of the great figures and moments of jazz history that have shared that room and whose photos decorate the walls. This is not merely a museum, however, where observers gather to view artifacts from the past; rather, the Village Vanguard offers its patrons a *living* history of jazz. Far from celebrating a now-dead tradition, the Vanguard holds a long, decorated identity-defining history, while its patrons and musicians reaffirm every day that the tradition carries on, as musicians perform new music in every set. Using the word “vibe,” writers refer to the perceptible history of the club and speak of this history in living terms. The vibe describes the club’s history as a “spirit,” a phantasmic agent that partakes in the daily activities of the club alongside its patrons. Through invocations of the vibe, the Village Vanguard is constructed as a heritage site where jazz devotees can experience a direct encounter with the artform’s history—a seemingly non-mediated, anachronistic moment of contact between the past and present.

As such, the Village Vanguard reveals a lot about what and how jazz means in contemporary jazz cultures. It demonstrates how current audiences and musicians construct and relate to jazz and the uses to which jazz history is put. Constructions of the

Village Vanguard are spatial expressions and realizations of the desires, perspectives, and identities of those invested in jazz and its places.

Method

The historical period that this project examines begins in 1957—the year the Village Vanguard became an “official” jazz club. My examination of discourse about the Village Vanguard is focused on close readings and analyses of printed texts where the club is mentioned, largely focused on local newspapers and magazines and national jazz publications. Occasionally other sources such as interview transcripts will appear, but written discourse is the dominant focus of this dissertation. This narrow scope provides a focused investigation into how this medium participates in the social construction of the venue.

The primary sources for this project were gathered largely from digital databases of historical newspapers and magazines. My investigation involved a close reading of every mention of the Village Vanguard available in these sources. I tracked recurring tropes and ideas from this body of discourse and selected articles and excerpts that best demonstrate these trends for inclusion in this dissertation. This dissertation, then, presents what I view as a representative sample of written discourse on the Village Vanguard.

The narrow focus on written discourse here is useful for the purposes of analysis, but it does leave many things out of sight. By focusing on written discourse, there is a risk that a project like this can become an echo chamber for the voices of those already in positions of power. There are many lived experiences of the Vanguard that remain

invisible in this discourse that might be accessed through an ethnographic or oral history study of the club. I had intended on including an ethnographic component in this study of the Village Vanguard but that was made impossible largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, ethnographic research and writings from ethnomusicology have had a significant impact on my approach to jazz cultures.⁵ Varied methodological approaches would help with representation and with understanding the Vanguard from wider perspectives, not only the perspectives of those who have had access to widespread written platforms.⁶

Drawing on writing primarily by critics and journalists in mainstream newspapers and jazz publications means that the discourse I engage with in this dissertation is shaped to a significant degree by white writers and business owners. Jazz narratives have long been controlled primarily by white critics and scholars and it is well documented how most print and broadcast media that have anything to do with jazz have historically been owned and controlled by white men.⁷ Oftentimes, this results in hegemonic structures that

⁵ Bruno Nettl's work has been particularly influential, here. See, for example, Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

⁶ Some of this work is already being done, particularly in ethnomusicology with the work of Kim Teal and Alex Rodriguez. See Kimberly Hannon Teal, *Jazz Places: How Performances Spaces Shape Jazz History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021); and Rodriguez, "Making Jazz Space," 2018. For other texts that demonstrate ethnomusicological and oral history methods in the study of jazz place, see Kathy Sloane & Sascha Feinstein, *Keystone Korner: Portrait of a Jazz Club* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Patrick Burke, *Come in and Hear the Truth: Jazz and Race on 52nd Street* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For an interesting oral history study on a non-jazz music club, see Amy Yates Wuelfing & Steven DiLodovico, *No Slam Dancing, No Stage Diving, No Spikes: An Oral History of New Jersey's Legendary City Gardens* (self-pub., CreateSpace, 2015).

⁷ John Gennari explores this issue and provides some excellent documentation and analysis of race in jazz criticism in John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

control popular narratives of Black music. These hegemonic structures are an important context in which the writers cited in this dissertation operate. Of course, not all writers here are white nor male, and there are a variety of voices present in this dissertation. Some portion of my work examines how, despite the racist, hegemonic, and patriarchal structures present in jazz, many writers use constructions of the Village Vanguard as positive forces in the production of a just society. The Vanguard's political situation is thus complex and fraught. I thus examine how the club's constructions reveal both existing injustices and progress towards equitable futures in jazz cultures.

Ongoing Conversations

This dissertation draws on a wide range of scholarly disciplines to shape my approach to studying jazz place. As is common in interdisciplinary work, I view this approach not as viewing my content from multiple points of view, but rather as combining disciplines to create *new* points of view. I also, however, take significant inspiration in this dissertation from scholars who reject disciplinary boundaries all together. Katherine McKittrick, Shana Redmond, and James Gordon Williams are amongst those doing this kind of work who have had a particularly strong influence on my thinking.⁸ Many have different terms for this kind of work—adisciplinary, non-disciplinary, transdisciplinary—but at the core they all pursue new approaches to reject hegemonic and colonial ways of knowing. This

⁸ Their key texts that I cite regularly throughout this dissertation include Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Shana Redmond, *Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and James Gordon Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines: The Politics and Practices of Black Musical Space* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2021).

dissertation does not reject disciplinary boundaries entirely, but I hope that my work demonstrates a far-reaching epistemological approach to understanding jazz and its places.

This dissertation engages directly with recent conversations about jazz and place. Though only recently and explicitly invigorated, discourse about place has long been a topic in jazz studies. Discussions of the spatial aspects of jazz are central in explorations of jazz's connection to urbanity, seen often in studies of the jazz scenes in different cities, especially New Orleans, a place of legend in histories of jazz.⁹ Further, many scholars engage with geographical topics in examinations of jazz's diaspora outside of the United States.¹⁰ From the broad body of literature that deals with jazz and place—both explicitly and implicitly—I take particular inspiration from David Ake's work on jazz, which examines the spatial aspects of peoples' representations of and relationships to jazz, and from Michael Heller's exploration of the aesthetic and political ramifications of the places jazz inhabits.¹¹

⁹ See, for example, Sarah Suhadolnik, "Navigating Jazz: Music, Place, and New Orleans," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016); Julie Michelle Raimondi, "Space, Place, and Music in New Orleans," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012); Charles Hersch, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of New Orleans Jazz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904 – 1930* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993); Ted Gioia, *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁰ See, for example, Philip Bohlman and Goffredo Plastino, eds., *Jazz Worlds, World Jazz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); E. Taylor Atkins, ed., *Jazz Planet* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Matthew F. Jordan, *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹¹ David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Ake, *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time Since Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Michael C. Heller,

Of the literature that deals explicitly with jazz and the construction of place, three texts have formed the foundation that this dissertation seeks to build on. Kim Teal's work demonstrates how musicians "perform" heritage in live performance by making slight adjustments to their music based on the history of the place in which they are performing.¹² Using the Village Vanguard as one example, Teal forwards an ethnomusicological approach to studying the impact of place on music, or how the construction of place is made audible. Also using an ethnomusicological approach to jazz place, Alex Rodriguez considers the construction of jazz place globally, examining jazz clubs on three different continents to understand the similarities and differences between how jazz place is constructed in different places in the world. He writes: "I intend to show that these three clubs *share* a sense of emplacement, despite these obvious differences, in jazz space. Anchored in places such as jazz clubs, festivals, and educational institutions, jazz space affords ways of being in the world through sound that resonate across vast geographies."¹³ Ultimately, Rodriguez argues that "by taking these three distant jazz clubs as my focus of study, I aim to articulate something like a 'view from nowhere' that can say something meaningful about jazz life as it is lived anywhere."¹⁴ Andrew Berish writes about race and mobility in jazz, examining the spatial

"Space," in *Loft Jazz: Improvising New York in the 1970s* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 127–144.

¹² Kimberly Hannon Teal, *Jazz Places: How Performance Spaces Shape Jazz History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021). This work was first published as a dissertation in Kimberly Hannon Teal, "Living Traditions: Embodying Heritage in Contemporary Jazz Performance," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 2012). See also Kimberly Teal, "Fred Hersch at the Village Vanguard: The Sound of Jazz Heritage at New York's Oldest Jazz Club," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (2018): 449 – 476.

¹³ Alex Rodriguez, "Making Jazz Space," 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

aspects of jazz practice. His work examines both how space and place impacts music making practices and how music is a spatial practice that constructs and reflects the spatial realities of life.¹⁵ Like my own, his work relies on a combination of theory from cultural geography and a musicological approach to understanding music and its places.

This work by Teal, Rodriguez, and Berish shows how a varied disciplinary approach to studying jazz and place is not only beneficial but necessary. The multivalent and contextually complex nature of music and place, both individually and in combination, require a creative scholarly approach that these authors all exemplify. In continuing this work, my dissertation adds to this discourse a disciplinarily varied study on the spatial aspects of meaning-making practices in jazz that reveals lived and desired connections to jazz place and history.

My dissertation, and much of the work on jazz and place noted above, engages in broader discursive trends in jazz studies. Particularly, my work enters into the lineage of research in jazz that is focused not only on the “facts” of history and of musical analysis, but on representations of jazz and people’s relationships to those histories. Foundational in this literature are writings from the 1990s by Scott DeVaux and volumes edited by Krin Gabbard that deal with historiography, narrative, and representation in jazz history that examine how people understand and relate to jazz and its history.¹⁶ Recent work on

¹⁵ Andrew Berish, *Lonesome Roads and Streets of Dreams: Place, Mobility, and Race in Jazz of the 1930s and '40s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Interested readers might also see Berish’s literature review on jazz place and space: Andrew Berish, “Space and Place in Jazz,” in *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*, Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, and Tony Whyton, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 153 – 162.

¹⁶ Scott DeVaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525-560; Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham: Duke

jazz mythology has also shaped my approach to understanding the meaning-making processes in jazz cultures, especially work by Tony Whyton.¹⁷

Following representational studies of jazz, much of jazz studies engages with how racial identities are intertwined with jazz practices. Ingrid Monson and Scott Saul provide models for examining Black jazz musicians' responses to their political contexts and their use of music in the (re)construction of contemporary race relations.¹⁸ More broadly, both Guthrie Ramsey and Paul Austerlitz engage with Black music's community-building and identity-forming power.¹⁹ Though operating as a club for a historically Black music, whiteness is also an important part of the Village Vanguard's history: I rely on work by Kelsey Klotz for approaches to understanding whiteness in jazz.²⁰ The diversity of musicians and audiences that the Vanguard hosts and serves reflects the complex racial politics of mainstream contemporary jazz culture that scholars have long studied. This

University Press, 1995); Krin Gabbard, ed., *Representing Jazz* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Another text that has significantly shaped how I think about the field of jazz is Paul Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Tony Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Tony Whyton, *Beyond A Love Supreme: John Coltrane and the Legacy of an Album* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Paul Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race, and Humanity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018); Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003). Ronald Radano's classic text has also shaped my understanding of Black music in the U.S.: Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

²⁰ Kelsey Klotz, *Dave Brubeck and the Performance of Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

discourse, however, rarely theorizes about place. This dissertation, then, adds a spatial lens to conversations about race in jazz cultures.

My work also engages with gender politics at the Village Vanguard, taking part in broader conversations about gender in jazz. Sherrie Tucker and Nicole Rustin-Paschale have written and edited foundational texts that problematize and contest patriarchal representations of jazz history.²¹ Their work sets up my discussion in this dissertation about how patriarchal representations of jazz are constantly and subtly reiterated in jazz places where issues of gender go unspoken. Much like discourse on race in jazz, however, place is often left undertheorized in this literature. This dissertation adds to this conversation a study of how gender inequities are spatialized in jazz practice.

To theorize the spatial aspects of jazz history and culture, I rely on literature from cultural geography. Aside from the work of Andrew Berish, the fields of jazz studies and geography have seldom come into contact. This dissertation brings together musicology and cultural geography to introduce new ways of understanding the spatial aspects of jazz culture and history to jazz studies.

To theorize place-making practices in jazz, my work employs human geography scholarship written over the decades since the discipline's "cultural turn" that began in about the 1970s. Writers such as Yi Fu Tuan, Doreen Massey, and Edward Relph

²¹ Nichole T. Rustin & Sherrie Tucker, eds., *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Nichole Rustin-Paschale, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

established new ways of understanding place that rejected the notion that place and space are static dimensions upon which we act. Rather, in their formulation, place is a process that is an ever changing and active part of social life.²² My dissertation takes up this understanding of place through my examination of the Village Vanguard, as I use the words of those invested in the place to demonstrate how its construction is socially constituted. Though discourse about the club has some common and consistent tropes, the place is ever changing. The club therefore demonstrates how place is never a finished product, but rather an ever-shifting construction that is constantly represented and reiterated.

The rejection of the notion of place as static is an important step towards decolonizing Western understandings and representations of place. Representations of places that frame them as static, undynamic, and without their own histories mirror and produce notions that places lie dormant, waiting to be discovered. Such understandings of place have clear colonial undertones and avoiding this rhetoric is essential in decolonizing discourse about place. Places are not static, neither lying in wait to be discovered nor objects to be used and discarded. Places exist within networks of life and meaning separate from any one viewing subject. They have their own histories and when we come into contact with them they have not been “discovered.” Rather, our interactions

²² Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 24 – 29; Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976). For some other foundational texts, see Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Verso, 1989); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); and Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

with places represent “a meeting-up of histories” where meaning is constructed, not extracted.²³

A note on terminology: this dissertation uses the words “place” and “space” throughout. Across scholarly disciplines these words have yet to receive a consistent definition and have, sometimes, been used interchangeably. I follow the common usage of these terms in cultural geography, which dates to Yi Fu Tuan’s classic text, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.²⁴ Space, here, refers to physical locations with definable boundaries. Place, on the other hand, is space that is infused with social and cultural history and meaning. Tim Cresswell’s oft-cited description gets at the foundation of the relationship between place and space as these terms will be used in this dissertation:

A child’s room, an urban garden, a market town, New York City, Kosovo and the Earth ... What makes them all places and not simply a room, a garden, a town, a world city, a new nation, and an inhabited planet? One answer is that they are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of a place – a meaningful location.²⁵

My dissertation focuses primarily on place in that I am interested in peoples’ relationships to jazz geographies and the cultural production of sites of meaning in jazz

²³ The phrase “a meeting-up of histories” comes from Doreen Massey’s anti-colonial description of space in Massey, *For Space*, 22. For a book that beautifully demonstrates this kind of anti-colonial work on music and place, see Alexandra T. Vazquez, *The Florida Room* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

²⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 1977.

²⁵ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 7.

practices. Space remains important, though, in that I understand space as a foundational part of the place-making processes that I interrogate.

In that place refers to human meaning, it has an inherent political dimension and geographers have long discussed spatial politics. Particularly relevant to this dissertation are theories of how place both reflects and recreates systems of racism and racial oppression.²⁶ The field now known as Black geographies offers an interdisciplinary body of discourse that has served as a foundation for my approach to understanding the racial politics of place in this dissertation.²⁷ As the home to a historically Black music, the Village Vanguard and its popular representations are laden with the politics of Black spatiality. Throughout this dissertation I draw significantly, both explicitly and implicitly, on foundational work in Black geographies, especially work by Katherine McKittrick.

This dissertation continues ongoing conversations in Black geographies, particularly the lines of inquiry that seek to reframe Black subjects as active agents in place-making practices. Camilla Hawthorne argues that, in its current state, Black

²⁶ See, for example, Keith and Pile, eds., *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993); Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds., *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and, especially, George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

²⁷ My primary point of contact with this literature is Katherine McKittrick & Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2007). For other sources in Black Geography, see, for example, Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso Books, 2017); Clyde Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017); Judith Madera, *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Thadious M. Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, & Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

geographies seeks to “[counter] long-standing trends in the discipline of geography, in which Black people were seen as *lacking* geography (due to the upheaval of the trans-Atlantic slave trade); or as *victims* of geography (due to ongoing practices of displacement and spatial segregation).”²⁸ In her book *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick demonstrates this approach to studying Black geographies by considering Black women as active forces in place making, rather than merely victims of place.²⁹ Recently, James Gordon Williams modeled this approach in jazz scholarship with his study of how Black improvisers participate in place-making practices through music.³⁰ Both Williams and McKittrick argue that Black subjects endure struggles and violence while simultaneously (re)constructing place to express joy, agency, and humanity. In my work on the Village Vanguard, I focus on how the words of those who write about the club are fashioning it in their image and actively participating in social constructions of place. I do discuss the marginalizing effects of these constructions when they present issues of power imbalances, but the focus here is primarily on the expressions of agency and identity amongst those representing the club. This dissertation contributes to this trend in Black geographies through a focused study on a crucial place in jazz, one of America’s many Black cultural achievements. Further, I hope that this work contributes to this interdisciplinary discourse by furthering the recently forged connections between Black geographies, musicology, and jazz studies.

²⁸ Camilla Hawthorne, “Black Matters are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): e12468.

²⁹ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 2006.

³⁰ Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines*, 2021.

Though a less frequent topic than architecture and the visual arts, cultural geographers occasionally discuss music in their work. George Carney was amongst the first geographers to establish music as a focal point in the discipline in the 1970s, publishing multiple editions of a popular edited volume, *The Sounds of People and Places*.³¹ During the release of these editions, Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill also published an edited volume on the geography of music.³² Together with Carney's volume, these works demonstrate the breadth of methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of the geography of music that arose in tandem with the field's cultural turn. In these volumes, geographers began to examine not only *where* music happens but also the reciprocal exchange between how place/space create music and how music creates place/space.

Recently, studies of music in cultural geography have contributed to a trend in human geography of disrupting the long-standing privileging of visual and text-based representations of the world. Often called "sonic geographies," this work explores not only what music means, but also how it is a generative force in the world.³³ Music is

³¹ The first edition of this text was George Carney, ed. *The Sounds of People and Places: Readings in the Geography of Music* (Washington: University Press of America, 1978). For the most recent edition, see George Carney, ed. *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Music from Country to Classical and Blues to Bop*. 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

³² Leyshon, Andrew, David Matless, and George Revill, eds. *The Place of Music* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998).

³³ For examples of this literature, see Karolina Doughty, Michelle Duffy, and Theresa Harada (eds.), *Sounding Places: More-Than-Representational Geographies of Sound and Music* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019); Julian Holloway, "Moving Sonic Geographies: Realising the Eerie Countryside in Music and Sound," *Cultural Geographies* 29, no. 4 (2022): 547-563; Susan J. Smith, "Beyond Geography's Visible Worlds: A Cultural Politics of Music," *Progress in Human Geography* 21, no. 4 (1997): 502-529; George Revill, "*El tren fantasma*: Arcs of Sound and the Acoustic Spaces of Landscape," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 3 (2014): 333 – 344; Daniel Paiva, "Sonic Geographies: Themes, Concepts, and Deaf Spots," *Geography Compass* 12, no. 7 (2018): 1 – 14; Nichola Wood,

central in constructions of clubs like the Village Vanguard. This dissertation will examine how writers use and represent sound in their constructions of the club.

As in geography, musicologists have engaged with place and music for some time, though the two disciplines have rarely come into contact. One recent and notable exception is the volume *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House*, edited by Suzanne Aspden, which brings together musicology and cultural geography to examine the spatial aspects of opera.³⁴ Mark Clague and Charles Garrett have both examined musics and places in the American Midwest, the former interested in the construction of one musical place and its cultural impact, and the latter considering how the movement of music through, between, and across places changes the music and its culture.³⁵ Using a different approach to the musicological study of the interaction of music and place, Denise Von Glahn has examined how American composers represent, memorialize, and thus construct places and American identity through music.³⁶ Most recently, a volume edited by Georgina Born brings together a variety of musicologists to

Michelle Duffy, and Susan J. Smith, "The Art of Doing (Geographies of) Music," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 5 (2007): 867 – 889.

³⁴ Suzanne Aspden, ed. *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

³⁵ Mark Clague, "Chicago Counterpoint: The Auditorium Theatre Building and the Civic Imagination," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2002); Charles Garrett, "Louis Armstrong and the Great Migration," in *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 83 – 120.

³⁶ Denise Von Glahn, *The Sounds of Place: Music and the American Cultural Landscape* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003).

examine how music and sound interact with space and place and how that interaction shapes our experiences of place.³⁷

Music and place have also gotten explicit attention in recent popular music studies scholarship—work that has had a considerable impact on my understanding of jazz cultures. One of the first full-length popular music texts to theorize place was an edited volume by John Connell and Chris Gibson, which investigated how music and place are constructed by identity.³⁸ Building on this discourse of place and identity in popular music, Ola Johansson and Thomas Bell published an edited volume that maps the social and cultural aspects of music onto their places.³⁹ Most recently, *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music, Space and Place* demonstrates the breadth of topics and approaches in current studies on place and popular music.⁴⁰

Discourse about music and place in musicology and popular music studies is theoretically scattered. This dissertation does not attempt to unify these approaches—indeed, it often reflects the theoretically scattered approach to place and space in music

³⁷ Georgina Born, ed, *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For other examples of scholarly work that investigates the spatial aspects of music see, Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007); Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Daniel M. Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape, and Norwegian Identity* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006).

³⁸ John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³⁹ Ola Johansson and Thomas L. Bell, eds, *Sound, Society, and the Geography of Popular Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

⁴⁰ Geoff Stahl and J. Mark Percival, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music, Space, and Place* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022). For another recent and interesting approach to studying place in popular music, see Sam Whiting, *Small Venues: Precarity, Vibrancy and Live Music* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

that defines the current state of the discourse. Although I endeavour, through my engagement with cultural geography, to provide a well-established grounding for a theory of place construction, I regularly stray into uncharted territory. By embracing and reflecting the productive chaos of current thought on music and place in music scholarship, I hope that this project is a useful addition to the body of multidisciplinary studies on music geography that continue to deconstruct hegemonic ways of knowing.

The Path(s) Forward

Chapter 1 examines discourse about the Village Vanguard's "vibe"—the perceptible history of the club that writers report in descriptions of the place. I examine how writers construct the vibe as the spirits of past jazz musicians that linger in the club, evoking these ghosts with descriptive imagery. Using theory from cultural geography, I understand the vibe as forming the core of the club's "landscape." As construed here, a landscape is a representation of a place that reveals the interests and desires of those who (re)produce it. Further, a landscape is not only a representation of place, but also a representation of our connections to place in that it reveals how people feel about and relate to places. Vibes, then, are a construction of the club that are a way for jazz fans to create a sense of connection to the past.

Vibes also serve political functions in that they represent the club in the image of those who construct it. This discourse establishes a murky political situation in that it subtly establishes boundaries for belonging in the club and, more broadly, in jazz culture at large. Here, knowledge of jazz history and immersion in its culture are a metric for determining if one is considered an insider or an outsider at the club. In that the

importance of the club's vibes to any one person relies substantially on their knowledge of jazz history, vibes discourse constructs the club as an alienating place for those who are not well-versed in jazz history and culture. As it relates to how this discourse impacts the present, then, the current Vanguard is haunted as much by its landscape as its landscape is by its ghosts.

Chapter 2 picks up on Chapter 1's exploration of the vibe by examining one particular vibe: the vibe of John Coltrane. As an important figure in the Vanguard's history, John Coltrane's vibe is amongst the most prominent in the club's haunted landscape. It becomes particularly noticeable when his son Ravi Coltrane performs at the club. This chapter examines the discourse that constructs John Coltrane's vibe through Ravi's performances at the Village Vanguard, arguing that these representations function to make jazz fans feel connected to the jazz past. In so doing, these writers construct the Village Vanguard as a site of meaning and validation for those invested in jazz cultures.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the imagination in the construction of landscapes of jazz places, including but not limited to the Village Vanguard. Discourse about jazz places often use rhetoric that describes these clubs as "otherworldly" to emphasize their uniqueness and meaning. Through the use of the historical imagination, jazz writers construct jazz clubs as transportive places and illustrate how one can experience places despite not physically being there. As a case study, this chapter examines Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, a Montreal jazz club that was created to imitate the Village Vanguard and other similar clubs, to demonstrate the complexity of the experience of jazz place. Using the notion of "elsewhereness" from cultural geography, I examine how Upstairs seeks to "transport" audiences to golden age New York jazz clubs, using a combination of sensory

and imaginary experiences to provide patrons with feelings of connectedness to the history of jazz and its places. In imitating the physical, social, cultural, and aesthetic features of clubs like the Village Vanguard, Upstairs demonstrates a unique process through which the Vanguard's landscape is constantly reproduced and reconfigured.

Chapter 4 reconnects the ideas of time and place, two intertwined and co-constituted ideas that have often been separated in Western thought. Here, I examine the points of connection between time and place in jazz geographies, arguing that the Village Vanguard's vibe is inherently temporal in that it is a representation of history (time). As such, the vibe produces a temporal landscape of the club where writers construct a flexible and non-linear representation of jazz time. The manipulation of time at the Village Vanguard demonstrates the workings of both time-space compression and expansion in the construction of jazz place. The Vanguard's haunted landscape compresses time-space in that it uses constructions of place to bring audiences closer to the past. By bringing jazz fans closer to histories of jazz it expands time-space as it enlarges the borders of what is phenomenologically accessible to us. Such manipulations of time-space at the Village Vanguard present a political double-edged sword: they often result in constructions of place and time that reinforce unjust representations of jazz history while also offering an alternative way of viewing the world that imagines a more just future for jazz history.

The above summary of Chapter 4 describes what I call a *vertical* reading of it where the chapter is read from beginning to end as one complete unit. However, there is another, less conventional way to read this chapter that offers a non-linear reading of this discussion of non-linear time: rather than reading the chapter from beginning to end,

those reading the dissertation in its entirety can choose to disassemble Chapter 4 and read it in pieces during the reading of previous chapters. I refer to this as a *horizontal* reading of the chapter. Chapter 4 is divided into three sections, each of which corresponds to a previous chapter. In a horizontal reading of Chapter 4, affix chapter 4.3 to the end of Chapter 1; affix chapter 4.2 to the end of Chapter 2; and affix chapter 4.1 to the end of Chapter 3.

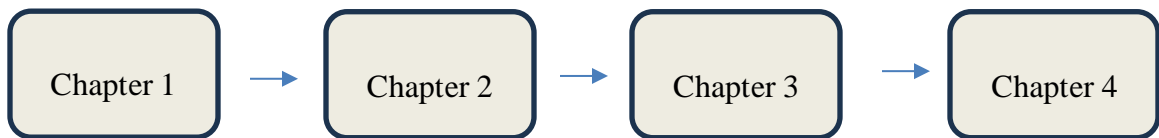


Figure 1: Dissertation structure with a vertical reading of Chapter 4

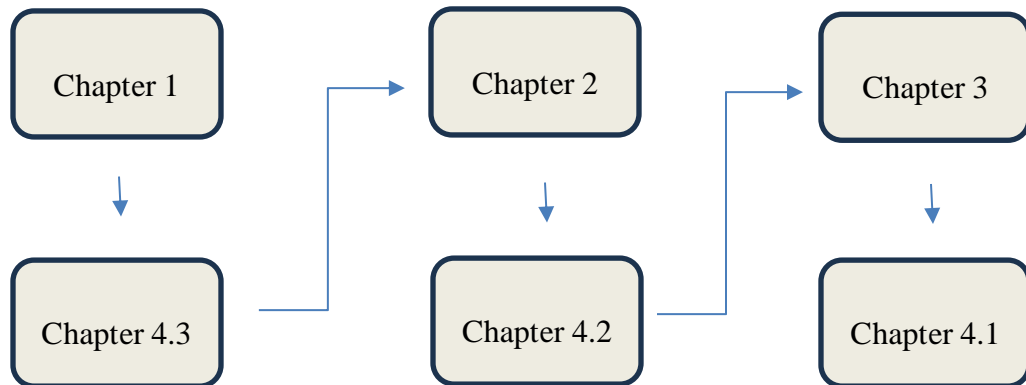


Figure 2: Dissertation structure with a horizontal reading of Chapter 4

In a horizontal reading of Chapter 4, Chapter 4.3 will add to the end of Chapter 1 a discussion of the temporal elements of the Vanguard's haunted landscape. In that the vibe is inherently historical, it produces a temporal landscape of the club. As writers

represent and manipulate time in the Village Vanguard's construction, time is used as a tool to achieve dominion over the past, oftentimes resulting in a reinforcement of patriarchal and colonial views of place. However, these manipulations of time also represent time as flexible and non-linear which presents opportunities for the vibe to act as a tool to disrupt hegemonic understandings of jazz and its places and create more just futures for jazz history.

In a horizontal reading of Chapter 4, Chapter 4.2 will add to the end of Chapter 2 a discussion of how representations of John Coltrane's vibe expand the boundaries of what is said to be phenomenologically accessible to us. This discourse demonstrates a manipulation of the representation of time at the Village Vanguard in that Ravi Coltrane is said to allow audiences to see and hear the past. This provides jazz fans with meaningful experiences and feelings of connectedness to jazz history. However, by expanding the borders of what is said to be accessible to us, it also defines those borders and reinforces gatekeeping practices of inclusion and exclusion in jazz.

In a horizontal reading of Chapter 4, Chapter 4.1 adds to the end of Chapter 3 another theoretical layer by examining Upstairs through the lens of time-space compression. Upstairs transports patrons across space but also across time, as it seeks not only to transport audiences from Montreal to New York, but also from the present to the past. As such, the club compresses time-space by bringing distant times and places closer to one another and offering simultaneous experiences of both here and there, and now and then. I examine the Village Vanguard through a similar lens, arguing that the Vanguard's design as a historical place is also transportive in that it offers audiences an experience of both the club's present and its past.

There are different advantages to each approach to Chapter 4. Reading it vertically will give readers an opportunity to dive fully into a focused discussion of the issue of time and place in jazz, a significantly undertheorized topic in jazz studies. Reading it horizontally will offer an added layer of depth and theory to the end of each of the first three chapters, highlighting how interrelations of time and place are useful and important to consider in any study of music and place.

The different paths I offer the reader throughout this dissertation reflect my desire to continually represent place as something that is always being worked on and never finished. There is never only one clear path to understanding the multivalent constructions of place and in turn there need not be only one way to read my investigation of it. With varied paths through the dissertation, the document presents different potential endings for each reader. This reflects how this dissertation has not “solved” jazz place and is itself a beginning more so than an ending. Even if only superficially, I hope that this slightly unconventional structure makes the dissertation format more closely resemble the ever malleable and unfinished nature of place, time, and history.

Chapter 1

1 Haunted Landscapes

There exist many stories about the Village Vanguard, the oldest operating jazz club in the world. These stories are wide ranging in their subjects, from tales of the legendary musicians who passed through the place to recollections of the experiences of audiences. And people who have been to the club, myself included, love to tell the stories of this amazing place. We love to tell these stories because they are, simply, good stories, but also because the memories in those stories hold significant meaning to those who tell them. The experience of the Village Vanguard that we seek to share in stories about the place are not only tales of one night at a cool club, but rather, in a way, the story of jazz history itself. All of our own experiences at the Village Vanguard happen within those photo-laden walls that remind us of the historical importance of the club and the significance of the people and music that have left their mark on the place.

Such stories and their meanings are the subjects of this chapter. Of course, they are more than *just* enticing stories. Many of these highly embellished and exaggerated tales function to convey some sort of meaning and truth beyond simple historical fact. These narratives represent a truth of their own—truths about the thoughts and experiences of the people who weave them. This chapter analyzes and deconstructs this discourse and its meanings to reveal how it constructs the Village Vanguard as a place in the image of those who write the stories.

This investigation of discourse about the Village Vanguard will focus primarily on printed discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. An examination of this body of texts reveals several commonly recurring tropes, all of which come together to form a coherent image of the club. These narratives describe a particular, idealized experience of the Vanguard wherein patrons experience the club's "vibe;" the perceptible history of the club. This history that haunts the place is, in effect, a ghost story, a tale of the spirits of former jazz musicians that purportedly live within the club. Neither living nor dead, these spirits represent the heritage that exerts control over the present aesthetic, cultural, and social makeup of the club.

These ghosts of past jazz greats make up the core of what I call the club's *landscape*, the representation of the club that is constructed through the narratives and stories in question. With these fantastical tales of the vibe forming the core of the representational landscape of the Village Vanguard, those who write these stories have created an image of the club that serves particular aesthetic, cultural, and ideological goals. In this haunted landscape, the ghosts that dance across the club's soundwaves are an imaginary force that exert real control over mainstream cultural constructions of the club and, in turn, influence what music and what peoples are purported to belong there.

1.1 **The Village Vanguard: A Brief History**

Now known as the world's oldest operating jazz club and one of its most successful, the Village Vanguard began in a far more precarious position than it finds itself today. Founder Max Gordon, the son of Lithuanian immigrants living in Portland, Oregon, moved to New York City to attend law school, per his parents' wishes. After six months

of law school at Columbia, he promptly quit, moved to Greenwich Village, and, in 1932, opened a nightclub there called the Village Fair. After getting into trouble for non-compliance with alcohol laws, the Village Fair closed not long after it opened. In 1934, Gordon opened a new nightclub with the help of his maintenance worker friend Harry Simon, who reportedly was the person who named the new place The Village Vanguard.⁴¹

The new club operated for about a year before Max Gordon realized he would need to move the club to a different location if he wanted to expand the business at all, since the current building did not meet the specifications required for him to acquire a cabaret license. In 1935 he found a new place in Greenwich village, a basement room, located at 178 7th Ave. South and moved the club there in one night, not even closing the club for a day. The Village Vanguard has remained in that same room ever since.

The space that the Vanguard moved into was less than glamorous. A narrow staircase led down to a small basement room with an odd triangular shape. It was filled with cheap barrels and second-hand chairs that Gordon had collected. The small stage was flanked by a curtain against the back wall and a small, wooden dance floor in front. Opposite the stage was the bar and a table in the back corner where Max Gordon would sit every night. How this room looked in 1935 was, by all reports, strikingly similar to how it looks today, despite some minor changes. Over time Gordon decorated the place with photos of famous musicians who had played in the club and the back wall would

⁴¹ Much of the earliest tellings of the history of the Village Vanguard come from Max Gordon's memoirs. See Max Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

have a mural painted on it. As the function of the place changed, the dance floor would be covered with more chairs and tables, and the kitchen would be repurposed into an office and hang-out space for musicians. But ultimately the Vanguard today looks very similar to how it did when it opened in 1935, a feature that amplifies the venue's status as a historical place.

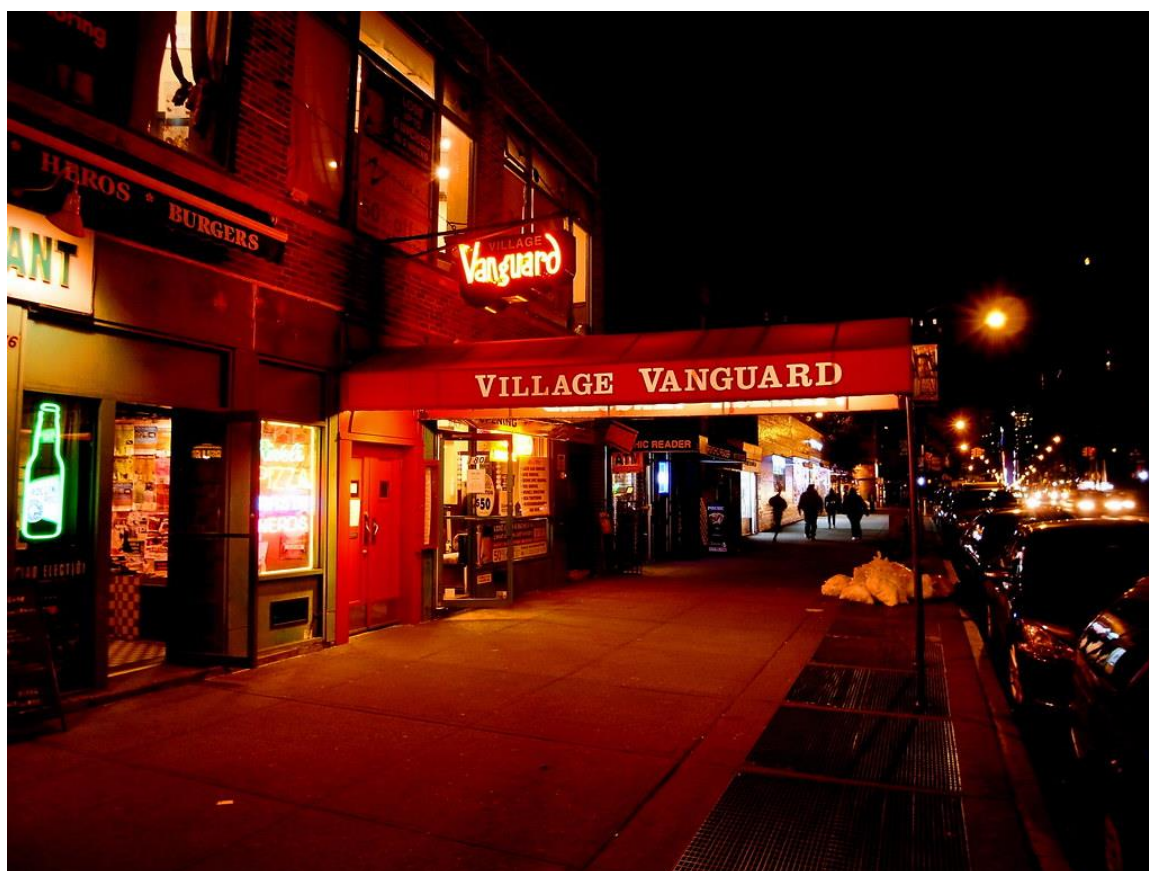


Figure 3: The Village Vanguard's now-famous awning and red door.

"Village Vanguard - New York" © Astro Zhang Yu, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 4: The Village Vanguard's interior.

"Village Vanguard - New York" © Astro Zhang Yu, CC BY-SA 2.0.

In its early years, the Village Vanguard operated as a nightclub that served a variety of food and drink and offered an eclectic array of entertainment acts including poetry, comedy, and musical acts from a wide range of musical genres. The crowds were generally raucous and youthful. Through the 1930s and 40s the Vanguard rose in popularity in the Village and, now famously, regularly programmed acts of performers who were not yet well-known but who would go on to have significant careers. These artists include The Revuers (featuring Judy Holliday), Leadbelly, and Harry Belafonte, to name a few. Many of these performers were in the early stages of their careers when they performed at the Village Vanguard during these years. Max Gordon often spoke proudly

of how his club has been a sort of incubator for the careers of successful artists and this aspect of the club's history is regularly celebrated by jazz fans and critics.⁴² Whereas today a performance at the Village Vanguard is a sign that a performer has "made it" in their career, as usually only well-established artists get gigs there, Kim Teal notes that "the Village Vanguard of the 1930s and '40s was not a point of arrival for performers, but a point of departure."⁴³

In 1949, Max Gordon married Lorraine Stein, who has been central in both the history of jazz and of the Village Vanguard. Lorraine Gordon played an important role in the early years of Blue Note Records and, while there, championed the music of Thelonious Monk, helping bring him widespread attention and acclaim. After 1949 she took on a central role in running the Village Vanguard alongside Max Gordon, and her keen ear and intimate knowledge of jazz shaped the trajectory of the Vanguard and the careers of many who she programmed to perform there.⁴⁴

The venue operated as a popular local spot during the early decades of its existence until a watershed moment in the club's history occurred that would change its trajectory significantly: in 1956-7 the club shifted to an all-jazz programming policy. In

⁴² Gordon's chapter about Judy Holliday in his memoirs shows an example of his fond memories of supporting little-known performers before they became famous. See Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, 33-42.

⁴³ Kimberly Hannon Teal, *Jazz Places: How Performance Spaces Shape Jazz History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021): 22.

⁴⁴ Lorraine Gordon details more of her experience at the Village Vanguard in Lorraine Gordon and Barry Singer, *Alive at the Village Vanguard: My Life in and out of Jazz Time* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2006).

October 1956 the Village Voice announced that the Vanguard would be beginning more frequent program changes and including more jazz acts. The “Notebook for Night Owls” section of that publication reads, “The new season at the Village Vanguard launches a new policy – one, says owner Max Gordon, that will include more jazz and more frequent changes of program than in the past. Welcome news for bar-standees, and other habitual pub-crawlers.”⁴⁵ Less than a year later, in May 1957, the Village Voice reported that the Vanguard had formalized this change of direction and would now be programming jazz exclusively.⁴⁶ Having previously existed as a nightclub featuring a wide variety of entertainment, as of May 1957 the Village Vanguard officially became a jazz club.

Then, in November 1957, Sonny Rollins recorded an album at the nightclub-turned-jazz club that would begin a long and distinguished line of live albums, many bearing the now-prestigious title “Live at the Village Vanguard” (or some variation of that phrase). Rollins’ *A Night at the Village Vanguard*, released in 1958, was followed closely by numerous other highly acclaimed albums that were recorded at the Vanguard, including albums by Bill Evans (1961) and John Coltrane (1962). Together, these early albums disseminated the place to a global audience and brought the club recognition around the world. In the years following the club’s installation of a jazz policy and the release of these influential albums recorded at the club, the name “Village Vanguard” took on heightened significance and prestige, with the club expanding its audience

⁴⁵ O.J., “Notebook for Night Owls,” *The Village Voice*, October 10, 1956, 11.

⁴⁶ N.A., “Vanguard Turns to Jazz Trade,” *The Village Voice*, May 29, 1957, 6.

beyond the confines of the Greenwich Village and downtown Manhattan communities that had sustained it in its first two decades and increasingly holding meaning to national and global jazz audiences. Formerly serving primarily a local arts community, the Village Vanguard now served a global jazz audience. It became simultaneously more stylistically narrow and more geographically expansive. Increasingly the Vanguard was a place of respect and even pilgrimage amongst jazz fans. Over the next few decades, the Vanguard's status and function would change significantly in the wake of these recordings and the new jazz policy. Though the venue's physical appearance remained largely the same, its function and meaning for jazz musicians and fans would evolve significantly.

From approximately the 1950s to the 1990s the Vanguard rose in status to become the cultural icon it is today, a monolith of jazz culture. As the musicians whose photos decorated the walls aged, and many of them passed away, the Vanguard became a reminder of the past. Albums recorded there in the early years of its jazz policy left the realm of current and new and entered into the historical canon of great jazz works. The Vanguard was becoming a sort of living museum, both intentionally and inadvertently. This process crept forward gradually throughout the second half of the twentieth century and was seemingly complete by around the 1990s, coming of age alongside the historically oriented neo-classicism movement that had by then gripped mainstream jazz cultures.

The second half of the twentieth century saw a number of important developments in the Vanguard's story. In February of 1966 Thad Jones and Mel Lewis debuted their big band on a Monday night at the Village Vanguard. This would become the "Vanguard

Jazz Orchestra” and for decades (still active at the time of this publication) would fill the Vanguard nearly every week on Monday nights, a slower night of the week that most clubs were closed. Through the 1970s and 80s bands would continue recording at the club and increasingly musician and record labels used the name and image of the Vanguard as a marketing tool, capitalizing on its fame and reputation to bring more attention to their recordings. In 1989 the club’s founder and owner, Max Gordon, passed away and ownership of the club was passed on to Lorraine Gordon. Having already had a significant role in running the Village Vanguard for decades, upon Max Gordon’s death Lorraine Gordon closed the club for one night and then continued the club’s tradition of every-night entertainment, running the club with much admiration from its patrons and musicians until her death in 2018. Since then, the club has been owned and run by Deborah Gordon, daughter of Max and Lorraine.

Through the second half of the twentieth century, the club became primarily a listening room for “serious” jazz music and a shift in the cultural function of the music that was played there occurred. The Village Vanguard’s name implies a place at the forefront of aesthetic and stylistic development. In its early years it often fully lived up to that name as it featured many artists considered avant-garde during their time. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, however, the music played at the club became less and less a part of the jazz avant-garde and settled into a more mainstream style of jazz rooted in the bebop and post-bebop eras. Despite leaving the avant-garde, however, the Vanguard did not simply become a relic of a bygone era of jazz. Rather, by the end of the twentieth century, the Village Vanguard would become a space of reverence and respect for the historically sanctified sounds of mainstream jazz

while still supporting a vibrant and changing present for contemporary musicians. The Village Vanguard is both a listening room for the sounds of the past and a site for meaning and innovation in the present.⁴⁷

And that is how the Vanguard entered the twenty first century and, largely, remains until this day: a room steeped in a decorated history of sounds and people that serves the needs of the present and supports a global jazz scene. Today, the Vanguard remains in its basement location, appearing nearly the same as it has since the first half of the twentieth century, marking one of the most prestigious and important locations in the history of American jazz.

1.2 **Constructing the Village Vanguard**

Like the story given above, the history of the Village Vanguard has been told many times by countless writers. Each narrative represents the club slightly differently, leaning into different tropes.⁴⁸ Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there was a distinct shift in the topics and tropes present in stories that were told about the club. In the Vanguard's first two decades of existence (about 1935 – 1955), most mentions of the club in newspapers and magazines were simply concert announcements and

⁴⁷ Kim Teal demonstrates how the Vanguard is a place of both present and past in “Jazz Heritage Live at the Village Vanguard,” in Teal, *Jazz Places*, 15-50.

⁴⁸ My narrative, for example, represents this venue as a monument of the jazz tradition, leaning into its turn to a jazz policy in 1957 as a key, climactic moment.

advertisements that provided potential clientele with names, times, dates, and prices for different shows at the club.

Around 1957, however, as the club grew in renown, articles specifically about the club began to appear in local and, eventually, national publications, especially the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, and *Downbeat Magazine*. These articles were predominantly celebrations of the Vanguard's importance to local, national, and international jazz scenes and recognitions of the venue's great achievements to date. In these celebratory writings, some tropes about the Village Vanguard begin to take root. These texts speak in grandiose terms about the Vanguard's history, appearance, and function. Such writings make it clear that in the second half of the twentieth century the Vanguard was becoming far more than just another local club or cool place to hang.

Discourse about the Village Vanguard tends to construct the club in a simplified and enticing way. In jazz, this is not unique to the Vanguard: Tony Whyton argues broadly that "the conventional jazz narrative is dominated by mythologies, chronological 'packaged' histories, stereotypical imagery and colourful stories that often oversimplify and romanticize issues surrounding the music."⁴⁹ Though Whyton here is speaking largely of narratives about music and musicians, this applies to jazz places as well and is true of the Village Vanguard. Of all the places throughout the music's history, the Village Vanguard is perhaps the most storied venue in jazz to date.

⁴⁹ Tony Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 107.

Many texts about the Village Vanguard deliver an image of the club in a narrative form, seemingly attempting to give readers a sense that they are experiencing the club themselves. Consider, for example, this passage from the opening of a *Downbeat* magazine piece about the club:

There is a canvas canopy leading from the sidewalk's edge to a neat, white double door. Above the canopy is a modest neon sign that announces "Village Vanguard." Through the white doors, a steep staircase descends to the cellar, and at the foot of the stairs, a second door opens to a small triangular, dimly lit basement room. This is the Vanguard, one of the best-known and longest-surviving night clubs in New York.⁵⁰

This narrative structure is very common in newspaper and magazine articles about the Village Vanguard. Such descriptions of the experience of entering the club offer an enticing introduction to readers who have not been there themselves and are nostalgic for those who have and are fond of the place. These narratives offer to readers the opportunity to temporarily suspend disbelief and imagine that they themselves are experiencing the club first-hand, giving them a sense of connection to jazz history.

Discourse about the Village Vanguard since 1957—and especially since the 1970s—consistently engage three common tropes that recur repeatedly in discourse about the club. First, these narratives often describe the Village Vanguard as historically permanent and as resilient to changing trends in jazz and the entertainment industry. Second, these sources frame the club's dirty and unappealing physical features as one of its endearing

⁵⁰ Martin Williams, "Monday Night at the Village Vanguard," *Downbeat Magazine*, November 30, 1967: 19. And just in case you ever find yourself at a jazz history trivia night, know that the club's iconic door is now red, not white.

qualities. Finally, writers discuss frequently how there are “spirits” of the past that live in the club.⁵¹

The above narrative from *Downbeat* hints at the first common trope in Village Vanguard discourse: the emphasis on the club’s survivability and, relatedly, its impact on jazz history. Many familiar with jazz culture know of the Village Vanguard by reputation, if for no other reason than simply the number of legendary live albums that have been recorded there that are central to the current mainstream jazz canon. Jazz writers regularly emphasize and validate the club’s prestigious reputation, like Ashley Kahn who called the club the “Jazz mecca” and the “center of the known jazz universe.”⁵² The Vanguard’s high esteem both contributes to and is a result of the club’s long-lived success. Known now as the oldest operating jazz club in the world, writers highlight the club’s permanence and survivability despite the various economic challenges it has faced throughout its existence. Following up on the above quote, Kahn continues that “Other jazz venues once claimed that kind of primacy. ‘The corner of the jazz world’ was the boast of the original Birdland at Broadway and W. 55th. But the Vanguard, seven decades old this Feb. 21 – still at 178 Seventh Avenue South, still with a seating capacity of 123 – has survived them all.”⁵³ By regularly highlighting the club’s exceptional sustained success and making its impact on jazz history and culture explicit,

⁵¹ Other tropes do appear in the discourse as well, but these are the ones I find to be the most prominent and the most loaded with historical and cultural meaning.

⁵² Ashley Kahn, “After 70 Years, the Village Vanguard is Still in the Jazz Swing,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2005, Eastern edition: 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

these writers validate and perpetuate the club's prestigious reputation and construct it as a place of monumental importance for the jazz tradition.

The Village Vanguard's interior is not always as celebrated as its history. Like many jazz clubs since about the 1940s, the Village Vanguard is in a basement room and shows signs of disrepair. The physical space is often a point of criticism about the club, and this trope of its dark, dirty, dingy space and outdated décor is treated negatively. One 1977 *New York Times* writer, for example, writing of how the Vanguard moved locations twice in its first two years, from one basement venue to another, says,

Today's Vanguard is in a basement, too... The room is triangular and its décor ranges from lugubrious to faded... The faded part is the red drapes back of the performers on the tiny stage at the apex of the triangle. And the lugubrious part is a mural on the rear wall of what I can only take to be a flying, naked hippie with more ribs than he should have and a disdainful look on his face.⁵⁴

In this case, the trope of the club's outdated physical space is delivered critically and negatively.

Mentions of the club's unappealing physical features are not always pejorative, however. Unflattering portrayals of the club's appearance are common in Vanguard discourse, but the unappealing features of the club's physical space are often forgiven or sometimes even romanticized. Ashley Kahn, for example, writes that "To the uninitiated, the small club at the bottom of 15 well-trodden steps below street level may seem little more than a cramped, triangular-shaped room. But to a hip populace it's where the ghosts

⁵⁴ Gilbert Millstein, "Max Gordon – The Man Behind the Vanguard," *New York Times* June 12, 1977, 7.

of past jazz giants still play.”⁵⁵ Kahn here is a sort of jazz basement apologist, forgiving the Vanguard for its appearance given the importance of its history. He romanticizes those unflattering characteristics by understanding them as part of what gives the club its unique character, making it yet more endearing for that “hip populace.” In discourse about the Village Vanguard, the club’s unappealing physical features are a common trope that is celebrated just as often as it is criticized.

One of the most celebrated physical features of the club is the collection of photographs that line its walls. Filled with dozens of photos of great jazz musicians who have played at the club before, the Vanguard’s walls are decorated with its history. Max Gordon speaks to the importance of these photos when writing about the photo of John Coltrane: “The last place he played before he died was the Village Vanguard. I keep a picture of him on the wall of the place. People are always offering to buy it. They can’t buy it.”⁵⁶ These photos are now an iconic part of the place’s décor and a central part of the Vanguard’s history.

These photos contribute to perhaps the most enticing part of Village Vanguard discourse: the trope that the Vanguard has an “aura” or “vibe” that patrons can feel when they are there. Stories about the Village Vanguard describe how the venue’s history is “alive” and that the “spirits” of great jazz musicians live in the club. These spirits are said to be eerily perceptible as their presence haunts the current place. As Ashley Kahn

⁵⁵ Kahn, “After 70 Years, the Village Vanguard is Still in the Jazz Swing,” 1.

⁵⁶ Max Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, Chapter 11, non-paginated.

pointed to when he wrote that the Vanguard is where “the ghosts of jazz giants still play,” discourse about the Village Vanguard has constructed it as a place where history is alive.⁵⁷

Descriptions of this spiritual aura at the Vanguard are one of the most frequent, most important, and most compelling parts of discourse about the club. In an interview, saxophonist Joe Lovano once said “It might affect you to be sitting in that room, imagining, ‘Oh, Thelonius Monk was here. Man, Miles Davis and Hank Mobley played here, and Bill Evans’s trio.’ You’re feeling the spirits. That’s how I feel when I record there – we’re calling the spirits.”⁵⁸ Likewise, Lorraine Gordon said that “the walls are still filled with photos of great artists that are no longer with us, who are here in spirit”⁵⁹ and saxophonist Brandford Marsalis agrees, saying “you just look up on the wall— everyone’s on that wall. You can really feel the ghosts here.”⁶⁰ Recently, critic Nate Chinnen summarized that

One thing musicians often say about playing at the Village Vanguard, New York’s oldest extant jazz club, is that you have to make your peace with the ghosts in the room. What that means has less to do with the spirit realm than with the *specters of historical memory* shaped by famous recordings and firsthand

⁵⁷ Kahn, “After 70 Years, the Village Vanguard is Still in the Jazz Swing,” 1.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Suzanne Little, “The Club that Jazz Built: Max Gordon’s Village Vanguard,” *Boston Review* 10, no. 5 (1985): 7.

⁵⁹ Brandford Marsalis’ words were quoted in Stephanie Stein, “At the Village Vanguard,” *Downbeat Magazine* August 1990: 27. Lorraine Gordon’s words were quoted in Kahn, “After 70 Years, the Village Vanguard is Still in the Jazz Swing,” 1.

⁶⁰ Lorraine Gordon’s words were quoted in Kahn, “After 70 Years, the Village Vanguard is Still in the Jazz Swing,” 1. Brandford Marsalis’ words were quoted in Stephanie Stein, “At the Village Vanguard,” *Downbeat Magazine* August 1990: 27.

experiences, and made all the more immediate by the photographic portraits on the wall.”⁶¹

The connection between these photos and the idea that the spirits of these musicians are still in the club is a very common trope in discourse about the club. These descriptions depict how the images leave a spirit in the room that constantly reminds everyone that they are currently at the center of jazz, both past and present.

Others extend the idea that that the past lives in the club, claiming that the club itself is alive. Max Gordon closes his memoir with a reflection of his time with the club and writes that “After running a place for as many years as I have, you discover that your place takes on a life of its own after a while. You started it, you put your ideas into it, your hopes and your dreams. It’s your baby, but now it’s got a life of its own, and you better know it.”⁶² In the same book, written in an introduction to Gordon’s memoirs, Nat Hentoff agrees with this statement, connecting the notion that the Vanguard has a “life of its own” with the “spirits” that remain there: “And as you see and hear, in each chapter, how that one room was able to encompass such extraordinarily variegated children of the night – from Leadbelly to Lenny Bruce to Sonny Rollins – you finally understand what Max means when he says that a place takes on a life of its own.”⁶³

Discussions of how patrons of the Vanguard experience jazz history as omnipresent in the club appears not only in primary sources, but also secondary

⁶¹ Nate Chinnen, “Bending a Club Legend to His Own Purposes,” *New York Times*, April 5, 2013. My emphasis.

⁶² Max Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980): 145 -146.

⁶³ Nat Hentoff, Introduction to *Live at the Village Vanguard*, by Max Gordon, 3.

literature. The most compelling example of this representation of the Vanguard in scholarship is perhaps Ronald Radano who, in an oft-cited passage, writes that

all that we hear in black music, or indeed in any kind of music, is inevitably invested in words: in the stories we tell, in the histories we recite, in the associations we make. When we listen to a jazz performance at a club like the Village Vanguard, we hear the music through the lens of history, as the space provides a kind of accompanying sound track to the sound itself. Or, perhaps more accurately, we hear the club in the music, given that we can never really separate out stories of the music from its seemingly pure sonic form.⁶⁴

Conveniently (for my purposes) choosing the Village Vanguard as his example here, Radano's idea that "the space provides a kind of accompanying sound track to the sound itself" is an excellent summary of decades of the social construction of place that has established the Village Vanguard as a place where jazz history "lives" and where patrons can "feel" the venue's past. Further, Radano describes the reciprocal relationship between place and sound and points towards the importance and inescapability of the spatial aspects of music. In this construction, sound and place at the Village Vanguard have co-constituted histories that invest one another with meaning.

1.3 Landscapes

I argue that the discourse that has constructed the current image of the Village Vanguard produces a landscape of the club. Landscape, in geographical terms, does not only mean a visual image of a scene or physical area. Rather, as I use it here, landscape refers more broadly to a representation of a place, both physical and, especially, imaginary. Such a

⁶⁴ Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xi.

use of the term landscape is broad and the concept is complex: and Kenneth Olwig writes that “The complications and entanglements of the meanings of landscape are frustrating to some students, who want simple definitions that they can easily quote.”⁶⁵ I will nonetheless quote Olwig to help define the geographical understanding of landscape as both representational and imaginary: “The character of landscape will be seen to have its foundation not in the land’s physical soil or climate, but in the intellectual soil of landscape’s history and cultural geography and the associated cultural climate of its language, literature, architecture, and arts.”⁶⁶ And putting it perhaps the most clearly, in an oft-cited passage, Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels describe a landscape as “a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings.”⁶⁷ Cosgrove, in his own book, further explains that “In other words landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience in a way that neither region nor area immediately suggest. Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world.”⁶⁸

When we create landscapes, we are choosing what about the places in question to include and what to exclude. Indeed, the writers quoted above are all representing the Village Vanguard in a particular way. Their constructions of the club rely on both

⁶⁵ Kenneth Olwig, *The Meanings of Landscape: Essays on Place, Space, Environment and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2019): 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶⁷ Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, “Introduction: Iconography and Landscape,” in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, eds., Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 1.

⁶⁸ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984): 13.

repetitions of selected ideas from pre-existing stories of the club they are familiar with and their own experience of the club. I argue that these representations of the club reveal not only the way they see it, but also the way they *want* to see it. As such, by choosing to represent the Vanguard in a particular light, the writers of the discourse about the Village Vanguard are (re)producing a landscape of the club.

In creating a landscape, so too are these writers creating meaning. Daniels and Cosgrove note that when examining a landscape it is “necessary to understand written and verbal representations of it, not as ‘illustrations,’ images standing outside it, but as constituent images of its meaning or meanings.”⁶⁹ Both the physical space of the Village Vanguard and the imaginary and socially-constructed understanding of the place contribute to its meaning. Both the physical space and the imaginary landscape reveal the meanings that the place holds. There is a reciprocal relationship between a physical space and an imaginary landscape of that place in that each is produced by the other. The materiality of a space contributes to our experience of it and informs the way we reshape it in our imagination and represent it in art, language, and discourse. The way we imagine these places then informs how we construct, maintain, or alter them physically. The Village Vanguard has gone through this loop, wherein the physical characteristics of the space have shaped the stories we tell about it, and in turn the owners of the club have

⁶⁹ Cosgrove and Daniels, “Introduction: Iconography and Landscape,” 1.

chosen to alter the physical space sparingly to maintain the image of it represented in discourse.⁷⁰

The narrative style of the stories that construct the image of the Village Vanguard create powerful evocations of the landscape that provide feelings of closeness to the place. Contrary to a common notion that landscaping produces distance between a place and a subject, the Village Vanguard's landscape offers a sense of direct contact with the club and history. Jeff Malpas writes that there is "a common conception of landscape according to which landscape is the product of an essentially 'representational' construal of our relation to the world that always involves separation and detachment."⁷¹ In such a construal, Malpas argues, we take the landscape as an object that we gaze upon and by being spectators we become distanced from the landscape and the landscape becomes separated from us. The solution to this problem, he asserts, is that we must reconsider landscape as a "re-presentation of a relatedness to place, a re-presentation of a mode of 'emplacement.'"⁷² That is, landscapes are not only representations of places but rather they are insights into our relationship to place, our connection to it, and the complex human experience of place. Landscapes offer not only a view of place, but a view of our connection to place.

⁷⁰ The interaction between materiality and the imagination in the social construction of place is examined more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

⁷¹ Jeff Malpas, "Place and the Problem of Landscape," in *The Place of Landscape*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011): 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

When those who write the landscape of the Village Vanguard use a narrative-style description of the club they are not only representing the place so that viewers can imagine gazing upon it from a distance. Rather, they often make an effort to invoke various sensory effects to make the spectator feel as close to the place as they can. In sharing their experience of the club, they are not only representing the place for others, but also showing their own relation to the place as they experienced it and as they *want* to experience it. With some degree of suspension of disbelief, these writings offer an experience of the club that feels less distanced than, say, a landscape painting might, and offer a more nuanced experience of the connection of a person to a place.

1.4 Vibes

The landscape of the Village Vanguard is made up of a number of common tropes and writers have captured the essence of the club's landscape in a single word: "vibe." In the summer of 1987, for example, a small poem about the Village Vanguard appeared in

Downbeat Magazine:

Deep within the vanguard darkness
 Lovers enraptured by spirits
 Set time on its ear.
 "Vibes," they say
 Is that ghosts?⁷³

With words like "darkness," "spirits," and "ghosts," this poem wonderfully captures the key characteristics of discourse about the Village Vanguard and summarizes them all

⁷³ Jeff Levenson, "For Max Gordon, and Others Similarly Possessed," *Downbeat Magazine*, September 1987: 65.

with the word “vibes.” “Vibes” here captures the experience of patrons who feel the “spirits” or “ghosts” of jazz at the club and emphasizes their historical quality (“set time on its ear”). The word “vibes” recurs regularly in stories about the Village Vanguard and is important because of how it appears to function as a summary of the discursive tropes of the Village Vanguard experience with all of its phantasmic flavour.

In writings about the Village Vanguard, the first written use of the word “vibes” that I have found is in Max Gordon’s memoirs, published in 1980.⁷⁴ By this point, texts discussing the “spirits” at the Village Vanguard had become standard fare in newspapers and magazines and most of the tropes discussed above were well-established. In this excerpt, Gordon is telling an anecdote about a conversation with his friend “Al” where the two were talking about an unnamed blond trumpet player who had risen to some degree of fame on the West coast, but performed very poorly when he was invited to play in New York at the Village Vanguard:

“How can a trumpet player sound great in California and terrible in New York?” I asked Al.

“It’s the vibes, man, the vibes!”

“What vibes?”

“Coltrane, Miles, Coleman Hawkins, Bill Evans, Mingus, and Sonny himself, cats who’ve played here and left their vibes here, man! Know what I mean? The vibes! That’s what I’m talking about. The blond cat didn’t belong in this company. The vibes scared the hell out of him.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ I am not sure if this was the first time this word was published in reference to the Village Vanguard, but it is, so far, the first instance that I have found of it in printed discourse about the club.

⁷⁵ Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, 96 - 97.

Like the poem in the *Village Voice* printed five years after this anecdote was published, Al here uses the word “vibes” to describe the peculiar sensation of “feeling” the history of the club while in the space—a negative experience in this case.

Again in 1985, the same year as the above *Village Voice* poem, Suzanne Little quoted Woody Shaw in a *Boston Review* article about the Vanguard, saying that

Acoustically, the Vanguard is one of the best clubs in the whole world. I think it’s the vintage materials used at the time, the wood, the way the room is built, I always think music is alive, and especially after reading Max’s book I understood how the room’s full of vibrations, from all kinds of people and music, not just jazz. There’s a diversity in there, from Judy Holliday to Pearl Bailey to Woody Allen. It’s absolutely the legendary club.⁷⁶

Using the word “vibrations,” which “vibes” of course is short for, Shaw describes how the club feels “alive” because of the people who had been there before and how their music lingers in the space. The use of the word *vibe* in a musical context, of course, is likely not a coincidence given its connection to the physical production of sound. The spirits that the *vibe* refers to were once physical bodies creating vibrations that we experience as sound. Stories about the Village Vanguard put those physical sonic vibrations through a transformative process wherein they transform from a physical vibration into a social abstraction. The physicality of the vibrations and the bodies that produce them disappear as they linger on indefinitely as an abstract representation of a moment in time. The vibrations relinquish their physical form and become a *vibe*, the invisible and intangible presence of the club’s past. This sonic construction of place distinguishes musical places from other, non-musical historical places and Shaw’s use of

⁷⁶ Quoted in Little, “The Club that Jazz Built,” 8.

the word *vibe* demonstrates how sound and place are intertwined in the construction of place and the meanings of the music. The *vibes* in this construction, then, are the perceivable social and aesthetic histories of the club.

Emphasizing the weight and historical nature of the word *vibe*, a writer for *Downbeat* magazine used it twice in a 1995 article about the Village Vanguard. They write: “Beyond the music, it is the affection with which jazz players, devoted fans and even casual listeners revere the image of the elfin, cigar-smoking Max Gordon – and the respect with which they regard Lorraine Gordon today – that is a testament to this most unusual of places, the home of a special *vibe* so strong that the room itself has taken on legendary proportions.”⁷⁷ Earlier in the same article, the author wrote that “On this particular Monday night, the club was alive with the *vibes* of past, present and future.”⁷⁸ This last phrase amplifies the importance of the historical element of the word *vibe*, making it clear that the Vanguard’s “*vibe*” is a historical feeling, or at least a feeling that is caused by an awareness of the room’s history. In the words of the poem quoted above, the historicity of the club’s *vibes* “sets time on its ear.”

Vibes, then, is a frequently used word that summarizes the idealized feeling of experiencing the history of the club, the notion that Village Vanguard patrons can sense the lingering sounds and presence of the “spirits” of the jazz greats who have played in space. The club’s discourse has naturalized the notion that patrons should feel these so-

⁷⁷ Larry Blumenfeld, “A Vanguard of Jazz: Still Happening at 60,” *Downbeat Magazine* May 1995: 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

called vibes when at the club and the discourse has put these vibes as a central point of focus within the constructed landscape of the club. This discourse asserts that the Vanguard is special primarily because of its vibes, which create a landscape of the club where these Vanguard-exclusive vibes are a critical part of the experience of the club.

Writers who construct the Vanguard's landscape usually use the words vibe and vibrations as a physical metaphor, rather than to denote an actual physical phenomenon. Addressing the connection and distinction between the physical and metaphorical understanding of vibrations, Shana Redmond asserts that

Vibration is a product of the voice as sound but is present in the literature oftentimes as a hard science – one that reveals little interest in questions of representation, politics, or identity. Defined as “a periodic motion, i.e., a motion which repeats itself in all its particulars after a certain interval of time,” vibration is the evidence that nothing remains still for long. Everything is working or being worked on, making the repeated tremor of infinite speech.⁷⁹

Redmond pursues the metaphorical idea of vibration, the non-hard-science approach, and examines how a person, Paul Robeson in this case, can themselves become a vibration who surfaces in the public imagination taking on different forms at different times for different people. She “contends with who he becomes instead of who he was” and reveals how “his reincarnation in a variety of forms...demonstrate[s] his continued evolution and elevation.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Shana Redmond, *Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

Such is the case with the people who created those physical vibrations at the Village Vanguard, legendary musicians like Bill Evans, John Coltrane, and Charles Mingus, to name just a few. Discourse about the Village Vanguard transforms the legacy of those individuals into vibes that continually resurface in a variety of forms, never still and always changing. These artists and their vibrations are freed from their physical limitations and take on a more sustainable and malleable form. Ashon Crawley describes “a vibration, a sonic event” and how

its ongoing movement makes its apprehension both illusory and provisional. Illusory because the thing itself is both given and withheld from view, from earshot. Provisional because it – the vibration, the sonic event, the sound – is not and cannot ever be stilled absolutely. It keeps going, it keeps moving, it is open-ended. It can be felt and detected but remains almost obscure, almost unnoticed. And this for its protection. And this, its gift. Giving something of itself while remaining a resource from which such force can eternally return and emerge.⁸¹

In Village Vanguard discourse we see a landscape of the club in which its history continually emerges to shape the meaning of the present place in the image of the past, always moving and giving while being both present and invisible.

By relinquishing these artists and their vibrations from their physical forms, they become, as Redmond argues, a form of non-verbal communication that can traverse expansive geographies. Metaphorical vibrations achieve a degree of “everywhereness” as they are free from their physical form that would otherwise cause them to be limited to a relatively small space as they fade over time.⁸² Vibes, liberated from the physical

⁸¹ Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

⁸² Redmond, *Everything Man*, 1.

limitations of vibrations, are free to evolve over indefinite time and traverse expansive geographies.⁸³

In their existence in the social imagination, these vibes are a powerful force in that they shape the present to a significant degree. Both Redmond and Crawley argue that vibrations, in the metaphorical sense, impact the present by holding meaning or altering the spaces we occupy in the present. Avery Gordon asserts at length the significant impact of the ghosts that haunt us and argues that we are always haunted, somewhere, by something. Gordon writes that “Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.”⁸⁴ These ghosts are historical constructions and “to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects.”⁸⁵ Gordon’s ghosts that haunt the present, or, the vibes, in Village Vanguard terms, are “a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it.”⁸⁶

Indeed, with the importance of this phantasmic rhetoric in the creation of the landscape of the club, to study the social life of the Village Vanguard we must closely

⁸³ The connection of vibes and vibrations to time and space/place will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Hauntings and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 8. For the sake of clarity, note that Avery Gordon has no relation to the Gordons who own the Village Vanguard.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

examine its ghostly aspects, its vibes. Though using different terms, Kim Teal has pursued a similar line of inquiry by analyzing specific ways that the club's past has a distinct impact on its present. She argues that "this space that was made famous by the music performed and recorded has valorized a heritage that now exerts control over what is played on its stage."⁸⁷ With case studies of Ethan Iverson and Fred Hersch, Teal demonstrates through ethnographic material and musical analysis that the club's past, and the musicians' knowledge of that history, change the way they play when in the place. Through choices surrounding repertoire and musical style, these musicians perform differently at the Village Vanguard than they do at other clubs to better align themselves with the traditions of that particular place.⁸⁸ I understand this impact of the past on the present as a haunting, in Avery Gordon's terms, and argue, then, that the centrality of vibes in the club's landscape have an observable impact on the present activity at the club.

These decorative tales of spirits that live in the Village Vanguard, then, are not simply ghost stories. The vibes at the Village Vanguard have a discernable impact on those who are aware of them and these historical echoes exert control over its present. In much of this discourse, though certainly not all of it, these hauntings are deliberate and welcome. Those writing about the Village Vanguard have gone to lengths to identify and preserve these ghosts, to welcome them into the place and offer them agency. And that is

⁸⁷ Teal, *Jazz Places*, 18.

⁸⁸ More specifically, Teal finds that musicians tend to play music that is more aligned with what is widely considered "mainstream" jazz styles while at the Village Vanguard. Fred Hersch, for example, does not perform his music that involves poetry and extreme harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic freedom, choosing instead to play jazz standards in styles rooted in bebop, swing, and the blues.

what Gordon and Redmond have in common in their writing about ghosts and vibrations: the assertion that these metaphorical forces have agency in the present and that events, people, and sounds of the past control, to some extent, the actions of today. This is the basic notion that the past impacts the present, that we take moments from history and turn them into imaginary forces that can live on and have agency in shaping the present. The Village Vanguard's haunted landscape, then, is a construction that blurs temporal boundaries and produces an intermingling of past and present wherein contemporary jazz audiences can be influenced by and feel connected to jazz history.

1.5 Haunted Landscapes and the Politics of the Vibe

There are many barriers that one must go through to “feel the vibe.” As with any place, the Village Vanguard is not constructed in discourse or in practice in a way that is equally welcoming to everybody. The people who go to the Village Vanguard are widely varied. In early reports, the club seemed to cater to a diverse range of identities, borrowing from the relatively inclusive space of the Greenwich Village area in the early and mid-twentieth century.⁸⁹ This continued somewhat to the present, though to a lesser extent as the Village Vanguard now advertises itself as a club that caters to a global jazz community moreso than a local neighborhood community. Reports of who attends the club are difficult to find, however, and painting a clear picture of who regularly attends the club through its history and to the present is a challenging task outside of a lengthy

⁸⁹ Max Gordon regularly notes in his memoirs that a variety of people attended the club and indicates that the varied populations had a lot to do with who was performing on any particular night. See, for example, Max Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 75.

ethnographic or oral history study. There are various reasons why this data might not be readily available in anecdotes and accessible sources. In the club's early days, as it catered to a diverse crowd it may have been to the advantage of the patrons to not reveal exactly who was visiting, given the risks of visibility for non-white, non-binary, and non-heterosexual people. The Vanguard may have provided a safe space for a variety of individuals through invisibility. In its later years, when the Vanguard began catering towards a specifically jazz audience, narratives may not mention identity because of more obscure practices of heteronormativity and homogenization of the politics of the jazz tradition. At the very least, we can tell that the Vanguard has always had a diverse audience, to varying degrees, and that who attends the club can vary widely from night to night. Of course, the club takes on the politics of its music in that who goes to the club on each night depends on who is playing. As such the music shapes the politics of the space very directly and who enters the space changes from night to night.

The politics of inclusion at the Vanguard are also significantly impacted by financial and physical accessibility. In terms of cost, attending a set at the Village Vanguard is not cheap. As of the time of this writing, tickets for one 75-minute set costs \$35 USD with a one drink minimum. With the cost of the ticket, a drink, and a tip, attending one set at the Vanguard will cost at least \$40, often close to \$50. This is a high price for a somewhat short set and makes it difficult for people of lower socio-economic status to attend shows.⁹⁰ Another barrier is the stairs that one must go down to access the

⁹⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Village Vanguard offered live streamed shows from the club for \$7 per set which may have made viewing live music from the club more financially accessible. It may have

club. The stairs, as noted in various sources above in a celebratory way, are narrow and steep. This entrance makes the club inaccessible to many who cannot get down such a staircase, thus placing a barrier based on physical ability.

The spatial politics at the Village Vanguard are also determined in large part by its borrowing of larger political trends in North American jazz cultures. Indeed, since the vibe represents the history of jazz, it brings with it the politics of that tradition. The history of jazz in mainstream narratives tells a story that primarily supports and celebrates heterosexual men, largely excluding women from the professional jazz musician and writer pipeline and almost entirely erasing queer and non-binary people from the narratives.⁹¹ The racial makeup of jazz history is complex, as a music that is historically Black but where white musicians have often faced fewer economic barriers to success. Jazz discourse is filled with a white/Black binary discussion of racial politics and though, at times, both white musicians and Black musicians have been celebrated and criticized for their race, Black musicians have faced more disenfranchisement and racism than their white colleagues.⁹² Jazz carries this political history with it and as its identity-

also increased access to live music at the club to those facing physical and social barriers when trying to enter the club.

⁹¹ Some scholarly interventions into these unjust representations of jazz history include Nichole T. Rustin & Sherrie Tucker, eds., *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); and Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁹² Kelsey Klotz discusses experiences of whiteness in jazz in Kelsey Klotz, *Dave Brubeck and the Performance of Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). For a recent and interesting discussion about barriers in jazz, especially financial barriers for non-white artists, see Dale Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

laden sounds fill the walls of places like the Village Vanguard, that place, too, takes on some of that political situation.

Reports of the exclusionary power of the Vanguard's vibes are common in discourse about the club. As quoted above, Max Gordon discusses in his memoirs the story of the "blond trumpet player" who choked and performed poorly at the club due to the presence of the vibe. For this unnamed musician, the vibes were an oppressive, destructive force that negatively affected his performance and that effectively prevented him from occupying space on the stage in the club as he reportedly did at other venues. A *New York Times* writer notes that

The Village Vanguard can be a harsh place for young musicians, The club has terrifyingly high creative standards, two or three sets a night, six nights a week, demanding deep improvisational resources and complete assurance. Without them, a musician will die a slow, obvious death in front of the baleful pictures on the wall of the great musicians who've played there.⁹³

The writers of the stories that make the Vanguard's vibes a central feature of the club's landscape represent them as a welcome presence, aiding in sustaining the vibes and their power. It seems, though, that in cases like the unnamed blond trumpet player and in the opinion of the writer who called the vibes "baleful," these vibes exert control not only in a positive way—nor, it would seem, only upon those who are willing.

Though it often excludes, the vibe is also often celebrated for its power to promote feelings of connectedness to jazz history and, as such, is a validating force for many invested in the jazz tradition. Many writers speak of the vibes with great reverence

⁹³ Peter Watrous, "Improvising Trombonist," *New York Times* May 28, 1988, 13.

and respect, rarely, if ever, casting them in a negative light. After all, the landscape that these writers have constructed is a celebratory one, and the vibes at the center of this landscape are an important part of that favourable character. Many musicians also seem to view the vibes and their influence as an important and acceptable feature of the Village Vanguard. Speaking of Roland Kirk, Max Gordon noted that “Rahsaan liked the vibes at the Vanguard, liked them so much that he’d work there for less money than in places ‘where the vibes say nothing to me.’”⁹⁴ For many musicians, the vibes contribute positively to their experiences and performances at the Village Vanguard and they are happy to embrace the haunting vibes and their agency at the club.

That the vibes appear to aid some and impede others make them inherently political. Indeed, the politics of ghosts is not lost on the authors whose analyses of the ghostly I have relied on in this chapter. Crawley asserts that the vibrations produced by Black voices present new epistemological possibilities. He asserts that Blackness and “Black breath” can sound out and disrupt institutionalization to open new worlds of possibility and new ways of knowing. He writes that “the disruptive capacities found in the otherwise world of Blackpentecostalism is but one example of how to produce a break with the known, the normative, the violent world of western thought and material condition.”⁹⁵ Seen through the lens that Crawley offers, then, the vibrations that musicians leave behind at the Village Vanguard could present opportunities for Black

⁹⁴ Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, 113.

⁹⁵ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 4.

artists and audiences to construct the place in their image, to create a place that stands alone from other institutionalized, racist places.

The political situation of ghosts is also the focus of Avery Gordon's work, as she argues that ghosts are the forgotten or invisible remnants of past oppression and violence. As such, we must be cautious in studying them because "ghosts are never innocent: the unhallowed dead of the modern project drag in the pathos of their loss and the violence of the force that made them, their sheets and chains."⁹⁶ She argues that work to uncover and making these ghosts visible should "not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future."⁹⁷ Ghosts and their hauntings, then, present a political dangers. However, in that they reveal the ways that the past influences the present, they also offer opportunities to confront injustices and develop new ways of knowing that do not sustain nor repeat harmful structures of power and thought.

Avery Gordon's ghosts differ from the ghosts depicted in discourse about the Village Vanguard in that the ghosts at the Vanguard are not hidden in the discourse. It is quite the opposite in stories about the Village Vanguard as these hauntings are made to be an explicit and visible part of this landscape. So too are they spun in a positive way, almost never considered sources of oppression or trauma. These hauntings are deliberate and welcome, not dark shadows that shape the present in unsavory ways. But what

⁹⁶ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Gordon teaches us about these ghosts is that they are remnants of history that resurface to influence the present in significant and observable ways. Ghosts do not simply linger and observe, but rather they claim agency and have observable influences on the present. Most pressingly, Gordon makes it clear that the power and agency of ghosts does not always have to be granted and that these forces can have substantial and harmful impacts on people, regardless of if they are aware of them.

By placing ghosts in such a central role in the construction of the club, these authors are creating a deeply political landscape. After all, not only are the ghosts political forces, but so too is landscaping a political process. As with all representational activities, landscaping is political in that it shapes a place in the image of the person constructing it: in most cases a “landscape represent[s] the desires and needs, the customs and forms of justice of the people who made them.”⁹⁸ The landscapers of the Village Vanguard have chosen to include ghosts in their landscape of the club and have chosen which ghosts fit their vision and needs and which do not.

The ghosts that were chosen to haunt this landscape of the Village Vanguard are involved with a politics of musical style and represent the dominant, mainstream canon of jazz history. Most of the writers quoted so far are members of the broad community of jazz musicians, writers, and audiences that sustain and support a classic canon of jazz. Kim Teal aptly describes how the Vanguard is “a symbol of a historically sanctified jazz

⁹⁸ Don Mitchell, “Cultural Landscapes: Just Landscapes or Landscapes of Justice?,” *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 6 (2003): 787-788.

mainstream.”⁹⁹ This style that makes up the jazz mainstream is described by Teal via the analysis of Travis Jackson, who writes that the jazz mainstream in New York in the 1990s is “played primarily on acoustic instruments by small groups of three to seven musicians; make frequent use of thirty-two-bar song forms, twelve-bar blues, and ‘modal’ frameworks, as well as various modifications of them; and are historically rooted in the practices of paradigmatic jazz musicians in general and African American jazz musicians in particular.”¹⁰⁰ I would add that the aesthetic tradition of this music is rooted in the bebop tradition that was established in the 1940s.¹⁰¹ Teal argues that this mainstream style of jazz is the style that is, tacitly, enforced at the Village Vanguard. Given the club’s prevalence in the jazz scenes of both New York and the world at large, the music that is played—and, especially, recorded—at the Vanguard has a significant impact on what becomes considered mainstream jazz.

As progenitors and followers of this jazz mainstream, the writers cited so far in this chapter have placed the ghosts that bear that aesthetic and cultural tradition at the centre of the club’s landscape. These musicians include many famous names that have been noted above, most of whom are associated in some way with establishing and/or continuing the mainstream canon of jazz. By constructing a landscape with these figures at the centre, these writers validate and perpetuate their own views of jazz music and

⁹⁹ Kim Teal, “Fred Hersch at the Village Vanguard: The Sound of Jazz Heritage at New York’s Oldest Jazz Club,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (2018): 450.

¹⁰⁰ Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 6.

¹⁰¹ For a comprehensive history of this music, Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

culture. These writers, it seems, enjoy and prefer this style of jazz, likely both aesthetically and ideologically. Further, many of these writers have established a career and make a living by writing about this particular type of music for a large number of readers. It is thus in their best interests to create a landscape wherein that style can thrive. In this landscape of the Village Vanguard, the presentation of the club is one where a clear stylistic ideology or jazz is forwarded, one that is in the image and best interests of those who construct it.

In addition to representing the needs and desires of those writing the club's landscape, the vibes at the Village Vanguard are also political in that they originated with and continue to represent people. These vibrations, though conceptualized as disembodied, ephemeral, and non-corporeal, are not without the complex baggage of human identities. They represent people, real people, who lived with complex identities. As such, some of these vibrations are Black, some are white. Some are male, some are (less often) female. Some young, some old. Some wealthy, some poor. The vibrations that haunt this landscape are the abstracted humanity of those who came before.

The simple notion that these vibrations were, and are, people, and that they have an impact on the real lives of people, is a fact not to be taken for granted. After all, a landscape is not only an imaginary construct that lives in our minds. A landscape exists in dialogue with the real, lived world and has social, cultural, political, and material impacts on the places it represents. Reflecting the views of many writers on landscape, Don Mitchell argues that symbolism and the imaginary elements of landscape are important, "but it is only important to the degree that it provides a window on, and a way into, the

physical city, the material landscape, the real social relations that make up the substance of women's and men's lives."¹⁰² He continues that

Landscape was more than a way of seeing, more than a representation, more than ideology – though it was very deeply all of those. It was a substantive, material reality, a place lived, a world produced and transformed, a commingling of nature and society that is struggled over and in. In these struggles, productions and lives, law (as a social practice) was critical, and normative goals of justice were always foremost.¹⁰³

In that landscaping is a political practice that has a material and observable impact on people's lives and those who have the power to create the landscape have the power in shaping the political norms it enforces, in our world where place is inescapable, "there is a struggle for landscape, and it is at the same time a struggle for justice."¹⁰⁴

Those who construct the haunted landscape at the Village Vanguard reveal how the club's vibes affect their experience of the place through stories of insiderness and outsidersness, a socially constructed notion of who they assert belongs in the club and who does not. Perpetuators of Village Vanguard's haunted landscape have long been concerned with protecting their place and their people by clearly demarcating differences between those they view as insiders and outsiders at the club. On one particular night at the Vanguard, this *Downbeat* writer seemed to be on the lookout for these outsiders: "It is 9:30 p.m. There are approximately six couples seated at the club's tiny circular tables in the center floor, or at the small rectangular ones against the walls. It's early as things go on a Vanguard Monday; the insiders know there is no real point in arriving until about

¹⁰² Mitchell, "Cultural Landscapes," 789.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 792.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 788.

10.”¹⁰⁵ For this author, one’s behaviour at the club threatens to label one as an outsider from—and because of—the moment they arrive. While describing the music that was played at the club that night, the author finds some more outsiders: “During the ballad, a couple comes through the entrance. He looks to be about 30; she looks to be 60; both look like middle-class suburbanites. The crowd, its attention as usual centered on the band, shows a scattered annoyance as a waiter shows them to a table and asks if they want to order anything.”¹⁰⁶ These unnamed people are labeled outsiders for their behavior in the club (showing up late, making noise during the music) but also for their appearance as “middle-class suburbanites” (read “squares” and, likely, “white”).

In this author’s active attempt to other some fellow patrons at the Village Vanguard, he employs the common narrative-style rhetoric that not only describes an experience at the club, but *prescribes* it. The author asserts that there is a correct way to experience the club and that, perhaps more pressingly, there is an *incorrect* way to experience it. In this example, it is clear that having the allegedly correct experience of the Vanguard requires, to some degree, knowledge of the club’s culture and history. Certainly, the couple in the example are not aware of the conventions of the club and their status as outsiders comes primarily from a lack of knowledge—they simply do not know enough to act properly in this place. And after all, as this author puts it, how could they? They are middle-class suburbanites, not hip, downtown folk.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Williams, “Monday at the Village Vanguard,” *Downbeat Magazine* November 30, 1967, 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

This begs the question: what if somebody cannot “feel the vibe?” The vibe is a negative experience for some, and a positive for others, but certainly there are people who attend the Village Vanguard and do not experience this phantasmic presence. If the vibe is an intangible but perceivable representation of the club’s history, can one access it if they do not know the club’s history?

In the Vanguard’s haunted landscape, authors construct the place as one where those with intimate knowledge of jazz can gather and share in a special and unique experience of jazz history. Though this often begins from a place of loving jazz and of community building, the discourse leans significantly into a division of insiders and outsiders to achieve it. The result is that writers of the Vanguard’s landscape equate a lack of knowledge about the Vanguard and jazz history with a failure to access the club’s vibe. As with the author above, who described the outsiders he saw at the club shows, knowledge about the club and its history is an important distinguishing factor between insiders and outsiders at the club. In this construction, knowledge is the currency that trades at the Village Vanguard.

The naturalization of the word “vibe” in this landscape-forming discourse functions to exclude those who are unfamiliar with the experience that the word promises. The word “vibe” refers not only to the phantasmic agents that are said to live in the club, but also to an experience that one might have while at the club. Much of the discourse that constructs the Village Vanguard seems to prescribe this experience of the vibe, threatening to other those who do not feel it. The club’s landscape normalizes this one particular and idealized experience of the place and uses it as a metric for determining who is an insider and who is an outsider. Further, the discourse uses literal

and absolute language when discussing the club's vibe, framing it as something that exists without a doubt. The result is a prescription of the experience of the vibe that implies that when somebody cannot "feel the vibe" it is not because the club failed to provide it, but rather because the individual failed to access it.

Accessing the vibe, then, as it is framed in this discourse, remains behind a web of barriers connected to one's relationship to jazz history. As these writers construct it, one first has to be aware of the history to which the vibe refers before one can properly appreciate the vibe. In other words, one must know the history to feel it. This construction of the Village Vanguard makes it a site for a highly exclusive community-building practice rooted in mainstream jazz politics. As such, in this representation, the Village Vanguard becomes an echo chamber for the politics of contemporary, mainstream jazz culture.

And yet, the political make-up of the Village Vanguard and the experience of those deemed "outsiders" is not dominated only by those who construct its haunted landscape. The vibe need not always have the final say. As a historically Black place in a diverse neighborhood, the Village Vanguard has been a welcoming place for many people with varying knowledge of jazz. Following writers like Ashon Crawley, Katherine McKittrick, and James Gordon Williams and their understanding of open and anti-hegemonic places, I argue that the Village Vanguard also offers a place where one can perform insiderness.¹⁰⁷ The Village Vanguard is a complex musical place where

¹⁰⁷ Thank you to Kelsey Klotz for a discussion on performing identities in jazz that helped me develop my thoughts on this subject.

musicians and audiences all contribute to its shifting landscape on a daily basis. Those who come to the Vanguard with a limited knowledge of the vibe are not necessarily excluded from the place, despite the assertions of some of the writers above. The vibe is an important part of the broad discourse about the place, but the lived experience of many people can escape the confines of the vibe.

1.6 **Conclusion: Haunting Landscapes**

How the constructed landscape of the club and peoples' lived experiences of the place interact is not always straightforward and clear. One question that remains is: do the political interests and assertions of the discourse actually change anything about the club itself? If audience members were unaware of this discourse, would they feel excluded from the Vanguard anyway?

The owners of the Vanguard have made the club a somewhat welcoming place. As a historic Greenwich Village place, the Vanguard is open and supportive of a wide-variety of people, not only jazz-savvy straight men. Simply because those who write the Vanguard's landscape have represented the club as a place where only certain people belong does not mean that audience members each night will feel or be excluded from the club.

And yet, the haunting presence of the club's past is not entirely undetectable to those unfamiliar with the club's history. The club's owners make this somewhat explicit with their décor, especially the images on the walls that signal to audiences that the place bears historical significance in its tradition. Indeed, the design of the club reflects trends

in jazz discourse at large, as its owners have played a part in both constructing those trends and reflecting them to remain current and relevant. As such, the club's haunted landscape does have a real and noticeable effect on the experience of people at the club, regardless of their level of awareness of the discourse that constructs it. It is common for landscapes to have real, observable impacts on the places they represent. Simon Schama writes that "once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, established itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery."¹⁰⁸ The vibe in the Village Vanguard's landscape, then, seeps into the reality of the club and of peoples' experience of it, and can evoke a sense of belonging or lack thereof, often in subtle ways.

In this way, the landscape of the Village Vanguard is itself a ghost that haunts the place. The ghosts that writers have called the vibe exert control on the club only to the extent that the gatekeepers of the club and of jazz history allow them. And so, it is not only vibes that haunt the club, but also landscapes. The musicians that Kim Teal describes as changing their style based on their knowledge of the history of the club are not only affected by the ghosts themselves, but by their acceptance of these ghosts as powerful. Musicians could simply ignore the photos on the wall if they deemed them unimportant, but instead they often choose to acknowledge them, grant them power, and thus agree with and become complicit with the writers who revise and (re)construct the club's landscape. And so, the landscape itself haunts the club. The Village Vanguard is haunted not only by history, but also by discourse.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 61.

As such, this discourse creates not only a haunted landscape, but a haunting landscape. The landscape itself exerts control over the present and the experience of those who know of and go to the club. This dissertation is as much an investigation of how history haunts the Village Vanguard as it is an investigation of how the discourse haunts the club's construction. The result of this discourse is a politically double-edged sword wherein people use a construction of place to find community and validation but also reproduce exclusionary practices in jazz. The Village Vanguard, then, operates in a complex network of politics and meaning and its haunting landscape is an active and generative force in the world of jazz.

Chapter 2

2 Living Vibrations¹⁰⁹

Of all the vibes that are said to haunt the Village Vanguard, John Coltrane's echoes amongst the loudest. One of the most revered figures in jazz history, Coltrane has a long history of performing at the Village Vanguard, appearing at the club many times over his career and recording multiple live albums there. Coltrane's vibe is intimately tied to the place and imaginings of his haunting constitute a significant part of the club's haunted landscape. His connection to the Vanguard has become a standard part of posthumous narratives of his life in both scholarly and non-scholarly writings, and this now deeply ingrained association has made John Coltrane and the Village Vanguard a historically consecrated pair. Whereas Chapter 1 examined what vibes are at a general level, this chapter will analyze John Coltrane's legacy, one particular vibe, to further reveal how these phantasmic agents create, hold, and sustain meaning.

Coltrane's vibe is sometimes evoked in a unique way: through performances by his son Ravi Coltrane, a successful jazz saxophonist. Ravi Coltrane is often represented in discourse as the heir to the Coltrane throne and the one who will continue his parents' legacy. Much the same as the Village Vanguard in its own respective discourse, then, in

¹⁰⁹ Since I started graduate school and began crafting the earliest iterations of the ideas in this dissertation, too many loved ones have passed away. I would like to dedicate this chapter to the memory of those who our families lost during the writing of this dissertation: Mary McCorkle, Rupert McCorkle, Susan Deschenes, Jean Deschenes, Gloria Boswell, Al Cogan, Dave Mather, Gerry Moore, Clarke Crawford, and Bentley (Gary).

these journalistic writings Ravi Coltrane serves as a site for jazz audiences to feel a direct and nearly unmediated connection to jazz history. Ravi's regular appearances at the Village Vanguard complete a triangle of meaning (John-Ravi-Vanguard) that result in affective moments of heightened awareness of and connection to a jazz heritage for many audiences.¹¹⁰

Following a line of inquiry into how John Coltrane's *vibe* works and how it is evoked through Ravi reveals the commonly used invocation of metaphors of life and death in jazz cultures.¹¹¹ Discourse about the Coltrane legacy frames John Coltrane's *vibe* as "living" at the Village Vanguard and Ravi Coltrane as someone who is keeping his parents' legacy "alive." These evocative metaphors are part of a complex web of meaning and politics. I examine them to show how contemporary jazz audiences *use* history for its affective power and how memories of the jazz past are sustained. I argue that the historical project of keeping the *vibe* alive serves the function of making the past feel present, accessible, and functional and thereby providing validation for those who love jazz.

¹¹⁰ There are currently no substantial scholarly writings about Ravi Coltrane. He is occasionally mentioned in discussions about John or Alice Coltrane, but this chapter will be the first direct and substantial engagement with Ravi.

¹¹¹ Tracy McMullen gives a primer on discourses of life and death in jazz in "If I Should Lose You: Keeping Jazz Alive," in *Haunthenticity: Musical Replay and the Fear of the Real* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2019), 96-125.

2.1 John Coltrane at the Village Vanguard

John Coltrane's name bears immense weight in jazz cultures. The name Coltrane carries a myriad of meanings throughout the jazz world, and his work is foundational for many contemporary jazz practices. For some, John Coltrane is a spiritual leader who achieved spiritual awakening and transcendence in his music. For many, he symbolizes hope and determination in efforts for Black civil rights. He is also an example of musicianship at the highest level, a crucial figure in the development of jazz styles, and the ultimate posthumous pedagogue, as students listen to his records on repeat to imitate and learn from this master saxophone player. Coltrane's legacy has been thoroughly examined in both scholarly and non-scholarly writings and is a cornerstone of contemporary jazz cultures.¹¹²

The myriad of meanings that John Coltrane holds constantly resurface throughout the jazz world when and as they are needed. Tony Whyton reveals many instances of (re)iterations of Coltrane's legacy through a study of his seminal album *A Love Supreme*,

¹¹² Coltrane's meanings and legacy are well-documented and discussed in jazz literature. For writings that consider more broadly the reception and construction of John Coltrane's meanings, see Tony Whyton, *Beyond A Love Supreme: John Coltrane and the Legacy of an Album* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Ake, "Being (And Becoming) John Coltrane: Listening for Jazz 'Subjectivity,'" in *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place and Time Since Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 17-36; and the articles published in the *Jazz Research Journal* issues 2.2 and 3.1, two John-Coltrane-centered issues of the journal. For discussions of Coltrane's place within discourses of Blackness, race, and social justice, see the essays in Leonard L. Brown, ed., *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). And for an analysis of how his music is used in current jazz pedagogy and in the construction of the jazz canon, see David Ake, "Jazz 'Training: John Coltrane and the Conservatory,'" in *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112-145.

demonstrating the widespread and varied reception of the legendary musician.¹¹³ Whyton argues that one reason why Coltrane's legacy resurfaces so explicitly and so often is because "as a cultural and spiritual icon, Coltrane's death left a void that could not be filled by other musicians or artistic leaders."¹¹⁴ John Coltrane offered such profound meaning in the jazz world that, upon his death, writers, musicians, and audiences quickly established his permanence to solve the issue of his irreplaceability. As a cornerstone of mainstream jazz cultures, John Coltrane's legacy is constantly recycled and reconfigured, as musicians, writers, and audiences find a seemingly unlimited depth of meaning in his achievements.

One place where Coltrane's legacy constantly resurfaces is at the Village Vanguard. His legacy traverses expansive geographies, appearing in a vast array of times and places, but its (re)iterations at the Vanguard are particularly powerful. Coltrane had a lengthy history with the Village Vanguard, having appeared there regularly throughout his career. He also recorded there numerous times, thereby documenting some of his appearances and producing multiple live albums from the club. With the legendary status of both musician and venue and their frequent combination, writers have bonded Coltrane and the Vanguard, turning Coltrane into one of the club's many vibes. As one of the most affecting and revered haunting bodies that lives at the club, Coltrane's vibe is a constitutive part of the Village Vanguard's landscape.

¹¹³ See Tony Whyton's work, especially Whyton, "A Love Supreme Remixed," in Whyton, *Beyond A Love Supreme*, 102-132.

¹¹⁴ Whyton, *Beyond a Love Supreme*, 103.

Writings about the Village Vanguard and its vibes reveal a pervasive and normalized association between Coltrane and the hallowed club. The overview of the discourse that constructs that haunted/haunting landscape at the Village Vanguard in Chapter 1 contains examples of authors choosing to cite John Coltrane specifically when discussing the club's vibes generally. In addition to those examples, many writers in jazz discourse at large choose Coltrane as their musician of choice when connecting a person to the place. Jazz writer and educator Ronan Guilfoyle notes that “key figures in jazz, and the music and styles they created and invented, were associated with specific clubs,” going on to name Bill Evans and John Coltrane as the musicians commonly associated with the Village Vanguard.¹¹⁵ Jazz writer Ben Ratliff—a John Coltrane expert and enthusiast—reveals a deeply rooted association between Coltrane and the Vanguard, writing of Coltrane's 1961 recordings at the club that “the spirit of Coltrane at the Vanguard in 1961 rises even above the music...I think of its essence every time I walk past the club.”¹¹⁶ Other examples of this explicit association between Coltrane and the club include an NPR article previewing journalist Audie Cornish's interview of jazz bassist Christian McBride, noting that “McBride says it's hard not to think about 'Chasin' The Trane'—or any number of fantastic live recordings—when walking down those stairs.”¹¹⁷ Most recently, and perhaps most interestingly, the artistic director of the

¹¹⁵ Ronan Guilfoyle, “Intense Innovation: Jazz Clubs and the Evolution of Jazz,” *The Journal of Music*, May 19, 2022.

¹¹⁶ Ben Ratliff, “John Coltrane and the Essence of 1961,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/11/03/john-coltrane-village-vanguard-1961/>

¹¹⁷ “Why Everyone Wants to Record ‘Live at the Village Vanguard,’” *NPR Music*, October 22, 2015. <https://www.npr.org/2015/10/22/450908686/why-everyone-wants-to-record-live-at-the-village-vanguard>

Monterey Jazz Festival Tim Jackson evoked the connection between Coltrane and the Vanguard when discussing the reasoning for ending the 2022 festival earlier in the evening than in previous years: “I don’t care who was on stage, it could be the reincarnation of John Coltrane at the Village Vanguard, and at 10 o’clock people would stream out of the arena because they were tired and cold.”¹¹⁸ Jackson landed on the powerhouse combo of Coltrane and the Vanguard as his example when searching for the most compelling hypothetical event the mind could conjure. In this case, and in all of the passages above, the authors might have chosen any number of other musicians to cite as connected to the Vanguard but chose Coltrane as their example. The connection between Coltrane and the Village Vanguard has become pervasive and normalized in jazz discourse.

Indeed, the connection between Coltrane and the Vanguard is meaningful enough that writers dedicate entire pieces to discussing it. Illustrating the significant connection that jazz writers make between John Coltrane and the Village Vanguard, jazz musician and critic Peter Watrous wrote an article titled “Celebrating Coltrane and a Shrine to Jazz” in response to a week-long celebration of John Coltrane held at the Village Vanguard in 1997, subsidized by his former label Impulse Records. Watrous joins in on the celebration of both the venue and musician, contributing to the haunting landscape of the Village Vanguard by noting that “a lively present and a rich past intertwine at the Village Vanguard” and quoting musician Antonio Hart in saying that the Village

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Paul de Barros, “Monterey Jazz Fest Revival Projects Theme of Spirituality,” *Downbeat*, October 3, 2022. <https://downbeat.com/news/detail/monterey-jazz-fest-revival-projects-theme-of-spirituality>

Vanguard has “a positive energy from the people there and from the very spiritual essence of the place.”¹¹⁹ For Watrous and many others, John Coltrane is a natural fit in this place as both the venue and the place are legendary in status: “It was no accident that Coltrane chose to record there. By the time he and his band walked down the stairs leading into the pie-shaped room at 178 Seventh Avenue South, at 11th Street, the Vanguard already had a reputation for consistently inciting some of the best performances in jazz.”¹²⁰ When discourses about John Coltrane and the Village Vanguard come together, they form a powerful interplay between two legendary entities of jazz heritage. In the examples quoted above, the club and the musician are used to work for one another, each lending their status and prestige to the other. With his legendary status, Coltrane’s performances at the Vanguard validate the club as a crucial heritage place for jazz and, in turn, they affirm narratives of the musician’s excellence, given the amount of time he spent on the club’s hallowed ground.

The interplay and combined meanings of these two discourses—that of the Village Vanguard and that of John Coltrane—have intensified over time, particularly as the jazz world has found some historical distance from the death of Coltrane. This is evidenced by reissues of Coltrane’s music and their altered packaging. One of Coltrane’s most famous performances at the Village Vanguard, and indeed of his career, came in late 1961 where four nights of a two-week stint at the Vanguard were recorded. These sessions produced content for multiple records, including the seminal album *Coltrane*

¹¹⁹ Peter Watrous, “Celebrating Coltrane and a Shrine to Jazz,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1997, E1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

“*Live*” at the *Village Vanguard* (1962), two tracks for *Impressions* (1963), and one track used on *Newport '63* (1963).¹²¹ These albums were all released by Impulse! Records and all feature cover art of close-up images of John Coltrane mid-performance (Figure 5). With the success of these records, especially *Coltrane “Live” at the Village Vanguard*, and the legendary status that that two-week engagement had garnered, in 1997 Impulse re-released all the recordings from those sessions in a set titled *The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings*. Now, all the tracks from those two weeks that had previously been dissected and scattered across multiple albums were back together, their recording history and the Village Vanguard as their unifying trait. In this package, instead of another closeup of Coltrane, the album art is a solid black background with the album title at the top and art depicting the Village Vanguard’s famous sign below it (Figure 6). Nothing else is visible other than the prominent name “Coltrane” at the top with the less prominent album title below it and the ghostly white sign of the Vanguard that haunts the cover’s black background. The selling points here are clear: 1) Coltrane, 2) Village Vanguard (in no particular order, it seems). From the retrospective position 36 years after the recordings and 30 years after Coltrane’s death, Impulse chose to feature simply the names of these two legendary entities, knowing that their status alone was enticing enough for potential listeners. With both club and musician already living on in their own discourses, this 1997 album re-release and its cover highlight the common association between the two and the power that these names hold both individually and together.

¹²¹ Many of the other recordings were released on various other re-releases in the 3 decades following their recording.

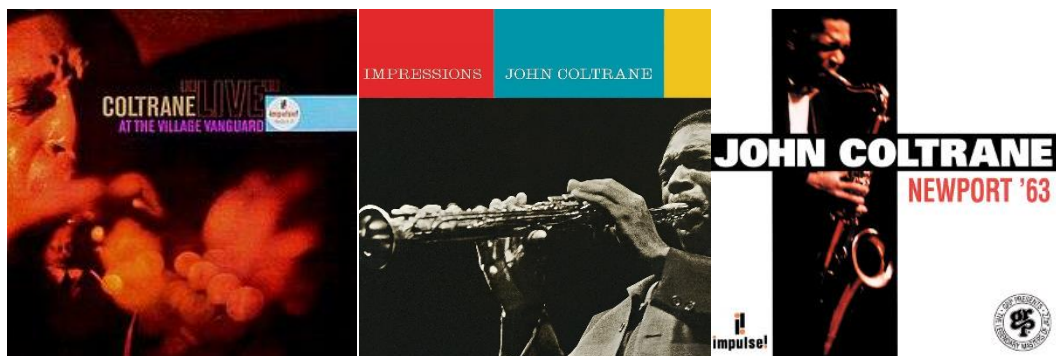


Figure 5: Album covers of some records created from John Coltrane’s 1961 performances at the Village Vanguard. From left to right: *Coltrane “Live” at the Village Vanguard*, *Impressions*, and *Newport '63*.

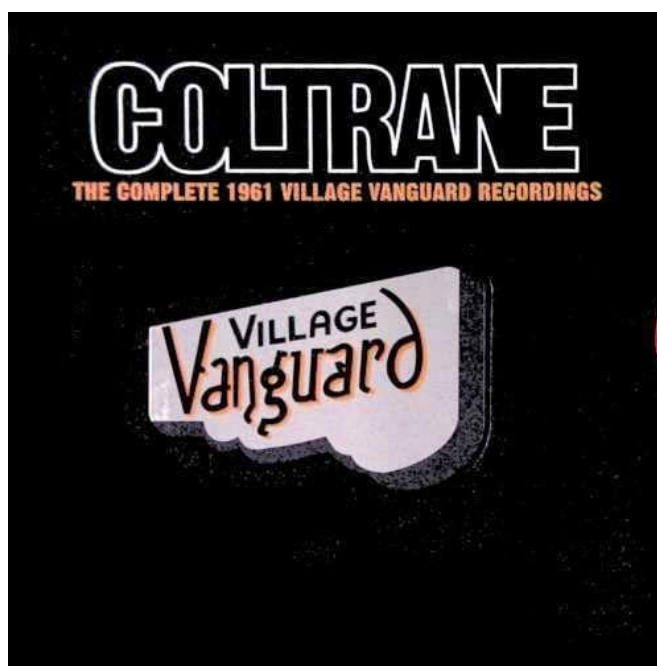


Figure 6: Album cover for the re-released box set of John Coltrane’s 1961 performances at the Village Vanguard, *Coltrane: The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings*.

The vibe of John Coltrane is a constitutive part of the Village Vanguard’s haunted landscape. His expansive legacy, said to haunt the Village Vanguard, has demonstrated significant staying power and has continued to affect musicians and audiences long after

his death. It continues to carry meaning and affect people across many times and places due to the ongoing reproduction of history and heritage in jazz cultures. Indeed, “one thought can produce millions of vibrations,” as Coltrane himself wrote on the jacket of *A Love Supreme*.¹²² Jazz writers constantly reaffirm the connection of his vibrations to the Village Vanguard and that connection’s relevance to present jazz cultures. Their words show that Coltrane’s vibe constantly resurfaces and holds significant meaning both on its own and in combination with the Village Vanguard. That meaning is constantly (re)imprinted on the club’s social, cultural, aesthetic, and physical makeup. Coltrane’s vibe is a formative force in the social construction of the Village Vanguard.

The texts cited above provide insight into how a specific vibe is understood to work. As Chapter 1 explored, a vibe is a social abstraction that sustains the memory of a great musician who has left their mark on the Village Vanguard. It gains permanence in its transformation from a physical vibration to a vibe and, in its new form, is said to remain perceptible to audiences despite changes in time and place. Watrous’ observation that “a lively present and a rich past intertwine at the Village Vanguard” during a celebration for Coltrane echoes how vibes are not stuck in the past but are historical projects designed for use in the present.¹²³ Jackson’s evocation of the image of a reincarnated John Coltrane performing at the Village Vanguard demonstrates the desire for an intimate connection with jazz history that the vibe satisfies: the vibe is designed to

¹²² Coltrane here is, of course, not writing about vibes in the same way I am, but the use of vibrations to signal a connection to an affective power greater than oneself resonates with the themes of this chapter.

¹²³ Watrous, “Celebrating Coltrane and a Shrine to Jazz,” E1.

defy geographical distance—that is, distance of both time and space—and allow jazz enthusiasts to feel intimately connected to jazz history through unmediated, anachronistic moments of contact between past and present.

Beyond written discourse and imaginings of John Coltrane’s presence, however, his vibe is also evoked at the Village Vanguard in a unique way: through his son, Ravi Coltrane. Ravi performs at the Vanguard regularly and provides a fascinating site for journalistic explorations of the speculative presence of John Coltrane at the club. Whereas John Coltrane’s vibe haunts the social and cultural landscape of the Village Vanguard, the living Ravi Coltrane regularly occupies its physical space. Ravi’s presence in the club fuels the discourse of the spirit of John Coltrane specifically and the Vanguard’s vibes more generally, and it has generated a small but fascinating niche of discourse unique to imaginings of John Coltrane’s persistent presence at the club. The following section will consider Ravi Coltrane’s reception at the Village Vanguard and how his presence in the club increases the potency of the place-making force of the vibe of John Coltrane.

2.2 **John Coltrane(?) at the Village Vanguard**

Ravi Coltrane is “accursed,” according to jazz journalist and critic Tony Gieske, and “his curse, of course, is that he is the son of a brilliant father, John Coltrane.”¹²⁴ Ravi Coltrane was one of four children left with Alice Coltrane when John Coltrane passed away in

¹²⁴ Tony Gieske, “Ravi Coltrane,” *Hollywood Reporter*, July 7, 2000, 20.

1967. He has become a prominent musician in contemporary mainstream jazz culture. His connection to his father in the press appears to be inescapable, and he is often said to uphold the Coltrane legacy passed down to him from his parents. As passages like the one cited above from Gieske indicate, the vibe of John Coltrane carries on through Ravi Coltrane.

It is striking to note that Ravi is said to carry on his father's legacy despite the two having barely known one another. John Coltrane passed away when Ravi was not yet 2 years old, leaving him to be raised primarily by Alice Coltrane. And yet, John Coltrane remains the focal point of these stories of legacy while Alice Coltrane is either invisible or relegated to the role of mother, an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter.¹²⁵ Ravi was raised by Alice Coltrane near Los Angeles, far from the East Coast where John Coltrane lived most of his life. Despite this distance, Ravi began to come to know his father through his recordings and found himself increasingly interested in jazz, taking up the music following a difficult period after the untimely death of his brother, John Jr., in 1982. In 1986, at the age of 21, Ravi began studying saxophone at the California Institute of the Arts, now fully invested in jazz. In 1991 Ravi would move to Queens where he would pursue his soon-to-be successful career in music, following in his father's footsteps and living in the region where John had spent most of his life.

¹²⁵ Franya J. Berkman provides an excellent start at a corrective to sexist representations of Alice Coltrane in jazz narratives. For an overview of the unjust representations of Alice Coltrane's legacy in jazz discourse see Franya J. Berkman, *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010): 4-6; Tammy Kernodle continues this work in Tammy Kernodle, "Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Alice Coltrane and the Redefining of the Jazz Avant-Garde," in *John Coltrane & Black America's Quest for Freedom*, ed. Leonard L. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 73-98.

The very brief biography I have outlined above is designed to reflect a common trend in discourse about Ravi Coltrane: centering the story around how Ravi's life relates to his father's career. He is, of course, much more than just a saxophonist carrying on the legacy of a legendary musician, but his connection to his father is inescapable in writings about him. Ratliff opens an article about Ravi noting that "Ravi Coltrane—who is the son of John Coltrane—was nobody special as a boy growing up in Woodland Hills... Of course, he was suddenly somebody very significant when he arrived at the California Institute of the Arts to study tenor saxophone because John Coltrane—who played the same instrument—is still the apotheosis of the jazz sainthood myth."¹²⁶ Similarly using a "chosen one" narrative, jazz critic Nate Chinnen uses Ravi's turn to jazz, and the taking up of his father's mantle, as the center of gravity in his telling of Ravi's biography:

His path to the Coltrane legacy was circuitous. Mr. Coltrane was 2 when his father died, so he was brought up in Los Angeles by his mother, Alice Coltrane, a pianist and accomplished artist in her own right. Even though music, including his father's, was ubiquitous in the household, he turned seriously to jazz only after his older brother, John Jr., died in a car accident in 1982...It was during this time that he began listening in earnest to his father's records; he was tired, he said, of being embarrassed by his ignorance. He was surprised by his connection to the music. It led him to recordings by Charlie Parker and Sonny Rollins – and to the saxophone.¹²⁷

These narratives center Ravi's relationship to his father's career, implying that his connection to John Coltrane is primarily what he has to offer to contemporary jazz

¹²⁶ Ben Ratliff, "Coltrane's Son, but With His Own Sound," *New York Times*, June 14, 1998, 31.

¹²⁷ Nate Chinnen, "From the Family Closet, A New Coltrane Album," *New York Times*, October 11, 2005, E3.

audiences. Though most critics celebrate his music as well, Ravi's connection to John Coltrane is a central feature of mainstream narratives of his life.¹²⁸

In non-biographical writings, too, Ravi is constantly connected to his father. Indeed, it is challenging to find sources that discuss Ravi and his music without any mention of John Coltrane. One need not look far past the titles of newspaper and magazine articles to get a sense of how pervasive this stated connection is: "Next Trane Coming: Ravi Coltrane Arrives," "Ravi Coltrane: Standing on the Shoulders of the Giant," "In naam van de vader: De ambitie van Ravi Coltrane," and "Ravi Coltrane: Au nom du fils" to name a few.¹²⁹ This is largely unsurprising given how prominent John Coltrane is in histories of jazz. This discourse tasks Ravi with carrying on the legacy began by John Coltrane and deliberately connects him to jazz history.

The most commonly noted piece of John Coltrane's legacy that Ravi is purported to carry on is his aesthetic posture, though not his sound. Writers celebrate how Ravi Coltrane embraces and continues his father's aesthetic legacy without simply being a copy of it. The prevailing theme in this discourse is that Ravi does not sound like his father, but that he maintains a similarly adventurous spirit in his saxophone playing. In the article cited above, Chinnen celebrates Ravi's engagement with John Coltrane's

¹²⁸ I have perhaps implied so far that the connection between Ravi and John is discussed by these critics primarily for its affective power. It is also, though, certainly motivated by the number of views it garners as these writers are leveraging the symbolic capital of the name Coltrane to attract more clicks.

¹²⁹ Erik Pedersen, "Next Trane Coming: Ravi Coltrane Arrives," *Option*, January/February 1998, 48; "Ravi Coltrane: Standing on the Shoulders of the Giant," *Jazzthetik*, November 2003, 34-35; Jerome Inen, "In Naam van de Vader: De Ambitie van Ravi Coltrane," *Jazz Nu*, December 1998, 14-15, 17; Thierry Pérémarti, "Ravi Coltrane: Au Nom du Fils," *Jazzman*, March 1998, 14. These are just a few of the countless published pieces that make this connection explicit.

legacy: “That he managed to acknowledge his father’s saxophone influence without emulation was, in itself, a complex feat.”¹³⁰ Chinnen goes on to quote McCoy Tyner, who has played with both John and Ravi, who said that “He’s got a handle on the legacy, but he’s not mimicking his father in any way.”¹³¹ Many writers do continue to search for traces of his father’s sound in his playing, however, and repeatedly point out that Ravi, even if for just a moment, does sometimes sound like his father. Sustaining the narrative that Ravi is a part of the Coltrane legacy but still a unique player, however, this journalist aptly notes that “on tenor, he had more clearly assimilated his father’s work (as every jazz saxophonist must).”¹³² This discourse, then, appears to be constantly searching for evidence of John Coltrane’s influence on Ravi, while nevertheless celebrating how Ravi manages to engage closely with that legacy without simply being a carbon copy of it.

Many writers allow Ravi Coltrane a degree of individuality, but his father’s sound is almost always referenced comparatively in their analyses. Jazz critic Ben Ratliff argues that “no, he sounds nothing like his father. Where John’s music was urgent and prolix, Ravi’s is cool and concise.”¹³³ Another critic draws attention to a review of Ravi’s album

¹³⁰ Chinnen, “From the Family Closet, A New Coltrane Album,” E3.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Michael J. West, “Saxophonist Ravi Coltrane makes a sound of his own in Blues Alley Performance,” *Washington Post*, May 7, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/saxophonist-ravi-coltrane-makes-a-sound-of-his-own-in-blues-alley-performance/2017/05/07/d053a18e-325e-11e7-a335-fa0ae1940305_story.html#comments

¹³³ Ratliff, “Coltrane’s Son, but With His Own Sound,” 31.

Spirit Fiction by writing “Ravi Coltrane has made an album that lives up to his father’s legend” in large, bolded font.¹³⁴ However, the article goes on to assert that

Not a little of the ambition of the new record is due to the ever-present specter of Ravi’s father, John Coltrane, one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. “*Spirit Fiction*,” with its rhythmic complexity and slippery structures, doesn’t so much challenge John’s legacy as move astride it. The album radiates a quietly adventurous artistry and a serene self-confidence.¹³⁵

Here, the authors appear to be actively attempting to separate Ravi Coltrane from his father’s sound, to attempt to take the son on his own terms. And yet they ultimately achieve the opposite, as in this attempt at distancing Ravi from his father, John Coltrane’s music is still the benchmark against which his music is measured.

Ravi is aware of the prevalence of discourse that connects him to his parents, and he engages with it willingly. Since taking up jazz professionally, Ravi has re-released some of his parents’ recordings and has discovered and released much of their previously unknown music. He holds a central role in preserving and maintaining his family’s legacy and estate, currently holding the role of Chairman and CEO of the Friends of the Coltrane Home, the organization that maintains the storied house in Long Island where John and Alice lived in the 1960s and where *A Love Supreme* was written. He is also currently engaged in a legal dispute over the ownership of another of John Coltrane’s former homes in Philadelphia.¹³⁶ His efforts to protect, preserve, and publicize his family’s

¹³⁴ Zachary Woolfe, “Spiritualized,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 12, 2012, 16.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ *Philadelphia Magazine* recently published a thorough overview of the issues at hand with this case: Shaunice Ajiwe, “The Drama Around Turning the John Coltrane House Into a Philly Jazz Monument,”

legacy are certainly motivated by his appreciation of the history and his closeness to his family. He also stands to gain financially from this work and is very aware of the positive impact his last name has on his position within the political economy of jazz. Ravi demonstrated this awareness and his willingness to take part in it when he mentioned that “every record company wants you to do whatever you can to help them sell records. With us, if you’re the son of someone—well that’s the first thing in your bio. To me, it’s not a bad thing. If I’m sitting around with musicians, we’re going to talk about these people—my dad, Miles, etcetera.”¹³⁷ Interviewers repeatedly ask about his parents and Ravi does not shy away from the topic, open to discussing both how invested he is in their legacy and how it impacts his own life and position.

Though open to discussing his parents and their legacy, Ravi is very calculated when he does so. As I noted above, he decidedly acknowledges the privilege that comes with his name, choosing not to avoid the subject. He does, however, regularly establish boundaries and reminds people that he is his own person, not just a mirror image of his parents. His biography on his own website, for example, focuses on highlighting his own

Philadelphia Magazine, July 12th, 2022. <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2022/12/07/john-coltrane-house/>

¹³⁷ Quoted in Larry Blumenfeld, “Rising Sons,” *Jazziz* 20, no. 2 (2003): 61. This interview that Ravi took part in happened in Larry Blumenfeld’s series of moderated discussions called “The Village Vanguard Roundtable.” The interview featured the children of multiple past jazz greats, pointing out that, of course, Ravi is one of many jazz musicians said to be continuing their parents’ legacy. Another musician who is talked about in a similar way as Ravi is Babik Reinhardt, son of Django Reinhardt, who might be an interesting comparison. Michael Dregni writes of Babik’s son, for example, that “When I first meet David Reinhardt, I’m struck by the eerie sensation that I am looking back through the decades into the eyes of his grandfather.” Michael Dregni, *Gypsy Jazz: In Search of Django Reinhardt and the Soul of Gypsy Swing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 278. For a scholarly account of Django Reinhardt’s biological and musical lineage, see Siv B. Lie, *Django Generations: Hearing Ethnorace, Citizenship, and Jazz Manouche in France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), see esp. chap. 5, “Heritage Stories.”

career achievements rather than selling his persona through his connection to John and Alice Coltrane.¹³⁸ In the same interview quoted above, Ravi uses one of his common strategies to distance himself somewhat from his parents: “Well, I don’t mind having a conversation about John Coltrane. I mean, if I talk to Steve Coleman about my dad or about Bird, the shit can go on for hours and hours. And it’s interesting. But doing interviews, it’s usually some less stimulating types of exchanges: ‘Do you play your father’s horn?’ or ‘Oh, you’re his son, what’s that like?’”¹³⁹ A seemingly innocent and honest comment, this quote demonstrates how Ravi regularly performs both connection to and distance from his parents. Mentioning how he appreciates their legacy in his day-to-day life but noting how he gets tired of talking about it in formal contexts, Ravi asserts very concisely that he is connected to that legacy but not exclusively defined by it. With this careful approach to how he represents himself, Ravi has crafted an image of himself as a bearer of jazz history and an active participant in ongoing jazz culture, occupying a finely balanced middle ground between past and present.¹⁴⁰

That Ravi Coltrane continues his father’s legacy and provides a connection to history without being a facile reproduction of John satisfies a widespread tendency in contemporary jazz culture to treat history as living and present. If Ravi was merely simulating his father, his performances could be read simply as acts of preservation of

¹³⁸ “Biography,” Ravi Coltrane, accessed December 20, 2022. <https://ravicoltrane.com/index.php?id=biography>.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Blumenfeld, “Rising Sons,” 61.

¹⁴⁰ This measured approach to representing the connection between himself and his parents is evident in his musical performances as well. In both his recorded music and his live performances, Ravi performs mostly his own music and contemporary compositions but will occasionally perform one of his parents’ pieces.

something finished—monuments to a dead tradition or a sonic museum of a time and place now unreachable. However, by carrying on the tradition in a dynamic way, making his individuality and agency clear, Ravi satisfies the desire to sustain jazz as a developing, living art form in which the legacies of jazz legends are as much present as they are past. This historically-obsessed discourse reveals Ravi Coltrane to be a figure that jazz fans can look to as evidence that jazz is a living tradition as he is a symbol of both the past and present of jazz.

Journalistic writings about Ravi Coltrane contain another frequently discussed point of connection between him and his father: the Village Vanguard. In recent years Ravi has been performing at the Vanguard regularly (about once a year). Given John Coltrane's well-established connection to the Village Vanguard and Ravi's treatment as a bearer of his legacy, a powerful moment of connection between past and present occurs when the son enters the space where his father's vibe is said to live. Ravi's performances at the Village Vanguard complete a triangle of meaning between the club, the musician, and his father that present some audiences with feelings of intimate closeness with jazz history.

Indeed, a collision of history-obsessed discourses (that of the Village Vanguard's vibes and of Ravi's connection to his father) came into focus with Ravi's appearance on a group of live-broadcast concerts at the Village Vanguard. Jazz radio station WBGO presented a series of concerts from the Village Vanguard in partnership with NPR from 2008 – 2013. NPR's website hosted a short write-up about each artist prior to their performance. A quick glance through these show notes reveals that this series was

committed to constructing and amplifying the Vanguard's vibes.¹⁴¹ NPR established their position in the Village Vanguard's haunting landscape immediately, with the show notes for the first concert being almost entirely about the venue, saying very little about the artists playing in that performance (the Adam Rogers Quintet):

Writing about New York's Village Vanguard can be a trap for adjectives, and especially those modifiers that make a subject feel old and musty. Words like storied, hallowed, and legendary come to mind—the small club in the West Village has a storied past, its hallowed stage a place where legendary jazz musicians have shared their ancient tales. Truth be told, the place is old, and it's a little musty before club owner Lorraine Gordon and her staff spruce it up for another evening of music.

The Village Vanguard, however, is no reliquary. You will not find the Shroud of St. John Coltrane or a grilled-cheese sandwich toasted with the imprint of the Virgin Mary Lou Williams. What you will find is a sense that this place is the distillation of jazz essence. People play instruments, hang out, tell tales, and live with music. The vibe is more Beat than beatified — discovery is very much alive at the Village Vanguard.¹⁴²

In addressing the haunted landscape of the Village Vanguard, this author appears to be attempting to create distance from it. And yet quite the opposite happens, as the second paragraph emphasizes exactly what the vibe is all about: that the history he reported in the first paragraph is not dead but living, present, alive. Much like other purveyors of the vibe, this author reiterates and sustains the landscape of the Vanguard, which treats history as a useful guide in navigating the present, not a shackle to the past. With this

¹⁴¹ As I have implied here, part of the motivation for this series was likely historical connectedness and a love of jazz history. However, it was likely also largely motivated by the opportunity to capitalize on the Village Vanguard's history, perhaps its most valuable marketing asset.

¹⁴² Josh Jackson, "Adam Rogers Quintet: Live at the Village Vanguard," *NPR Music*, April 14, 2008. <https://www.npr.org/2008/04/14/89621136/adam-rogers-quintet-live-at-the-village-vanguard>

text, NPR established very quickly that this series of concerts at the Village Vanguard would not only broadcast live music; they would also be broadcasting the club's vibe.

As many do, this author chose John Coltrane as one of their examples of deified jazz musicians that live at the Village Vanguard. Coltrane is one of the many vibes that would establish the history-steeped context that all musicians in this series would be performing in. In October 2013, Ravi Coltrane entered this context, placing him immediately into the haunted/haunting discourses of the Village Vanguard that prominently feature his father. The show notes posted on the NPR website to promote this particular concert make sure that connection is not lost on anyone: indeed, Ravi's connection to John is almost the only thing that is discussed. The write-up is brief: I will reproduce it in its entirety here, minus the set list and personnel list that appear at the end:

After releasing his latest album, last year's *Spirit Fiction*, saxophonist Ravi Coltrane put his decade-old quartet on hiatus, and has now assembled a new group. Had John Coltrane lived to see his son grow up, he might have told Ravi about how his own "classic quartet" broke up; he'd begun to incorporate new voices (including Ravi's mother Alice Coltrane) by the time his new band recorded live at the Village Vanguard in 1966. But that exchange never happened, and Ravi Coltrane discovered his inheritance on his own. Perhaps that's one reason why he developed a sleek and modern approach, loosely suggesting his father's adventurous spirit but not his signature sound.

Ravi Coltrane will soon bring his new band into the Village Vanguard for a week. WBGO and NPR Music presented a live video webcast and radio broadcast of the Ravi Coltrane Quartet in concert.¹⁴³

The prose in this write up is relatively tame for discourse that connects Ravi to his father, avoiding evocative metaphors and flowery language. But it certainly makes Ravi's

¹⁴³ Patrick Jarenwattananon, "Ravi Coltrane Quartet: Live at the Village Vanguard," *NPR Music*, October 2, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/10/02/226161266/ravi-coltrane-quartet-live-at-the-village-vanguard>.

connection to John Coltrane explicit and, indeed, that is about all it is intended to do. As a promotional piece for an upcoming concert, it appears that the strategy was to make Ravi Coltrane's connection to his father a central selling point. Not only is the venue legendary, but so too is the legacy that Ravi bears as he performs there. Perhaps most interestingly, this text frames Ravi's connection to his father as almost uncanny. It emphasizes how Ravi's career has significant parallels to John Coltrane's despite them barely knowing one another, framing this as an "inheritance" that was, apparently, innate and inevitable. Such a narrative emphasizes the notion that when John Coltrane died he did not disappear, but that his vibe lives on both at the Village Vanguard and in/through Ravi Coltrane.

The intensity of the connection between Ravi and the Village Vanguard comes into focus again each time he performs at the Village Vanguard. Following an October 2021 performance by him at the Vanguard, a student newspaper published their own exploration of Ravi's connection to his parents and how that history is a place-making force at the Vanguard:

Heir to one of the most renowned last names in the world of jazz, Coltrane needs no introduction. Like his father, John Coltrane, he's known for his enticing and improvisational saxophone playing that will make any listener forget their own world and become absorbed in his sound. From his mother, Alice Coltrane, he inherited a spontaneity and charm that washes over the crowd from the start. Even with the weight of his parents' names bearing down on him, Coltrane has forged his own path to make a name for himself, and his talent was on full display during the opening night of a week-long residency at the Vanguard on Oct 26.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Stevie Rowley, "Hypnotized by Tenor Sax: Ravi Coltrane at the Village Vanguard," *The New School Free Press*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.newschoolfreepress.com/2021/11/08/hypnotized-by-tenor-sax-ravi-coltrane-at-the-village-vanguard/>

With the connection between Ravi and both of his parents established from the outset, the author goes on to describe how the performance, which featured their music almost exclusively, altered her experience of the place:

Throughout the performance, the sound of the music was hypnotic, creating an intense focus between the audience and stage. Drinks collected rings of water around the bottom of their glasses, the room remained still, the outside world had disappeared.

...

To end the night, Coltrane honored his late father by playing his version of “Giant Steps.” Fans of Coltrane SR., know that this song is no easy feat....Coltrane’s fingers moved from key to key as if they were designed to follow the rhythm.

...

The talent shared during Ravi Coltrane’s opening night at the Village Vanguard is unmatched. He showcased his prowess in the form, and mesmerized the audience. With support from Blake and Douglas, Coltrane left everyone wanting more as he beautifully paid tribute to his parents. For nearly three hours he took us into his world, barely fitting its depth inside the four walls of the Vanguard. By the time we came back to Earth, it felt like only seconds had gone by.¹⁴⁵

This piece weaves a narrative of intense connection to the music that, as the author describes, “hypnotized” the audience and transported her to a different place. The representation of jazz music and jazz place as transportive will be explored in Chapter 3, but here the most significant facet of this trope is how references to Ravi’s parents constantly recur in the description of the experience of the place. It becomes clear throughout this piece that it is not only the music that is transportive. When the author writes that “he beautifully paid tribute to his parents” and immediately after that “he took us into his world, barely fitting its depth inside the four walls of the Vanguard” it

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

becomes clear that “his world” refers vaguely to the weight of the legacy that he bears as a member of the Coltrane family. Here, this performance is not providing a window into only Ravi’s world, but rather into the Coltranes’ world. This “world,” then, is a manifestation of jazz history: the vibe. The metaphor of “world” and its non-normative temporality that the author describes emphasizes the expansiveness of the vibe inside the Vanguard’s physical space and its potential to exceed boundaries of time and place. The music of Ravi Coltrane played to the silent soundtrack of his parents’ vibe offers opportunities for speculative geographies of jazz and history. For this author, Ravi Coltrane’s “hypnotizing” music conjures the history of jazz on stage and makes the Coltrane legacy audible.

The Village Vanguard appears to barely contain the depth of historical meaning in Ravi’s performance. And yet, it does. This establishes that the Vanguard is special enough to hold such vibes while other, less hallowed places might not be. At the very least, this piece implicates the Vanguard in this intense and direct moment of contact with jazz history. Such a moment highlights how these two similar discourses collide when Ravi Coltrane plays at the Village Vanguard: both the musician and venue having well-established reputations as bearers of history.

2.3 **Life, Death, and Vibes**

Continuing to follow the thread of how Ravi Coltrane evokes John Coltrane’s vibe at the Village Vanguard reveals an interesting discursive trope: the issue of life and death and what those words mean in the context of jazz. These words have a literal meaning, as many of the vibes at the Village Vanguard represent musicians who have died. Though

there are many living musicians who contribute to the club's haunted landscape, a vibe seems to take on heightened importance and power once its subject has passed away. Music played an important role when, in 1967, John Coltrane underwent the transitive process going from life to vibe and both memories of the music and the musician himself were freed to become fully realized vibes.¹⁴⁶ Ornette Coleman performed at Coltrane's funeral and, in a meaningful story of legacies in jazz, John's son Ravi would in turn perform at Coleman's funeral when he passed in 2015. Journalist David Remnick recalls that for John Coltrane's funeral,

At Coltrane's request, Ornette Coleman—backed by two bassists, Charlie Haden and David Izenzon, and the drummer Charles Moffett—closed the ceremony by playing one number, a raging version of “Holiday for a Graveyard.” Later that evening, at the Village Vanguard, Coleman played one of Coltrane's most haunting ballads, “Naima.”

On Saturday morning, nearly a half-century later, at Riverside Church, John Coltrane's son, Ravi, played a haunting improvisation on soprano saxophone, accompanied by Geri Allen on piano, over the casket of Ornette Coleman. The song was Ornette's composition called “Peace,” from his audacious 1959 album “The Shape of Jazz to Come.”¹⁴⁷

Discussing funerals and the services that function to memorialize and remember the jazz past, this excerpt evokes the vibes of jazz, twice using the word haunting to describe the music used in the memorials. In this retelling, the Village Vanguard appears as a place where these moments of life, death, and legacy in jazz can play out. Remnick's concise

¹⁴⁶ Tony Whyton argues that the timing of Coltrane's death was a significant force in his reception thereafter as his passing at the time that his music was seemingly hitting its peak of spirituality contribute to narratives of him achieving spiritual awakening and ascension. See Whyton, *Beyond a Love Supreme*, 103.

¹⁴⁷ David Remnick, “Ornette Coleman and a Joyful Funeral,” *New Yorker*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/ornette-coleman-and-a-joyful-funeral>

retracing of the narrative of life and death that Ravi participated in when he played at Coleman's funeral begins to reveal a complex network of meaning surrounding death and legacy in jazz and the central place that the Village Vanguard can take in that discourse. The Vanguard is an important part of the historical project of keeping jazz alive: I argue that the metaphor of life and death in jazz contributes to the affective power of the Vanguard's haunting landscape.

Writers attempt to keep jazz alive, in part, by keeping the past alive. But what does the word "alive" actually mean in this context? The meanings of words like "alive" and "dead" when referring to non-living objects and ideas in jazz comes into focus in the discourse about John and Ravi Coltrane and the Village Vanguard. In this context, uses of the words "alive" and "dead" are used to foster feelings of connection to the jazz past and reveal the affective and affirming power of history, the ways we sustain its memory, and the ends to which the past is put. I argue that the social use of Ravi Coltrane to amplify John Coltrane's haunting of the Village Vanguard demonstrates how the idea of life and death in jazz discourse functions to sustain memories of the jazz past. In so doing, the past becomes accessible and works to validate experiences and identities connected to a love of jazz.

Put simply, "keeping jazz alive" is a catchy phrase that means sustaining the memories of the most affecting sounds, people, places, and moments in jazz and then *using* them for the purposes of the present. For the writers cited in this dissertation, keeping jazz alive—by way of the construction of a haunting landscape of the Village Vanguard—is a historical project that seeks to ensure that these memories of jazz are not only things to be remembered, but things to be acted upon. Chapter 1 explored how the

vibes of the past have agency and presence in the present, and the discourses I examine in this dissertation show how the past can be used for various social functions.

One key function of discourses of life and death in jazz is to reify and uphold political and ideological structures. Tracy McMullen argues that some efforts to keep jazz alive work “to construct and ritualize ideas about jazz history, gender, and American nation,” and, further, that some jazz preservation efforts and organizations like Jazz at Lincoln Center enforce restrictive white, European understandings of art in jazz.¹⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Tony Whyton argues that the stories and myths that we tell about jazz work to uphold dominant ideologies of the music.¹⁴⁹ Keeping jazz alive also keeps alive the baggage that comes with its history, both the good and the bad. These discourses celebrate the achievements of many, particularly those of Black Americans who have suffered as a result of racism and yet found endurance and resistance. Yet they also allow (and often support) the persistence of patriarchal and homophobic structures in jazz culture. Such discourses therefore encourage a “live and let live” situation, with both the good and the bad of jazz history preserved alongside one another. These efforts to keep jazz alive always have a moral element to them, as those sustaining the music and its history are choosing what to ignore, what to let live, and what to let die.

In discourse about Ravi Coltrane at the Village Vanguard, similarly, both the good and the bad of jazz history resurface. As the bearer of his father’s vibe, Ravi carries

¹⁴⁸ McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 98.

¹⁴⁹ See Tony Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

with him powerful histories of Black resistance and power, as John Coltrane worked in his music and in his career to defy racist structures. James Gordon Williams uses the phrase “crossing bar lines” to explain how African American improvisers “[transgress] social constraints connected to white supremacy” and refuse to exist within racial, hegemonic structures.¹⁵⁰ These musicians use improvisation as an “articulation of Black humanity,” creating and imagining Black musical spaces with possibilities for knowing and existing in the world beyond what typically fits within white-centric spaces.¹⁵¹

Though Williams does not consider the Coltranes in his study, I would argue that John Coltrane “crossed bar lines” in his music, particularly later in his life as he increasingly resisted hegemonic musical traditions.¹⁵² Amiri Baraka noted this while Coltrane was still alive and performing, arguing that he was one of many musicians who did not accept “those casually sanctified halls of white middle-brow culture” and how his “music is significant of more ‘radical’ changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes toward the general environment.”¹⁵³ In many of Coltrane’s records, we hear the creation and imagination of Black musical space wherein Coltrane both reflects the realities of

¹⁵⁰ James Gordon Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines: The Politics and Practices of Black Musical Space* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 17.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Leonard L. Brown gives a compelling discussion of how critics during Coltrane’s lifetime attempted to enforce hegemonic white codes of thought, and how Coltrane responded with both words and music in Leonard L. Brown, “In His Own Words: Coltrane’s Responses to Critics,” in *John Coltrane & Black America’s Quest for Freedom*, 11-31.

¹⁵³ Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1963): 241. There is also a useful overview of how John Coltrane’s music defied racist structures and played a role in Black resistance efforts in Akinyele Umoja, Karin L. Stanford, and Jasmin Young, eds. *Black Power Encyclopedia: From Black Is Beautiful to Urban Uprisings*. Volume 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 265-270.

systemic racism and demonstrates his agency in the expression of a Black humanity that is defined by much more than oppression.¹⁵⁴

While little of this is spoken of regularly in discourse about Ravi Coltrane, it nonetheless echoes loudly within his performances. Any critic who can listen to Ravi Coltrane's music and know enough to articulate the differences between his and his father's sound using specialized terminology is certainly aware of these Black-affirming aspects of John Coltrane's life and legacy. When writers connect Ravi to his father, whether claiming that the two sound alike or not, the legacy of Black resistance and achievement is made legible, as we can never truly separate the music from its history, nor the sounds from their contexts. Ravi Coltrane, then, provides an example of how it can be harmful to attempt to make such distinctions between sound and history, as an attempt to examine only "the music itself" would constitute, implicitly if not intentionally, an attempt to make a legacy of Black resistance invisible. Rather, in discourse about Ravi Coltrane, perceiving him as someone who amplifies the vibe of John Coltrane can work to boost the signal of non-hegemonic ways of creating space in the world through music that resists racism and celebrates complex personhood.

¹⁵⁴ Katherine McKittrick's writing is central in both Williams' and my own understanding of Black places and she provides an excellent summary of how a vibe both engages with and transcends racism: "Waveforms – beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, and frequencies that intersect with racial economies and histories and available lyrical content – cannot be exacted yet speak to exacting racial technologies. With this, Black music, what we hold on to and what we hear, moves between and across and outside ungraspable waveforms, the anticolonial politics underpinning Black cultural production, and the racial economy of white supremacy that denies Black personhood." See Katherine McKittrick, "Rebellion/Invention/Groove," *Small Axe* 20, no.1 (2016): 79-91.

When this process of using history to support political goals occurs at the Village Vanguard, the club becomes both a site for the creation of just spaces and the product of that creative process. Everything occurs in place and the Village Vanguard makes for an ideal location for this representation of Ravi Coltrane as a bearer of a Black legacy. Given the Vanguard's construction as a historical location and its haunted landscape upon which history can live and be acted on, John Coltrane's vibe is always on standby, ready to be retrieved from the well of history and be put to a use for which it is needed. The haunting landscape of the Village Vanguard frames the club as an accomplice to Ravi Coltrane in this historical project of keeping the vibe of John Coltrane alive. As the club provides ideal grounds for history to be used for the needs of the present, the club itself is reconfigured as a social and cultural place. As Ravi makes his father's multi-faceted legacy audible, the politics, meanings, and associations of that vibe are (re)imprinted on the club's landscape. Given that places are never static and there is no end to the social construction of places, the Village Vanguard continues its movement through a complex network of meaning and associations as its vibes are constantly reiterated. Just like its history, the Vanguard undergoes a process of constant revision and renewal, a process in which Ravi Coltrane plays just one small part.

Just as the productive and positive elements of jazz history are kept alive by way of Ravi Coltrane and his amplification of John Coltrane's vibe at the Village Vanguard, so too are the unjust aspects of that history. Alice Coltrane's place in the story told in this chapter reflects sexist, patriarchal trends in narratives of jazz history that threaten to make the contributions of women in jazz invisible. Alice Coltrane remains largely absent in this story, an absence that mirrors the lack of critical attention that is paid to her in jazz circles

and the significant skewing of history that ties Ravi Coltrane to his father's legacy more so than his mother's. Alice Coltrane's contributions to jazz are wide-ranging: as an important figure in the jazz avant-garde of the 1960s she expanded harmonic and melodic boundaries in her performances and compositions, explored inter-cultural collaborations, established the harp as a viable instrument in jazz, and is a spiritual leader both within and outside of jazz. Though many critics will mention Alice in discussion of Ravi and John Coltrane, she is often relegated to the role of wife or mother, with her aesthetic and cultural achievements rarely mentioned as a part of her legacy.¹⁵⁵ This is true of Alice's treatment outside of discourse about Ravi and John, too, and treatments of her legacy at large reflect the widespread trend of underrepresenting women in jazz and the unjust treatment of the contributions of Black women in the arts.¹⁵⁶ Despite Alice Coltrane's meaningful work both in jazz and beyond she has received little scholarly attention and has often been given reductive and sometimes dismissive treatments in popular discourse.¹⁵⁷ In representations of the Coltrane family, then, it remains unfortunately no

¹⁵⁵ One example of a text that does this is Peter Watrous, "Just Music, No Oedipal Problems," *New York Times*, June 16, 1998, E9. Here, Watrous discusses Alice Coltrane primarily as a mother while using words like "hero" and "genius" to refer to John Coltrane.

¹⁵⁶ Research on jazz, gender, and justice has been increasingly common in recent years. For a few select works that provide context on the circumstances of women in jazz see, for example, Nichole T. Rustin & Sherrie Tucker, *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); James Reddan, Monika Herzig, and Michael Kahr (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Jazz and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2022); and Tammy Kernodle, "Black Women Working Together: Jazz, Gender, and the Politics of Validation," *Black Music Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (2014): 27-55.

¹⁵⁷ As cited earlier in this chapter, interventions towards correcting representations of Alice Coltrane in jazz narratives can be found in Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 2010; and Kernodle, "Freedom is a Constant Struggle," 2010.

surprise that John Coltrane remains firmly at the center, as the narratives painted in that discourse are conditioned by patriarchal norms.

The patriarchal history of jazz is also a context in which Ravi Coltrane exists when he performs. These patriarchal structures of jazz are a constitutive part of the Coltrane vibe that silently sound out when Ravi is used as a connection to jazz history. This is no fault of Ravi's as he regularly engages with the legacies of both of his parents and represents them both equitably. Many who write about the Coltrane vibe, however, rarely address these issues of gender politics. And what goes unsaid goes unchecked. By not addressing or actively working to break down the patriarchal underbelly of jazz culture, writers who construct the haunting landscape at the Village Vanguard are complicit in the survival of unjust social norms. Ignorance is not bliss for the politics of how we use jazz history and the vibe that Ravi Coltrane helps make perceptible carries complex meanings, both productive and destructive.

Keeping jazz alive through Ravi Coltrane and his parents' vibes demonstrates that this project of preventing the death of jazz means not only sustaining its memory but also ensuring that those memories can continue to serve specific social and political functions. Of course, this is not the whole story of this vibe. As discussed above, the Coltrane legacy is large and complex, its meanings ever-changing as it moves in and through time and place. Each time it resurfaces and sounds out it can be put to different uses depending on the users and their needs at any given moment. There is more to the story than just John Coltrane being a symbol of Black empowerment and Alice Coltrane being a victim of sexism. These are just two of the prominent and pressing issues of this vibe that I can

see from my present time and position that often go unspoken in the discourse I am analyzing here.

Another function of the metaphor of keeping jazz alive is that such a framing can make the history of the music and its people feel close and accessible. In dominant cultures of the Western world, a metaphorical death often signals something being gone, distanced, and inaccessible. When something is alive, however, it is present, relevant, and available to us. The discourse that seeks to keep jazz alive by nurturing and sustaining the vibe attempts to understand the past in a way that makes it feel close and present. Indeed, as Chapter 1 explored, the vibe is not only a memory of history, but also the *perceptible* history of the club. In other words, the vibe is history that we can be close to, so close that we can “feel” it. That the vibe can still evoke bodily responses, in that audiences can purportedly “feel” it, stands as proof in this discourse that the vibe is still alive and accessible, despite the reality that in most cases the bodies that originally created those vibrations have passed away.

The Village Vanguard, then, might be considered a “resonant tomb,” in Jonathan Sterne’s words. In *The Audible Past*, Sterne argues that technology has regularly been understood to function to “free” parts of the human mind, body, and spirit from their physical limitations. Sound recordings, he argues, allow voices to live beyond the lifespan of the bodies that produced them, making a recording a “resonant tomb” where the dead can be heard, the exteriority of their voices now separated from the self-aware

interiority of the body.¹⁵⁸ Though Sterne is concerned primarily with recorded sound, specifically early recordings around the turn of twentieth century, the Village Vanguard presents one example of how this can also play out in live performances—and recordings of them—in contemporary musical places. Using Sterne’s framing of records and their powers to “embalm” and sustain the sounds of bodies so that those bodies can continue to serve social functions after death, I argue that the Village Vanguard can be thought of in the same way. Though only metaphorically audible, the vibes at the Village Vanguard are the preserved soundwaves of now-deceased bodies that musicians and audiences regularly reimagine to fulfil social functions. More abstract than records, imaginations of how history lives on at the Village Vanguard keep the past perpetually vibrating.¹⁵⁹

If the Vanguard is a resonant tomb that stores and reproduces the vibrations of the dead, then Ravi Coltrane is a powerful medium through which they are accessed and amplified. The many vibes that live at the Village Vanguard form the club’s haunted landscape purportedly experienced by audiences and musicians as a whole, coherent, affective force. However, the levels adjust with every set and on different nights some vibes rise higher in the mix. Ravi Coltrane’s performances at the Vanguard heighten the awareness of the vibes of his parents, making them the most prominent inaudible accompaniments to his performances. In such a framing, keeping jazz alive at the Village

¹⁵⁸ Jonathan Sterne, “A Resonant Tomb,” in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 287-333.

¹⁵⁹ Late founder of the Village Vanguard Max Gordon contributes to this metaphor of the Vanguard as a tomb for John Coltrane writing in his memoirs that “The last place [John Coltrane] played before he died was the Village Vanguard. I keep a picture of him on the wall of the place. People are always offering to buy it. They can’t buy it.” Max Gordon, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, Chapter 11, non-paginated.

Vanguard by construing Ravi Coltrane as the conduit for the vibrations of his parents serves to advance feelings of closeness with the history. The bodies that produced the sounds of John and Alice Coltrane may be dead, but their vibrations remain alive, close, and accessible.

Of course, listening to actual recordings of John and Alice Coltrane may seem a simpler path to experiencing their musical voices beyond their deaths. Recorded sound is, after all, the media that Jonathan Sterne is discussing in his metaphor of a resonant tomb. But there is something different about replaying the Coltranes' voices on record and imagining their replayed voices via Ravi Coltrane. The difference, of course, is that through Ravi Coltrane's performances there is a living, breathing body producing those sounds rather than a lifeless digital or analog media that reproduces sound separate from a body. And in the distinction between remembering and experiencing the history of the Coltranes through records and through Ravi, there is a highlighted difference between *live* and *alive*. "Live at the Village Vanguard," the common phrase used in album titles recorded at the Vanguard that the title of this dissertation plays on, indicates something that *was* live. I place emphasis on *was* because of course in noting that it is live, a recording title of this type also makes it clear that it no longer is. What Ravi presents for audiences, as a living person, is not only the experience of the Coltrane legacy *live* at the Village Vanguard, but *alive* at the Village Vanguard.

Ravi Coltrane's performances at the Village Vanguard allow audiences to imagine for a moment that they are experiencing John Coltrane returning in spirit to perform at the club. The presence of a body that is visibly producing the vibrations—and specifically a body of a family member of this hallowed figure—makes such a suspension of disbelief

easier than it would be when listening to John Coltrane’s music on record, where the sounds are external and separate from a body. This is, of course, not a stretch of the imagination for those already imagining the feeling of Coltrane’s vibe in the club. Ravi Coltrane himself has contributed to the discourse that mistakes him for his father, intentionally or unintentionally, in a story he told about being startled after hearing Charles Mingus yell “Coltrane, Coltrane!” to John Coltrane on an album and thinking that Mingus was yelling at him.¹⁶⁰ Allowing oneself to imagine that Ravi Coltrane is John Coltrane incarnate may be made easier, too, because Ravi bears a significant resemblance to his father. A passage quoted earlier in this chapter also connects Ravi physically to John Coltrane when the author writes of how “Coltrane honored his late father by playing his version of ‘Giant Steps’: Fans of Coltrane Sr., know that this song is no easy feat.... Coltrane’s fingers moved from key to key as if they were designed to follow the rhythm.”¹⁶¹ This description, calling out how Ravi’s hands were “designed,” highlights how many writers do not simply identify John Coltrane’s vibe in an imaginary, abstract, silent vibration: they actually locate it—or some remnants of it, at least—in the physical body of Ravi Coltrane.

Ravi Coltrane, then, offers jazz fans a unique experience of history wherein audiences can imagine that they are actually seeing John Coltrane. In this sense, then, keeping jazz alive (and actually living, in Ravi’s case) allows audiences to feel closer to history than they otherwise might. Ravi’s physical presence within the Village Vanguard

¹⁶⁰ Ratliff, “Coltrane’s Son, but With His Own Sound,” 34.

¹⁶¹ Rowley, “Hypnotized by Tenor Sax,” 2021.

where his father's vibe lives facilitates feelings of extreme closeness to the Coltranes because Ravi is the closest thing that audiences have to Coltrane Sr.'s sound-producing body. In this discourse, it seems that the body is a less obtrusive mediating factor than sound recording. Through Ravi's body audiences can feel closer to the history that they love and identify with. Ravi's body is a more direct connection to the bodies that have been lost. His life and breath help audiences to justify narratives of how John Coltrane still "lives," thus bypassing the inaccessibility that death is often understood to bring.¹⁶²

2.4 Conclusion: The Life of Vibes

The notion that we can keep jazz alive accesses the affective and validating power of locating the meaning of music externally to oneself. This is particularly important in this case given that I believe a significant motivation for this vibes discourse is a love of jazz and its history. When we construe these vibes as being "alive" we construct them as ideas or objects that independently hold meaning separate from ourselves. When the things (jazz history, in this case) that are intimately connected to our identities and understandings of self become externalized they gain significant validating power, as they are no longer just our own, subjective, internal feelings, but rather things that hold more concrete meaning in the world at large. Just as a "resonant tomb" separates the voice from the body, making the interiority of the voice an exclusively exterior phenomenon, it also confirms that those voices continue to resonate and vibrate

¹⁶² A related phenomenon in jazz is the continuation of performing groups like the Count Basie Orchestra who continue to trade on a historic name long after their famous leader has passed away.

separately from ourselves. Separating the affective power of jazz from our own bodies by giving its history its own metaphorical physical body validates the experiences of loving jazz deeply, just as it affirms that this music that is constitutive in our own identities is meaningful beyond just our own fleeting feelings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when feelings about life and death and our relationship to places came into intense public focus (and much of this dissertation was written), Ravi Coltrane spoke of the Village Vanguard and the life-affirming possibilities of the place:

There's something very nourishing about it, I mean, I mean, this is a challenging time for everybody, you know, musicians especially, but when we don't have access to our...this is like our temple for us you know this is like our church you know this is a sacred space you know, um. Well it just doesn't feel like we're living you know what I mean [laugh]. When this place is happening and the doors are open and the room is full and the music is playing and the audience is uplifted that's when you know you're living. And that's a connection that is so human and so organic and so ancient. This is what we've been doing for thousands of generations, you know, playing music and and and you know and people we sit there and listen you know we listen you know and that's, it's a beautiful beautiful connection.¹⁶³

Ravi's description of the Village Vanguard continues the discourse of life and death in jazz, highlighting how the place is crucial in the affirmation of life. Ravi does not assert that anyone would actually die without the Village Vanguard, but rather leans into a metaphorical understanding of what it means to be living. Ravi here uses life as a metaphor for sustaining memories of history that we can act on and feel close to, connecting the themes of life and history by describing the feeling of being in the

¹⁶³ Ravi Coltrane, "While it is not nearly the same as performing in front of an audience, we will be performing at the Vanguard and supporting live music and the club..." Facebook, October 22, 2020. <https://fb.watch/dElsIaXwvE/> This description comes from an interview at the Village Vanguard made for a promotional video for one of Ravi's performances at the club.

Vanguard as “organic” (read: bodily) and “ancient.” In this description, Ravi indicates feelings of validation from this history—that we can only feel alive when we have access to the music that we hold dear.

The metaphor of life and death extends to the Village Vanguard itself, as well, as discourse about the club constantly personifies it and talks about the place as if it, too, were alive.¹⁶⁴ Current owner of the club Deborah Gordon described her return to the club after a long closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic: “I just sat out in the room – I’m kind of doing it now, just by myself – and it really just felt like a little pulse going...Like a heartbeat. It feels like the city upstairs is hurt, wounded in some ways, and there’s a little pulse going down here in the Vanguard. Waiting, waiting, waiting.”¹⁶⁵ Even during difficult times, knowing that there is life waiting for us, separate from our struggles, is immensely comforting. It is a deeply affective force knowing that, even if one were to die—a heightened possibility for many during the pandemic—the Village Vanguard and the music that many devote their lives to would continue on. Construing the Vanguard’s meaning as existing separately from oneself by giving it its own living body is validating as it allows jazz audiences to locate their object of love as separate from themselves. This separation affirms a notion that the meaning of the music and the place is expansive beyond any one individual’s feelings and that jazz audiences are connected to something larger than themselves.

¹⁶⁴ Chapter 1 contains numerous examples of writers calling both the club and its vibes “alive.”

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Nate Chinnen, “A New Phase for the Phrase ‘Live at the Village Vanguard,’ As the Club Joins the Streaming Era,” *WBGO*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.wbgo.org/music/2020-06-09/a-new-phase-for-the-phrase-live-at-the-village-vanguard-as-the-club-joins-the-streaming-era>

The Village Vanguard, then, is personified because we need an external place to locate the things we love. We need a place to keep them, to access them, and to commune with other people who also find a validation of their experiences of jazz in the vibe. That place needs to be as special as the vibes it holds. The Village Vanguard is constructed as a key cog in a complex network of music, people, places, and meanings, while Ravi Coltrane's presence at the club and discourses of life and death in that context reveal ways that jazz audiences devise to relate to the jazz past. The Village Vanguard has its own history that needs to be remembered and used. Framing the club and its vibes as alive affirms the notion that it is present and relevant and thus, as Ravi Coltrane said, that we, too, are present and relevant.

Chapter 3

3 Imagined Geographies

Jazz clubs are never static places. Though they may remain in one physical location, they exist in a complex and constantly moving constellation of cultural, social, and aesthetic moments. As such, their meanings are ever-changing and what any given club means and represents is a perpetually moving target that is constantly developed and reconfigured with every moment that passes and every set that is played. The construction of jazz place is thus a never-ending process. Jazz place lies not in the product of this process but in the process itself.

Such an ongoing process of place construction involves a dialectic between the physical world and the imagination. Understandings of place are conditioned both by the sensory, physical, embodied experiences of the material world and by the imaginary construction and re-construction of those conditions. Places, then, are not bound to their physicality, which means that being physically present in a place is not required to experience that place. As such, places like jazz clubs that have been constructed thoroughly in the imaginations of many through discourse and media have significant potential to evoke experiences of the place across expansive geographies.

This imaginary experience of a place from a distance is demonstrated in this anecdote by jazz writer Nat Hentoff:

A cold winter afternoon in Boston, and I, sixteen, am passing the Savoy Café in the black part of town. A slow blues curls out into the sunlight and pulls me indoors. Count Basie, hat on, with a half smile, is floating the beat with Jo Jones's

brushes whispering behind him. Out on the floor, sitting on a chair which is leaning back against a table, Coleman Hawkins fills the room with big, bursting sounds, conjugating the blues with a rhapsodic sweep he so loves in the opera singers whose recordings he plays by the hour at home.

The blues goes on and on as the players turn it round and round and inside out and back again, showing more faces than I had ever thought existed. I stand just inside the door, careful not to move and break the priceless sound. In a way I'm still standing there.¹⁶⁶

Drawing on a meaningful memory, the existence of this place in the author's imagination allows him to feel like he is still there, despite being away from the physical location and being separated in time from the moment this experience happened. The sensuousness of this anecdote is a product of the recounting of various physical elements of the place: the appearance of the band and their placement in the space, the real and metaphorical physicality of the sound that "fills" the room as it is "turned" and that one must be careful not to "break," and the implied warmth of the place that contrasts the cold air outside. Hentoff's story demonstrates that the construction of a jazz place occurs through a combination of the experience of the materiality of a space and the imaginary reconstruction of it. In describing the feeling of "still standing there," Hentoff shows how the interplay of the physical and the imaginary in the ongoing process of meaning formation of jazz place allows us to access these places from distant times and locations.

The complexity of the experience of place is the topic of this chapter. The notion that one can have an experience of a place while not physically present suggests that jazz devotees have a far more complex relationship to place than is often discussed in current literature on jazz. Connections between place, time, and sound present rich texts for

¹⁶⁶ Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is* (New York: Random House, 1976), 11.

understanding how things mean and how people relate to one another and to their surroundings. Investigating this meeting of place, time, and sound reveals the significance of the historical imagination in constructions of contemporary jazz place.

The historical imagination is a central element of the construction of jazz place. My investigation in Chapter 1 of the historical meaning of the word “vibe” in Village Vanguard discourse and the landscape that it constructs is an example of the historical imagination at work in the production of jazz place. This chapter will examine the use of landscapes of jazz place in production of *physical* spaces and its impact on spatial design, particularly in the case of places created and designed in the image of pre-existing jazz places. This chapter will reveal how landscapes of jazz place constructed in discourse literally create both place and space.¹⁶⁷

This chapter, then, is not about the Village Vanguard. Or at least not entirely. This chapter will take a brief and partial detour from discourse about only the Village Vanguard to discuss the complexities of recent constructions of jazz place more broadly. This detour is only partial because the Village Vanguard will still feature prominently in the discourse in question, just not exclusively as it has in previous chapters.

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates how jazz clubs are constructed in printed discourse as special, otherworldly places. This rendering of jazz place describes them as places that exist outside of the normal rules of space and time, places that would

¹⁶⁷ Recall that in this dissertation I use the term space to refer to physical locations with definable boundaries and the term place to refer to spaces that are infused with meaning.

be otherwise inaccessible. These special jazz places are purported to be made accessible through an interplay between the sensory and imaginary experiences of the jazz club. Central to the imaginary aspect of this exchange is the historical imagination, imaginings of the history of jazz that give meaning and purpose to the music and its places.

The framing of the jazz club as otherworldly, however, is complicated by the physical design of some of these places. Jazz at Lincoln Center, for example, uses views of the city beyond its venues to reinforce the club's connection to its city, counteracting, to some extent, the notion that the club is an otherworldly place. Nonetheless, this architectural design maintains the centrality of the role of the imagination in the experience of the club and sustains the construction of the place as being special and different than the world outside of its walls.

The discourse that constructs jazz clubs as otherworldly and the architectural features of some clubs that emphasize their worldly locations creates a tension between here and there. In this imagined geography of the jazz club, the place of jazz is both a part of this world and distinct from it, both present and absent. To rectify this tension in discourse, I explain the experience of jazz clubs using the concept of "elsewhereness." Coined by Jeff Hopkins, elsewhereness is a spatial strategy wherein a place is constructed to provide one with an experience of a place in a different location than where one currently is.¹⁶⁸ Achieving the experience of elsewhereness requires the use of the

¹⁶⁸ See Jeff Hopkins, "West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of Myths and Elsewhereness," *The Canadian Geographer* 34, no. 1 (1990) 2 - 17; and the larger, elaborated work, Jeff Hopkins, "Landscape of Myths and Elsewhereness: West Edmonton Mall," Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1992.

imagination and it explains how through a combination of sensory and imaginary experience of place one can be simultaneously present at and absent from a place.

This chapter concludes with a case study of Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill in Montreal, a club designed in the mainstream image of the jazz club established by places like the Village Vanguard around mid-century. By engaging with jazz heritage and a well-established lineage of mainstream underground jazz spaces, the owner employs a historical imagination of jazz to create a place that imitates the experience of other revered jazz places. Mapping the features of Upstairs onto the idea of elsewhere, I demonstrate how Upstairs is a site where the mainstream landscape of jazz place is constantly reproduced and reconfigured. This study shows how the historical imagination literally creates places and, in turn, how those places reify and sustain mainstream imaginings of jazz and its places. Upstairs shows how the experience of sound, time, and place in jazz is a deeply complex matter and how that experience can be manipulated to celebrate an image of heritage in the historical imagination.

3.1 Jazz, Place, and the Imagination

The imagination is a central factor in our experiences of places. Our experience of all places is always a combination of a sensory experience and an imaginary one.

Together, these modes of experiencing a place form a coherent understanding of where we are, where we think we are, where we want to be, and how we want to be when there.

In one of the first texts to examine the imagination from a cultural perspective (rather than a psychological one), John Caughey argues that the imagination and our lived, social lives are connected and condition one another. What and how we imagine on a daily basis

is conditioned by our socially and culturally learned patterns of acceptable behaviour. In turn, those imaginings have a significant impact on the way we engage with the lived world, making our lived worlds and our imagined worlds very closely connected.¹⁶⁹

In a theory of place and the imagination developed collectively by Nicky van Es, Stijn Reijnders, Leonieke Bolderman, and Abby Waysdorf, the authors interpret

Caughey's work as saying that

people live in two different worlds simultaneously. On the one hand, they live within a reality perceptible to the senses, contained within time and physical space. By means of [the senses], they create an impression of their immediate surroundings. On the other hand, people move in an inner spiritual world build on memories, visions of the future, fantasies, daydreams, and stories which play out *elsewhere* – in a difference time of place, a world that thrives by virtue of the imagination."¹⁷⁰

Taken as true, then, our experiences of the social world, and specifically our experiences of place and the places where we listen to music, are conditioned by both the sensory and the imaginary.

My understanding of the imagination's role in the experience of place aligns closely with the theory laid out by van Es et al., which they summarize as follows:

The imagination is a crucial part of human consciousness and is almost constantly present within the context of everyday life, albeit on a semi-conscious level as a "silent force." This power of the imagination is twofold. On the one hand, it makes it possible to turn the chaotic flow of sensory experiences into an unambiguous and coherent perception of the immediate surroundings. On the

¹⁶⁹ John L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

¹⁷⁰ Nicky van Es, Stijn Reijnders, Leonieke Bolderman, and Abby Waysdorf, "Introduction: Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism, and Belonging," in *Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism and Belonging*, eds., Nicky van Es, Stijn Reijnders, Leonieke Bolderman, and Abby Waysdorf, (London & New York: Routledge, 2021), 7-8. Emphasis original.

other hand, it is the imagination that lifts people above the temporal and spatial limitations of sensory perception and situates their own “existence” within a broader context: a larger world that extends beyond our horizon and that has its own past and future. It is a world to which people feel connected in some way, but also one that can inspire fear (cf. Klinkman, 2002 : 7). To put it differently, through the imagination, human consciousness is extended in time and place.¹⁷¹

The constant interplay between imagination and the senses and its capability for broadening our experience of the world is apparent in discourse about jazz clubs. One journalist describes an experience of the Village Vanguard similarly to how Hentoff described his experience above:

Shoulders hunched against an evil wind blowing up Seventh Avenue South, turn right under the red canopy at No. 178 and pull open the famous door that Charles Mingus once ripped from its hinges: A saxophone, cymbals, warm, smoky air gust up from the bottom of a steep flight of narrow stairs. Descend into a cluttered little room shaped like a slice of pie; shrug out of the overcoat, find a table and maybe a drink, look around, listen hard, and smile. Another night at the Village Vanguard.¹⁷²

Like Hentoff’s anecdote, this story describes the coldness of the outside air and the warm respite that the jazz club offers. Sensuous descriptions of the physical features of the space create a sense of nostalgia and contribute to the vividness of the description of the place. And while describing the features of a real physical space, this image of the club is also imaginary: this story does not appear to describe any one particular night, but rather evokes what any night at the club could be like. The Vanguard’s vibes are central to this imagining of the place, as the author makes certain to note the “famous door that Charles Mingus once ripped from its hinges.” This is not just any door; this is the door that

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷² Eric Pooley, “All That Jazz: Down on Seventh Avenue, the Village Vanguard Has Been a Music Mecca for 50 Years,” *New York Magazine* 23, no. 50 (December 1990): 107.

Charles Mingus interacted with and left his physical mark on. The physical feature of the place is the hinges that once had to be replaced; the imaginary construction of the place is the door that now bears a trace of the jazz tradition as jazz heritage is fixed upon the materiality of the club. In this anecdote, the writer's historical imagination shapes their sensory experience of the place and guides their construction of it.

Such a story about entering the Village Vanguard describes the place as otherworldly. The central action of this tale is the experience of leaving the outside world and entering the club. In this interplay of physical and imaginary constructions of place, the process of entering the Village Vanguard is the process of entering another realm. Though perhaps not as spectacularly fictive as entering a wardrobe or a rabbit hole to find oneself in Narnia or Wonderland, respectively, it is a common trope in Vanguard discourse to discuss passing underneath the red awning, through the famous doors, and down the narrow steps as a passage into a radically different and special place. The descriptions of the place that evoke the physical sensation of both the club and the space outside the club function to set this place in stark contrast with the outside world. These descriptions characterize the club as radically elsewhere. Not merely nice places to hear music or get a drink, the places in these anecdotes are construed as otherworldly in their marked difference from their surroundings. As much of the discourse frames it, entering the Village Vanguard is to leave the real world and enter a wondrous place filled with the vibes of jazz history. Or, perhaps, even to enter into jazz history itself.

Hentoff's story about entering the door of the club in Boston also centers its action around the process of leaving the outside world and entering a special place. In Hentoff's story this barrier between the otherworldly space of the jazz club and the

mundane real world is emphasized by his placement of himself at the precipice of jazz place. As he accepted the invitation from an ethereal blues tune that called out to him from the mysterious space, he was instantly stunned as he entered the place. Just inside the door he entered into somewhere entirely different than the outside world that he had just left behind. The sensuous nostalgia of the anecdote highlights just how powerful this otherworldly place can be. Jazz places are commonly constructed in discourse as places that are separate from the outside world, places that offer an escape from the places and times that we normally occupy. As many writers imply, when one enters a jazz club one is stepping out of the real world and entering a special space, a different plane of existence where the imaginary suppresses the regular laws of space and time.

Despite writers framing these places as radically somewhere *else*, though, they are very much still *here*. Rather than reading the above anecdotes as describing places that are fully out of this world, they are better understood as describing places of great meaning and significance that are made increasingly special through imaginative processes. Van Es et al. describe how the imagination might not be quite as spectacular as it is sometimes framed, since imaginings tend to be based on things we already know:

There is, however, an intrinsic paradox to the imagination. On the one hand, the imagination sets us free. It offers individuals a way of imagining other worlds, where they are not present. Almost everything can happen out there. The world of the imagination does not seem to obey the law of gravity or other rules of our known reality. On the other hand, the imagination is not fully detached from real life, either. As Immanuel Kant already pointed out in his *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* in the late 18th century, human beings can only imagine things that are close to what they are familiar with. In other words: the imagination lets people float a little bit, meaning that it gives them the liberty to leave this world

temporarily but only one minor step and never far away from the presence of their known reality.¹⁷³

Fantastical imaginings of jazz places are not entirely alien, so characterizing jazz clubs in this way is something of an exaggeration. I instead read these tales of jazz places as vivid descriptions of the imaginary portion of our experience of place, an experience that is conditioned by both the sensory and imaginary. And in that interplay between sensory and imaginary, experiences of jazz place offer a taste of the otherworldly but remain solidly grounded in the everyday world.

That jazz clubs remain tethered to the everyday world even in their imaginary constructions is evident in the myth of the jazz club as a distinctly urban space. For many decades jazz discourse has celebrated jazz clubs for their connections to their cities, their closeness to urban life. The jazz club is repeatedly constructed as intimate and local. It cannot be out of this world because of its close connection to the urban space that it occupies and the identity that it draws from that urban myth. The physical features of some clubs contribute to this sense of connectedness to urban life like, for example, the Village Vanguard, where patrons can hear the subway going by once every few minutes due to the club's underground placement in Greenwich Village. Such a sound regularly reminds patrons of the club's connection to city life. Though largely unintentional and uncontrollable, the subway is a symbol of the mundane aspects of everyday life and its sonic presence in the club makes the urban myth of jazz clubs a soundtrack that accompanies the experience of the club and that contributes to the historical imagination

¹⁷³ van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf, "Introduction," in *Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism and Belonging*, ed. van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf, 6.

of the place.¹⁷⁴ The sound of the subway passing by the Village Vanguard, then, illustrates how both the sensory and imaginary are at play in the experience of the club.

Not all explicit connections of the jazz club to urban space are unintentional, however. Jazz at Lincoln Center presents an interesting example of the interplay between the myth of the urban jazz space and the imaginary realm that decorates it. Much like the descriptions above of the process of entering venues that seem like they might represent the transition into a different realm, Jazz at Lincoln Center has an entrance process that would easily fit such a narrative. To enter their space, one must take the “jazz elevators” up to where the venue is modestly perched on the fifth floor.¹⁷⁵ To enter, one must call the elevator with a button labelled “push button to jazz.” Once inside the elevator, the music playing is not quiet music intended to exist in the background of the sonic space, but rather mainstream jazz music from the canon of jazz masterworks championed by Jazz at Lincoln Center, which is played loudly enough to ensure riders are well aware of it. Such a journey on an elevator designed with self-awareness and a degree of parody in mind makes it clear that one is travelling not only up 5 stories to a jazz club/concert hall, but also into a bastion of the jazz canon, a space where one must pay close attention and give much respect to the greatness of past jazz masters and works. The process of entering the venue is not necessarily brief and certainly not unremarkable, and this

¹⁷⁴ This, of course, is my own imagining of the subway. With the wide range of issues regarding access, mobility, urban planning and organization, and the spatial politics of sound, people in different positions than me will likely have a very different understanding of what the subway means and represents.

¹⁷⁵ The Jazz at Lincoln Center website describes the elevators as “jazz elevators” in their directions for reaching the club. Jazz at Lincoln Center, “Getting Here,” Jazz.org, accessed 9 April 2022, <https://2022.jazz.org/>.

elevator stands as an in-between space that facilitates the visitor's journey from the "real world" to somewhere special and distinct. By evoking the historical imagination through sound, the entrance to Jazz at Lincoln Center functions to ensure that patrons know they are entering somewhere important, somewhere *else*.

Once inside, however, the architecture of the venue reconnects patrons' imaginations to the urban space they just left. In the Appel Room and Dizzy's Club the walls behind the stage that the audience face during performances are nearly entirely glass, windows that give audiences striking views of midtown Manhattan during performances. Despite going through a process that prepared audiences to enter a special place that was potentially otherworldly, the venue ensures that patrons remain connected to the urban space around them, despite the seeming potential for the historical imagination to remove them entirely from this world. In this situation, as van Es et. al write, "the power of the imagination lies not in offering an escape but in its potential to refurbish and transform the known world, to change the ways we deal with ourselves and the people around us, the ways of being in *this* world."¹⁷⁶

Tony Whyton complicates the function of the view of the city at Lincoln Center, though, noting that these urban jazz spaces remain insular to some extent and separated from the city that they present. Discussing Christopher Small's analysis of how classical concert halls are symbolically separate from the outside world due to their physical features, Whyton notes that many venues, including jazz venues, "are purposely designed

¹⁷⁶ van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf, "Introduction," in *Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism and Belonging*, ed. van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf, 6-7.

to promote the idea that music exists in a time and space outside the real world.”¹⁷⁷

Regarding Jazz at Lincoln Center, he continues:

[It] draw[s] reference to the outside world through glass backdrops – facades that allow access to the cityscape beyond. Taken at face value, this architectural feature of new jazz venues rides against Small’s notion of the concert hall separating music from the everyday world; we are encouraged to believe that jazz in this environment is not hermetically sealed art for art’s sake but a reflection of the sound of everyday life. We could almost be encouraged to imagine that jazz provides the soundtrack for the city scene beyond, connecting the music explicitly to everyday life. However, these design features can be understood as constructing an idealized view of the social, much in the same way as a travel agent would sell a trip to New York. The urban environment is mediated through glass, the transparent facade signifying the “real world” while the music remains cosseted in the safe, sterile and opulent world of the concert hall. Ironically, the marketing pitch for Lincoln Center’s Allen Room promotes the space as being modelled on a Greek Amphitheatre. The symbolism here is quite telling; the venue not only connotes high culture and spectacle, it is also a space where myths are created, performed and developed.¹⁷⁸

Jazz at Lincoln Center, then, plays into the myth of the jazz club as an urban place with its architecture, but frames that urban place from which it draws meaning in a calculated way. This venue is at once separate from the world and a part of it, highlighting the importance of the interplay between materiality and imaginary in our experiences of the place. And since the view of the city is mediated by the glass that insulates the club from the outside world, the imaginary is at play in how we imagine both the club and the city. Both places are, at once, here *and* there; the city and the jazz club are both places that we are near or within, and places that are distant and imaginary. This demonstrates how all of our experiences of place involve the imaginary to some degree, which means that

¹⁷⁷ Tony Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

entering into a jazz club cannot be to leave the “real” world and enter somewhere radically elsewhere, but rather that the transition from outside to inside is merely the transition from one imaginary place to another. Though the written constructions of jazz place that I have considered here frame the outside world as the mundane and the inside as spectacular, this characterization is a function of the historical imagination that allows us to demarcate the places that hold meaning to us as special and unique.

In investigating all of the grandeur that the imagination adds to our constructions and experiences of place, it is important to emphasize that the imagination is neither a false nor fictive realm that can be corrected by the “real” sensory world. Rather, the imagination bears a truth of its own. One truth that the imagination bears is evidence of place attachment and the affective connection that people have to places. In examining imaginations of places where the subject is not physically present, as in Hentoff’s anecdote above, we find that imagining is not an emotionless procedure but rather a process through which the feelings that people have about specific places are developed and reinforced. These imaginings are neither entirely fictional nor fantastical, as they represent the very real and deep emotions that we feel about the places we go and, in this context, the places where we listen to jazz.¹⁷⁹ The imaginary world is just as “real” as the sensory one and together they create one coherent and meaningful experience of the world we live in and the places we love.

¹⁷⁹ The argument that the imagination is always an affective matter is put forth, in different ways, in both van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf, “Introduction,” in *Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism and Belonging*, ed. van Es, Reijnders, Bolderman, and Waysdorf; and Kathleen Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015).

The affective capacity of place imaginations is easily tied to music and musical places given the obvious affective capacities of music. In a study of musical tourism, Leonicke Bolderman investigates the role of sounds in stimulating the geographical imagination and an affective bond between people and places.¹⁸⁰ Bolderman summarizes that “music tourism involves an array of practices which give access to rich imaginative worlds that reflect and shape ways to feel at home in the world.”¹⁸¹ Given music’s role in shaping our imaginations of the places we associate the sounds with, people often feel the desire to visit those places, and, as such, “music literally moves people.”¹⁸² And as we move into and through those places, both physically and in the imagination, we engage in a “process of identity work” involving music where one connects oneself to shared identities and situates oneself within larger social and cultural contexts.¹⁸³

What Bolderman’s work shows is that music is a powerful stimulant of the imaginary and that the music we associate with a place shapes how we imagine that place. One of the central features of how this works is through an awareness of the music’s history – this connection to places is not just about the sounds themselves, but about the cultural and historical baggage that those sounds carry.¹⁸⁴ In other words, the

¹⁸⁰ Leonicke Bolderman, *Contemporary Music Tourism: A Theory of Musical Topophilia* (London & New York: Routledge, 2020). See especially Chapter 3, “Sharing Songs on Hirakata Square: On Music Listening and Imagining Place.”

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 12. See especially Chapter 4, “Have You Found What You’re Looking For? Music Tourists, Experience, and Identity.”

¹⁸⁴ For an excellent discussion of how imaginings of musics and places shape one another, see Andy Bennett, “Music, Media and Urban Mythscapes: A Study of the ‘Canterbury Sound,’” *Media, Culture & Society* 24 (2002): 87 – 100.

historical imagination of the music feeds into our imaginary constructions of places. At any given jazz club, our historical imagination of the place is conditioned not only by the history of the physical place but also by the music that has been played there and the music that one expects to hear there. Jazz places are constructed in the imagination not only by the history of the place itself, but by the history of jazz, the music that it provides a home for.

3.2 **Upstairs, Elsewhereness, and the Historical Imagination**

The analysis presented thus far demonstrates how our imaginations are an active part of our experience of jazz place while we are physically present. As Hentoff's anecdote shows, the imagination also takes a part in the experience of places where we are not physically present, allowing us an experience of those places from afar. But even in these imaginings where we are not physically present, sensory information is still an important factor, and Bolderman describes this as "an intrinsic paradox: imagining concerns both the absent and the present."¹⁸⁵ As I understand this, and as the rest of this chapter will discuss, it is possible for the imagination to operate in both ways simultaneously, decorating a place where we physically are while also offering the experience of being somewhere else. In other words, the imagination allows us to be in two places at once.

¹⁸⁵ Leonieke Bolderman, "I Just Can't Get You Out of My Head: How Music Triggers the Imagination," in Reijnders, Waysdorf, and Bolderman, eds., *Locating Imagination*, 68.

These places that the imagination takes us to are physically elsewhere, but not necessarily otherworldly. The imagination can construct experiences of both fictional places like in otherworldly framings of jazz clubs and of real, specific places around the world that one may visit. In jazz, these real places that are visited from afar through the historical imagination are often other jazz clubs or a landscape of clubs (e.g. New York-styled clubs from mid-century). Such an imaginary experience of jazz place draws on a complex network of references and meanings, and clubs can manipulate and invoke the historical imagination to construct their club in a particular image. Sometimes otherworldly, sometimes real and specific, and often to some degree both, these imaginary geographies of jazz are powerful sites of meaning, identity, and heritage.

Having experiences of jazz places while not physically there relies largely on the power of the imagination and can be assisted, intentionally or not, in a variety of ways. There are many ways to evoke these distant, transportive experiences, including through printed media (stories, descriptions) and digital media (audio and visual recordings of the places). There is also a more literal media through which to make use of the imagination of place in jazz, however: physical media like architecture and spatial design—or, in other words, actual places and clubs that are constructed to simulate the experience of other jazz clubs. Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill in Montreal does just this, modelling itself on downtown New York jazz clubs from around mid-century to spark the historical imagination and create meaning through an intertextual engagement with jazz heritage places.

Located in downtown Montreal, Upstairs opened in 1995 as a small piano bar that took over its space from a restaurant that had gone bankrupt. Over the first couple

decades of its existence, the club has developed into a classic-style jazz club with an international reputation, now a destination for world-renowned jazz musicians travelling through Montreal and a central venue for the annual Montreal International Jazz Festival. It also, however, serves a local scene featuring a large number of tourists and non-jazz fans. Upstairs, then, lives a dual life, catering to both a broad local audience and to jazz devotees.

Upstairs bears a distinct and vernacular identity, but is not an entirely unique space. The motivation for the venue's design and function comes directly from the well-known model of the dark, underground jazz club that many now consider the "classic" jazz club style. Often associated with the underground origins of bebop and the New York scene of the 1940s and onwards, this style of club is pervasive in popular imaginings of jazz clubs. Upstairs' website describes the owner's process of discovering this influence for his club:

Joel Giberovitch was studying political science at Concordia, when his father Sid, the original owner of Kojaks and the El Coyote restaurant, asked him if he wanted to get involved in a place that had gone bankrupt. So he started Upstairs in April 1995 as a simple piano bar, with pub-like food and an atmosphere that engendered backgammon and the like. A year later he realized his vision for the locale was different than his dad's, so he set out for New York City and visited as many jazz clubs as he could. "Such clubs as The Village Vanguard, the Blue Note, Bradleys, and Smalls all left a big impression on me, and I came back inspired to give Montreal a New York-style jazz club."¹⁸⁶

Giberovitch further describes the influence of these New York clubs in an interview in the *Ottawa Citizen*:

¹⁸⁶ Juan Rodriguez, "History," Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, 2016.
<https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>

When I had taken it over it was more of a piano bar. Then I went to New York, about two and half years after I first walked into here. I just got inspired. I wanted to turn Upstairs into more of a serious music jazz club. My vision was very clear as to what I wanted to do.

I got so motivated. Here was electricity running through my veins — the Village Vanguard, Bradleys, Smalls, I went to so many. And Sweet Basil. I went to as many as I could. I was like a pinball bouncing from club to club.¹⁸⁷

Upstairs was thus modeled on both the physical and imaginary features of a collection of New York jazz clubs. The makeup of Upstairs reflects the influence of other jazz places and its construction reveals the particulars of the imaginary world of jazz clubs of Upstairs' owner. That the club draws on multiple places makes the experience of place that it offers more complex. It is not simply reproducing a single other place, but rather what I will refer to as a *landscape* of mainstream contemporary jazz clubs.

Recalling the term from Chapter 1, landscape refers to a representation of place that is political and meaningful in that it reconfigures a place in the interests of the person doing the representing. I have examined the landscape of one place, the Village Vanguard, in depth, but here I broaden the term to encompass a wider context of which the Vanguard is a part.

The list that Giberovitch provides indicates what I consider a mainstream representation, or landscape, of contemporary jazz place. These clubs are often underground, in half or full basements. Typically, they are small, non-spacious rooms with capacities between 50 and 200 that enforce quiet during shows to make the rooms function as listening spaces above all else. This genre of jazz place tends to take history

¹⁸⁷ Peter Hum, "The Man Upstairs (Joel Giberovitch interviewed, on the eve of his Montreal jazz club's 20th anniversary)," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 10, 2015.

very seriously and makes efforts to explicitly evoke that heritage in the space, for both its meaning and its marketing potential. These clubs use photos, album covers, and memorabilia as decoration and embrace a throwback aesthetic to remind audiences of the historical roots of the space. Interestingly, some of these clubs actually existed during the roughly mid-century era that is being referenced by the spaces (The Village Vanguard) and some of them were created more recently (Smalls). Regardless of when they were opened, though, now that the mid-century point of reference has passed into history even those that were there at that time are engaging in the same project of spatial historical reenactment as Upstairs.

Upstairs demonstrates a generalized view of a sort of model or schema for contemporary jazz clubs and, being a representation of no one specific place, this understanding of place is a large-scale imagining of the places of the jazz tradition (or, rather, *a* jazz tradition). This imagination of jazz place takes many of the history signaling features noted above and packages them together in a realization of this landscape. Based on imaginings of where that history first occurred, it now produces a coherent imaginary image of a place in which history can reside. In seeking to physically reproduce that imagination in a physical realm, Giberovitch has engaged in a complex process of place construction.

Cultural geographers have developed a variety of ways to consider the processes and results of places gaining meaning from other places. Edward Relph famously describes the use of imitation in commercial places, arguing that places that seek to replicate other places are “placeless,” meaning they lack their own unique, local

identity.¹⁸⁸ These anonymous and interchangeable places include fast food chains, freeways, airports, and shopping malls, to name a few, and these places use standardized and technical spatial designs for the sake of efficiency and at the cost of distinctiveness and diversity. Not every place that resembles somewhere else fits into Relph's category of placeless, however. Places like Upstairs make use of pre-existing places in their spatial strategy, but they still feature a rich, vernacular place identity.

Jeff Hopkins presents a way to consider these non-exact replicas of places with his idea of "elsewhereness," the phenomenon of a place giving the subject the sense that they are somewhere (or sometime) other than they are, a fantastical experience of place that is not exclusively physically determined and is, at its core, a sort of semiotic play.¹⁸⁹ Simply put, places that evoke elsewhereness are partial imitations or simulations of other pre-existing places, and Hopkins summarizes that elsewhere places "are 'spatial metaphors' of other places in that they act as *substitutes* for the original referent or place."¹⁹⁰ Hopkins' formulation of elsewhereness allows for a fluid and non-absolute understanding of places that imitate others without becoming exact duplicates: "elsewhereness varies in degree depending on the resemblance continuum of characteristics and/or uses between the original referent artifact or place and its imitation, be it vaguely reminiscent or a near-perfect duplication, and depending on the spatial

¹⁸⁸ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1987).

¹⁸⁹ See Jeff Hopkins, "West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of Myths and Elsewhereness," *The Canadian Geographer* 34, no. 1 (1990): 2 - 17; and the larger, elaborated work, Jeff Hopkins, "Landscape of Myths and Elsewhereness: West Edmonton Mall," Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1992.

¹⁹⁰ Hopkins, "West Edmonton Mall," 4.

strategy of its designers/users.”¹⁹¹ Here, then, is a way to understand Upstairs, a space that evokes a sense of a different place, in this case of mid-twentieth-century New York clubs. Upstairs makes use of the imaginary construction of place to replicate a landscape of New York jazz clubs from the “golden era” of jazz.¹⁹² Places that are elsewhere, essentially, are places that seek to give the subject the sense that they are somewhere or sometime other than where they physically are with the use of imitation – a description that aptly captures the strategy employed by Upstairs.

Central to the idea of elsewhere-ness is the idea that the resemblance between an imitative place and its original is never absolute but falls on a continuum. Or, rather, on two continuums, since, as Hopkins notes in the quote above, a place imitates both the *characteristics* and the *functions* of a place. So, there are 2 “continuums of resemblance” that an elsewhere place can be mapped on to, a continuum for the *characteristics* of the physical place, and of the *uses* or the function of the place. For this discussion of musical places, I also add a third continuum, a continuum of *sonic* resemblance, since when a musical space imitates another musical space it must also consider to what extent the music performed at the new venue will resemble that of the original place. Any place that imitates another will fall somewhere between the “vaguely reminiscent” and “near-perfect duplication” ends of the continuums in both their characteristics and their function/uses. These continuums, I would add, can function separately from each other, with the level of resemblance of one continuum not necessitating the same level of

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Juan Rodriguez, “History,” Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, 2016.
<https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>

resemblance from the other, although they are closely intertwined and often influence one another. In its spatial project of imitating classic jazz clubs, Upstairs strategically manipulates these three continuums, (re)producing a landscape that reveals a particular view of jazz history and heritage.

Continuum 1: Characteristics

Generally, Upstairs attempts to replicate its influences closely, landing further towards the “exact duplicate” side on these continuums. It is never an exact duplicate of another place’s characteristics, partially because it does not seek to replicate only one place, but rather a landscape of a collection of places. Further, Upstairs cannot replicate the characteristics of another place precisely because of practicality, given that it was created for a pre-existing building, not a built-to-suit space.

Nonetheless, as it relates to the landscape of classic New York jazz clubs, Upstairs sits closer to the “exact replica” end of the continuum of resemblance for characteristic and physical properties. The club’s website confirms that this resemblance is intentional: “With its classic wood paneling, stone walls, long bar, and elegant linen covered tables Upstairs Jazz Bar & grill is an intimate throwback to the golden age where musicians and fans alike considered jazz clubs a home away from home.”¹⁹³ To point to two notable examples of similarities, Upstairs imitates two defining characteristics of the classic jazz club: it resides in a basement and the décor features images and memorabilia of great jazz musicians.

¹⁹³ Rodriguez, “History,” Upstairs, 2016, <https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>

Mainstream constructions of contemporary jazz clubs assume that they reside in basement rooms, largely a product of the literal and metaphorical underground origins of bebop, one of the dominant jazz styles at the time when many of the spaces that inform this landscape began. As Chapter 1 discussed in the context of the Village Vanguard, this basement feature can sometimes make the space seem undesirable and yet it also adds to its charm and character. Upstairs, too, is in a basement. This may be by coincidence to some extent since the space was taken over from another restaurant before there was a plan to make it a jazz club. However, the importance of this spatial feature in the history of jazz is such that Giberovitch decided to playfully name the club after this characteristic. The club's name is Upstairs, despite being downstairs, and it makes sure that the joke is lost on no one by writing the name upside-down in its logo and marketing materials.

Furthermore, the downstairs placement of Upstairs is highlighted not because of the inherent desirableness of basements (the sensory construction) but because of the historical importance and weight that that this particular spatial location bears in the jazz tradition (the imaginary construction). The historical imagination that conditions the landscape of jazz clubs that Giberovitch draws on represents a basement room as a connection to jazz history and the heritage of jazz place. Jazz no longer has to be played in basements and yet many choose to continue to do so to maintain the tradition of a particular lineage of jazz that occupies a prominent space in the mainstream jazz canon. Whereas actually-upstairs venues like Jazz at Lincoln Center exhibit wealth in their spatial design indicating institutional acceptance and prestige, clubs like the Village Vanguard and Smalls manipulate the thriftiness of their basement spaces to signal

heritage and authenticity. At Upstairs, the choice to emphasize the club's below-ground location represents an effort to (re)produce a landscape of jazz place conditioned by the historical imagination and produced through a combination of sensory and imaginary constructions of jazz place.

Upstairs also imitates another key feature of mid-century-inspired basement jazz clubs: photos and memorabilia of great jazz musicians used prominently as décor. Chapter 1 discussed how these photos are an important part of the Village Vanguard's landscape and how they contribute to the room's historical vibe. Many other clubs feature this as well, to both connect themselves to the history of the music played at their club and to the history of jazz place that they continue. Smalls Jazz Club, for example, decorates its walls with photos of jazz musicians, while also going as far as to decorate the walls and ceiling of the narrow staircase that descends into the club with covers of albums that were recorded there and newspaper clippings about the club. Upstairs includes photos of musicians that have played at the club before, connecting it to the history of its music and its self-conscious lineage of jazz place (Figure 9). Again, this spatial decision is one that relies on the historical imagination for it to work. The use of the photos indicates a sort of reverence and importance in that the materiality of the photos themselves is only useful in that it sparks the imagination, which is what gives the photos their meaning. At Upstairs, and in this landscape of jazz place, the walls are not decorated with images but with history.

Continuum 2: Function

Upstairs clearly makes great use of the physical design choices used by its predecessors and falls towards the “exact replica” side of the continuum of characteristic resemblance in relation to the landscape of contemporary jazz clubs that it engages with. Likewise, it lands in a similar place on the continuum of resemblance for *function*. Although the function of jazz places has changed significantly throughout jazz’s history and varies from club to club, one common feature of most North American self-declared jazz clubs is that they serve primarily as a space to *listen* to music. Most jazz clubs that Upstairs uses as referents now enforce a “quiet policy,” usually made clear with announcements before the music begins and/or signs on tables that prohibit speaking and noise during the show. Writing in 1985, Suzanne Little aptly summarizes this late twentieth-century development in jazz club culture: “Like the Vanguard, these rooms are anchored in a night-club economy, yet have steered away from the old speakeasy ethos. The jazz club has gradually evolved into a listening room, a performance space – more intimate than a festival, more relaxed than a concert – which caters to an increasingly middle-class, dedicated, and informed audience.”¹⁹⁴

Upstairs’ website confirms a similar attitude, branding itself with the following statement:

Upstairs is Montreal’s leading jazz club, presenting music 52 weeks a year in an atmosphere that encourages attentive listening, facilitated by a first-class sound system filling the cozy semi-basement... On showcase nights (Fridays and

¹⁹⁴ Suzanne Little, “The Club That Jazz Built: Max Gordon’s Village Vanguard,” *Boston Review* 10, no. 5 (1985): 23.

Saturdays), from the moment the lighting dims and club owner Joel Giberovitch's voice intones a polite advisory that this is a jazz concert and silence would be appreciated, the musicians own the stage, and attention levels throughout the club quickly hit their peak.¹⁹⁵

Giberovitch himself mentioned in an interview, "Behind the bar, when the music's on we don't shake our martinis, we stir them, we don't make cappuccinos while there's a bass solo going on."¹⁹⁶ Upstairs, then, continues with its strategy of elsewhere-ness in its function as it imitates the practices of mainstream jazz clubs.

This practice of enforcing attentiveness to the music raises some complex issues about spatial politics. As Suzanne Little noted in the quote above, turning jazz clubs into "listening rooms" makes them spaces that are increasingly catering to a "middle-class, dedicated and informed audience."¹⁹⁷ A shift towards a mode of listening more typically associated with classical music makes the venues more exclusive, as it others those who are not as intimately familiar with the tradition and makes the divide between "insiders" and "outsiders" more distinct. The listening practices enforced at Upstairs are socialized and operate to create a sense of community and shared space for fans but tend to exclude others.¹⁹⁸ Given that exclusivity often seems to signal prestige, this process of exclusion becomes desirable for clubs seeking to add an air of authenticity. The chef at Upstairs, Juan Barros, confirms that this practice of exclusivity is the case in the non-musical

¹⁹⁵ Rodriguez, "History," Upstairs, 2016, <https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Little, "The Club That Jazz Built," 23.

¹⁹⁸ For a recent and related study that examines how musical places create senses of togetherness through non-verbal actions and how those practices both include and exclude, see Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispirita, *Together, Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).

aspects of the experience as well, noting that he attempts to rectify this exclusivity somewhat with food and ambiance:

Music is the spine of the club. Food, wine, service and the look of the place are the complements. It helps that Upstairs is an old location with a lot of character. Jazz might be considered an intellectual music, not for everybody. You might say you need a certain kind of cultural awareness to enjoy it. It's not something that pops up like a spring mushroom – it has a very strong history. To help make the music accessible you need a menu and ambience that can please everybody.¹⁹⁹

The menu at Upstairs features a standard, unpretentious selection of food common for contemporary North American bar and grill-style restaurants. Food, then, is an important part of the club's construction as it helps it cater to those in the local scene, many of whom are not necessarily there to be "transported" into the history of jazz.

Upstairs' function maps closely onto that of other classic jazz clubs, then, in a rather complex way. With its combination of location, menu, and enforcement of listening practices, the club caters simultaneously to both jazz fans and non-jazz fans alike. Within the context of jazz history, the jazz fans it seems to focus on are middle or upper-class, educated listeners. The continuum of resemblance for the function of Upstairs therefore raises a complicated question regarding spatial politics, but at its core it seems to lean closely towards the "exact replica" end of the continuum as it functions as a music-centered room for a particular portion of the populace.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Rodriguez, "History," Upstairs, 2016, <https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>.

²⁰⁰ Though the club may have some political issues, I do not mean to paint an image of Upstairs as a politically unethical club as that would be a misrepresentation of the place. Many non-jazz listeners, I believe, can go to Upstairs and not feel othered since it is a generally welcoming and accepting environment. There is, however, a historical pretention that underpins its chosen strategy of enforcing its mode of listening and, even though it may not always be obvious or make people feel unwelcomed, we should be critical in noting that a place that takes this posture always creates the chance for exclusion and spatial inequity.

Continuum 3: Sound

Discussions of elsewhere-ness in previous literature and in this chapter thus far have been limited mostly to the visual aspects of space. The “characteristics” continuum of resemblance, for example, refers almost exclusively to a space’s *visual* characteristics and our experiences of what we see in a place. In a discussion of jazz clubs, however, we must necessarily add a third continuum of resemblance, that of *sounds*.

The sonic construction of place has not received as much scholarly attention as visual constructions of place, but there exists a small foundation of literature to begin understanding how we use sounds to create and distinguish places, their place identities, and our senses of space.²⁰¹ Just like the visual aspects of a space, the sonic elements present in a space help to construct that place and significantly alter our experience of it. This reality, of course, becomes all the more pressing when discussing places that are built to function as musical spaces, like concert halls, recording studios, and jazz clubs. Also important to consider, however, is that not only does music make a place, but so too does place make the music: the two exist in a reciprocal relationship in the production of meaning and place identity.²⁰² When a musical place imitates another pre-existing place, it often will imitate the sounds of that place because that is a central part of the place’s

²⁰¹ Amongst the most substantial musicological contributions to the field is Georgina Born, ed., *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For geographical writings, see, for example, George Carney, ed., *The Sound of People and Places: Readings in the Geography of Music* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1978); Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, & George Revill, eds., *The Place of Music* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998); and Susan Smith, “Beyond Geography’s Visible Worlds: A Cultural Politics of Music,” *Progress in Human Geography* 21, no. 4 (1997): 502-529.

²⁰² Kim Teal investigates this at length in Kimberly Hannon Teal, *Jazz Places: How Performance Spaces Shape Jazz History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021).

identity, making it an essential part of the place-replicating equation. On a sonic continuum of resemblance, then, a place that is elsewhere often sits firmly towards the side of exact replica.

It is difficult to categorize a venue precisely in terms of musical genre since every musician that plays there will play a different type of the seemingly unlimited sub-genres of jazz, but it is still possible to trace trends in programming to compare different places. Many of the clubs that Giberovitch cites as influences for Upstairs have reputations for programming music that was at the core of the dominant mainstream styles of jazz at any point in time, typically avoiding genres on the fringes or small sub-genres that have not yet gained esteem in the jazz world. Kim Teal's study on the Village Vanguard that reveals how musicians perform their music differently at the Vanguard than they do at other places demonstrates the enormous impact that place has on our production of sound.²⁰³ Further, the study documents the classic jazz style that is primarily featured at the Village Vanguard. This style of jazz is also what is played at most clubs resembling the Village Vanguard because of how the sound is linked to the type of place – naturally, it might seem, “classic” jazz is at home in “classic-style” jazz clubs.

Upstairs is no different in this regard, imitating the Village Vanguard and the classic New York city-style jazz club in its programming and aesthetic choices. A look through its concert offerings shows a regular lineup of trios and quartets, standard combos used for mainstream jazz. The university jazz bands of McGill and Concordia

²⁰³ See Kim Teal, “Jazz Heritage Live at the Village Vanguard,” in *Jazz Places*, 15-50.

play there frequently which are no exception: university bands are often the epitome of traditional mainstream jazz because of the curriculums prescribed at those schools which fits in perfectly with the “curriculum” of jazz that regular patrons of Upstairs would experience. On Upstairs’ website and promotional materials, the descriptions of performing musicians often link them directly to the creators of the current mainstream styles by citing their influences. Further connecting performances at the club to the jazz canon, Upstairs, like many current jazz clubs, holds numerous homage and tribute concerts to former jazz greats (whose photos are usually on the walls), where musicians play classic songs by the mainstream canon-forming musicians. Such performances reveal an aesthetic posture that closely connects the club to the landscape of jazz place that it is engaging with in its spatial project. By carefully curating a historically mainstream soundscape, Upstairs connects itself to a lineage of jazz place and stimulates the historical imagination.

Upstairs, then, takes on elsewhere-ness as its spatial strategy and attempts to simulate the experience of a classic New York-style jazz club as closely as it can. It intentionally lands as far as possible towards the “exact replica” end of the three continuums discussed here by replicating the physical characteristics of a basement club that uses photos of musicians as its central décor, the function of a club that enforces a music-focused quiet policy, and the musical choices of a space that houses traditional, mainstream jazz. In so doing, Upstairs demonstrates a very concrete engagement with the discourse that has shaped mainstream understandings of jazz place and takes an active role in continuing that discourse. Through the physical media of an actual club, Upstairs (re)produces a landscape of contemporary jazz place that promises attendees an

experience like (or of) other historically renowned jazz places. With a strategic use of physical characteristics designed to play on the historical imagination, Upstairs demonstrates how the imagination plays a central role in our experience of place and how complex the experience of jazz place can be. Upstairs transports patrons not to an otherworldly place, but rather to a place very much of this world, one that holds immense affective power and meaning. With a knowledge of history and the power of the imagination, at Upstairs patrons can be in two jazz places at once.

3.3 Conclusion: Rectifying the Global and the Local in Jazz

Using the concept of elsewhere to show how Upstairs mimics other clubs very closely as a part of its spatial strategy is not to argue it is a mere simulation of somewhere else. If its only goal were to replicate an experience of elsewhere, it would be placeless and void of vernacular meaning. Upstairs is not placeless, however, and it has a distinct local identity that holds meaning for local regulars. Upstairs is not burdened by the need to achieve an unattainable perfect duplication of another place, so its patrons and designers are free to engage in a game of experience where they create a place to their liking based on experiences and constructions of other places, both real and imagined. At Upstairs, the manipulation of the various continuums of resemblance engages us in semiotic play wherein the designers and users can construct places to their liking,

borrowing and creating as they see fit.²⁰⁴ The freedom in this ludic form of place-making allows people to express their historical imagination and to use joy, pleasure, and identity as generative forces in the construction of the places they occupy.

In its playful use of place and history, Upstairs perfectly captures a central issue that makes the concept of elsewhere-ness so interesting: the notion that we, humans with bodies, can use our imaginations to be in two places at once. These places where we can go can often seem otherworldly in their marked difference from the everyday world and yet are always rooted in our experiences and desires for the world outside of the clubs. Regardless of how near or far these places are, however, the transportive potential of imagination makes them accessible and allows one to experience multiple places at once. Upstairs simultaneously presents the opportunity for both a rich experience of a local place in a culturally vibrant and distinct city and the experience of an enticing construct of a different place, namely the New York jazz scene. For the average, occasional patron who does not have any knowledge of jazz, Upstairs is a cool, local place with good music and food that they miss when they leave. For the die-hard jazz traditionalist, Upstairs is, to use Hopkins' words, a "place-ship" that takes them on a simulated pilgrimage to a holy grail of jazz clubs in a golden era of jazz history. For both these imaginary subjects and everyone in between, Upstairs presents an opportunity to enjoy the complex experience of elsewhere-ness, being both here and there at the same time, wherever that may be.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Jeff Hopkins elaborates on the connections of elsewhere-ness to play in Hopkins, "West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of Myths and Elsewhere-ness," 4.

²⁰⁵ Note that in the context of global jazz cultures, Montreal is not very far from New York and the two cities share many North American cultural and social traditions. This idea of elsewhere-ness could be a useful approach to studying other jazz places that evoke New York clubs but exist in very different social and cultural contexts. Previous work on non-North American jazz often deals with similar ideas but with

This tension between the local and the universal is not new to jazz history, although it has become more prominent since about the 1970s, when jazz underwent its “neo-classical” turn. Writers like Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray sought to turn jazz into “America’s classical music” which meant elevating it from the level of mere entertainment to significant and meaningful art. Along with this labelling of jazz as fine art came a discourse of universalism that began to characterize jazz as a music that is great to the point that it could transcend space and time, that like great classical music it is timeless and should be appreciated by people everywhere. This discourse sought to free jazz from its vernacular “restraints” and reconstruct it as a Black mode of expression that is accessible to all.

Describing the music in universalist terms obviously raised the potential threat of reducing the importance of place in jazz. This, however, does not seem to have happened, since place still significantly matters, as Teal has shown in her research, and as is evidenced by how much prestige and importance is given to places like the Village Vanguard. Jazz discourse often sits in a peculiar place, then, where people speak of the importance of place for a supposedly universal music, a surprisingly not-so-obvious irony. Highlighting this current contradiction in jazz discourse, Scott DeVeaux eloquently wrote that “The most intimate pleasures in jazz are local,” just months after Alex Rodriguez published a dissertation detailing how jazz space is created based on universal

different approaches. See, for example, E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

practices in jazz culture of using “a view from nowhere” that can say something meaningful about jazz life as it is lived anywhere.”²⁰⁶

Upstairs is not the only jazz club to employ the spatial strategy of elsewhere-ness and, indeed, nearly all jazz clubs from the second half of the twentieth century onwards make use of this approach to some degree. These venues represent a sort of microcosm of this tension between the local and the universal in jazz discourse. What elsewhere-ness adds to this larger discussion is that it makes it clear that we do not necessarily have to consider the seemingly competing notions of local and universal to be in tension with one another, but rather that they can exist simultaneously due to the complexities of our experience of place. In contemporary jazz places, then, as understood with the concept of elsewhere-ness, we can experience the rewards of the complex process of the production of jazz space by harmoniously taking on Rodriguez’s universal “view from nowhere” while simultaneously enjoying the local and remaining securely in place.

²⁰⁶ Scott DeVeaux, “Review: Live at the Cellar: Vancouver’s Iconic Jazz Club and the Canadian Co-Operative Jazz Scene in the 1950s and ’60s,” UBC Press, accessed 22 April 2019, <https://www.ubcpres.ca/live-at-the-cellar>; Alex Rodriguez, “Making Jazz Space: Clubs and Creative Practice in California, Chile, and Siberia,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2018): 3.

Chapter 4

4 On Time

This chapter is about time. More specifically, it is about how time is a crucial force in the construction of jazz place. This dissertation, to this point, has separated place, space, and time as analytic categories. Though they are, indeed, different things, the concepts are intimately intertwined. This chapter will reflect on their points of connection to continue to develop a more nuanced understanding of how jazz place works. Considering the role of time in the construction of jazz place reveals how jazz clubs function as sites of meaning making by providing those invested in jazz with feelings of connectedness to jazz history. Through co-constitutive imaginations of jazz time and place, clubs like the Village Vanguard provide audiences both near and far with unmediated, anachronistic moments of contact between past and present.

Western thought has long operated upon an often implicit but rigid separation between time and place.²⁰⁷ Though such a separation can be useful for the purposes of detailed analysis, cultural geographers have criticized this conceptual rift. Advocating a more holistic view of space that does not uncritically privilege time, Doreen Massey argues that “the definitions of both space and time in themselves must be constructed as the result of interrelations” and that we should “insist on the inseparability of time and space, on their joint constitution through the interrelations between phenomena; on the

²⁰⁷ For an intellectual history of philosophies of time in Western thought, see Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

necessity of thinking in terms of space-time.”²⁰⁸ Nigel Thrift argues that the connections between time and space are central to the study of geography, writing that

The essential unit of geography is not spatial, it lies in regions of time-space and in the relation of such units to the larger spatio-temporal configurations. Geography is the study of these configurations. Marx once said, ‘one must force the frozen circumstances to dance by singing to them their own melody.’ The frozen circumstances of space only come alive when the melody of time is played.²⁰⁹

The interrelations between space and time are evident in everyday life. Spaces change as time passes: the natural world around us grows and decomposes as the seasons change; the house gets dirty if left unattended to for too long; we revisit places from our past and reminisce about how they used to be (or are surprised to see that they have not changed). Our experiences of time are relative to and conditioned by the spatial aspects of everyday life: travelling halfway across the world in 3 hours would be considered fast for a person but slow for an email; time zones confuse us when scheduling virtual conferences; casinos have no windows or clocks; the passage of time can make places

²⁰⁸ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 261, 269. Massey clarifies that “the argument here is not in favour of a total collapse of the differences between something called the spatial and the temporal dimensions...Rather, the point is that space and time are inextricably interwoven. It is not that we cannot make any distinction at all between them but that the distinction we do make needs to hold the two in tension, and to do so within an overall, and strong, concept of four-dimensionality.” (261)

²⁰⁹ Nigel Thrift, “Time and Theory in Human Geography: Part II,” *Progress in Human Geography* 1, no. 3 (1977): 448. Many geographers deal with the interrelations of time and place in their work. One of the earliest and most notable writers to advance the agenda of reconnecting time and place was Torsten Hägerstrand. A small selection of his influential writings include: Torsten Hägerstrand, “Geography and the Study of Interaction Between Nature and Society,” *Geoforum* 7 (1976): 329–344; Torsten Hägerstrand, “Time-Geography: Focus on the Corporeality of Man, Society, and Environment,” in *The Science and Praxis of Complexity* (Tokyo, Japan: United Nations University, 1985), 193–216; and Torsten Hägerstrand, *Tillvaroväven*, eds., Kajsa Ellegård & Uno Svedin (Stockholm, Sweden: Formas, 2009). For another early example, see Nigel Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996). For more current overviews of this literature, see Kajsa Ellegård, ed., *Time Geography in the Global Context: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2018); and Kajsa Ellegård, *Thinking Time Geography: Concepts, Methods and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

“nostalgic” or, less flatteringly, “dated,” depending on cultural values. Experiences of time, space, and their interrelations are deeply interwoven into the fabric of everyday life.

This chapter explores the points of connection between time and place in jazz geographies. Though scholars have long discussed time and temporality in music, much of the discourse has focused on musical elements like meter or rhythm and our experiences of them.²¹⁰ This chapter is focused instead on historical time and how broader constructions and experiences of time play a part in the meaning making practices in jazz. Such an issue has seldom been discussed in studies on jazz place, one notable exception being Alex Rodriguez’s work on global jazz cultures.²¹¹ Discourse about the Village Vanguard deals explicitly with imaginations of and relationships to time (history). Writers construe the club’s vibes as the perceptible history of jazz: vibes, then, are inherently temporal. The Vanguard’s landscape is haunted by none other than its own past, a distanced time that writers try to hold near. As such, the construction(s) of the place discussed in this dissertation create a temporal landscape of the club where time is a focal feature.

²¹⁰ For an important historical text in this discourse, see Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Shirmer Books, 1988). For a recent reference text on the topic, see Mark Doffman, Emily Payne, and Toby Young, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Time in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). David Burrows deals with constructions of time that are closer to how I am dealing with the subject in David Burrows, *Time and the Warm Body: A Musical Perspective on the Construction of Time* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007). Studies on embodiment in music often deal with time. See, for example, Mariusz Kozak, *Enacting Musical Time: The Bodily Experience of New Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²¹¹ Alex Rodriguez, “Making Jazz Space: Clubs and Creative Practice in California, Chile, and Siberia,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2018; Andrew Berish also addresses time in his work, though chooses to limit discussion of temporality for analytic purposes in Andrew Berish, *Lonesome Roads and Streets of Dreams: Place, Mobility, and Race in Jazz of the 1930s and ’40s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

I conceptualize the Village Vanguard as a site where jazz writers manipulate representations of time. In writings about the Village Vanguard, time is imagined as flexible, circular, and non-linear. Writers construct the vibe as a part of a constant process of compression and expansion of time and place that results in a non-linear sense of jazz time that operates logically, though not necessarily chronologically. In this representation of jazz time, I argue, writers construct the vibe in a way that both supports and challenges hegemonic approaches to viewing jazz history. Writers seek control and dominion over history and the passage of time in a way that sustains patriarchal and unjust representations of jazz history. And yet, at the same time, constructing the vibe temporally also offers an alternative way of viewing the world that imagines a more just future for jazz history.

The structure of this chapter will be somewhat unconventional. As such, here is a traveler's guide to reading this portion of the dissertation. As the introduction to this dissertation noted, this chapter can be read in one of two ways. First, it can be read in stand-alone pieces, with each section serving as an extension of each of this dissertation's three previous chapters, respectively (a horizontal reading of the chapter). If you are reading this introduction, however, then there is a good chance that you have chosen to read it the other way: as a single, complete chapter that can be read from beginning to end (a vertical reading of the chapter). If read this way, the chapter will bring readers on a reverse journey through this dissertation, adding new ideas about time to content that has been previously discussed. Beginning with 4.1, I take the idea of elsewhere introduced in Chapter 3 and add a temporal layer to it, framing it as a form of time-space compression. I then examine the Village Vanguard through the new lens of temporally-

oriented elsewhere. In section 4.2, I return to chapter 2's discussion of Ravi Coltrane and his father's vibe, now considering how the Coltrane vibe demonstrates that jazz time and place are not only compressive, but also expansive. This vibe is a medium that expands our access to jazz history and defines the boundaries of what jazz is and who are considered insiders in the tradition. In 4.3, I return to this dissertation's first chapter topic and elaborate more broadly on the temporal component of the vibe, using Tracy McMullen's notion of "replay" and her analysis of efforts to preserve the jazz past help to explain how the compression and expansion of time and place represent efforts to assert control over history, often problematically. I conclude on a more optimistic note and argue that the vibe's temporality can also be a force for good that works towards more inclusive and equitable futures for jazz.

A note on terminology: the words space, place, and timespace are used throughout this chapter and though they are different, they are closely related. As the introduction to this dissertation outlined, space here refers primarily to physical locations with quantifiable boundaries. Places, on the other hand, are spaces that have been infused with cultural, social, and emotional meaning and not defined exclusively by physical location. Place is a social construction in which space plays an important role. Though this chapter is primarily about place, many of the geographers I cite here are writing about space. If it appears that there is some conceptual slippage between space and place here it is because what these cited authors are saying about space is also true of place. Given the integral role of space in the construction of place, the two share very similar qualities. They are, however, different. I embrace the grey area between the two to highlight the spatial aspects of jazz place. In studying the connections between time and space/place,

geographers have often used the term “time-space.”²¹² I use this term in my discussion of time-space compression, where that word is commonplace. Outside of discussions of time-space compression, however, I use the term “timespace” to highlight how time and space/place are inextricably intertwined and how neither can be fully understood if removed from the other.²¹³ Combining time with space, timespace provides a framework for understanding the temporal and the spatial aspects of the construction of jazz place.

4.1 Elsewhereness and Time-space Compression

Elsewhereness reveals the complexities of our experiences of place. In the case of Upstairs Bar & Grill, the club’s design shows how history and the imagination shape how we experience places, how we relate to them, and how we construct them as sites of meaning. The discussion of Upstairs’ transportive power in Chapter 3 focuses on place and space, prioritizing experiences of physical location, only considering time implicitly in the discussion of history. This section explicitly introduces time to the equation to consider how Upstairs’ spatial design creates a transportive experience of both time and place. With the use of elsewhereness as a spatial strategy, the designers of Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill not only seek to transport patrons to a different place, but also to a different time. The places that Upstairs references are chosen based on their historical relevance and they are all modelled on a style of jazz club that became popular around mid-century.

²¹² This term is largely used in discourse about time-space compression and was established in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989).

²¹³ The term “timespace” comes from Jon May & Nigel Thrift, eds., *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Using these places to evoke a feeling of pastness is a central feature of Upstairs' spatial strategy. In its emphasis on historical jazz places, when Upstairs transports someone to a New York jazz club, they are brought not to the New York-style clubs of today, but to a (re)construction of New York clubs of the past.

The imaginative and temporally transportive power of place engages with globalization, as it connects far away times and places. Such blurring of distance was famously critiqued by Karl Marx who spoke of how we “annihilate...space with time,” referring to how distance has become increasingly trivialized with faster modes of travel and communication.²¹⁴ Not always pejorative, however, scholars across disciplines have employed phrases such as the “global village” to describe how the world has begun to feel smaller as it becomes easier and faster to traverse it, both physically and virtually.²¹⁵ Changes in our ability to traverse space at increasingly rapid speeds have intensified economic and social injustices while also opening opportunities for culture sharing and meaning making.

The trivialization of distance by physical travel speeds, media, and the cultural imagination is often referred to as time-space compression by geographers.²¹⁶ This term refers to how more space can be traversed or experienced in less time. These writers

²¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books & New Left Review, 1973), 539.

²¹⁵ This term was first coined in Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). For further foundational texts on globalization see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and David Held et al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²¹⁶ Barney Warf, *Time-space Compression: Historical Geographies* (New York: Routledge, 2008); May & Thrift, eds., *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, 2001; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 1989.

examine how social and technological advances have altered our experiences of space and time and, as a result, have a significant impact on our constructions of place.

Geographers who discuss time-space compression consider how time and space each condition our experience of the other and how our experiences of time and space and their interaction has rapidly shifted in the last 150 years.

Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill offers an example of how creators of jazz places use time-space compression in their spatial strategies to connect audiences with histories of jazz. As Chapter 3 has shown, Upstairs provides patrons with an imagined—or virtual—experience of another place. At Upstairs, jazz fans in Montreal can experience features of New York’s downtown jazz scene from afar. Joel Giberovitch’s desire “to give Montreal a New York-style jazz club” brings New York *to* Montreal, allowing patrons to have an experience of the place without spending the time required to travel from Quebec to New York City.²¹⁷ In so doing, Upstairs makes New York’s ecosystem of jazz clubs feel closer to Montreal, compressing the distance between them by lessening the time one must travel to “get there.” By bringing these historical places closer to jazz fans, Upstairs makes use of time-space compression to help people invested in the tradition feel connected to a jazz heritage.

The type of time-space compression that Upstairs leverages is a metaphorical or imaginative annihilation of distance. Rather than a physical annihilation of distance through technological developments, as the term time-space compression conventionally

²¹⁷ Juan Rodriguez, “History,” Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, 2016.
<https://www.upstairsjazz.com/en/history.php>

refers to, Upstairs provides experiences of distant places through the use of the historical imagination. Time-space compression is a useful metaphor here for understanding the effect that the designers of Upstairs are trying to create for audiences without the use of significant technological interventions.

Through time-space compression, Upstairs uses time to alter experiences of place, and uses place to alter experiences of time. Upstairs compresses time-space by shortening the temporal distance between experiences of these places (using time to alter experiences of place) while also stimulating the historical imagination to compress the feeling of distance between the present and the past through its use of place (using place to alter experiences of time). Here, the historical imagination does important work as it facilitates the transportive potential of contemporary jazz places and provides them with the power to compress time and place by offering an experience of both *here* and *there*, simultaneously. It also functions to allow one to feel concurrent experiences of *now* and *then*, as these places are designed to give patrons an anachronistic feeling of contact with the past. A large part of the appeal of the New York clubs that Giberovitch used for a model for Upstairs is their historical relevance. These clubs recall and reconstruct images of the jazz places of the past. So, when patrons of Upstairs have experiences of these other places, they too are having experiences of the places of the past, as Upstairs borrows much of the pre-established meanings of these clubs. At Upstairs, patrons are not only transported to New York clubs, but to New York clubs of the past. In this club, Giberovitch's spatial strategy has constructed place in a way that impacts and manipulates patrons' experience of history, of time. As such, at these contemporary,

nostalgic jazz places, space and time are co-constitutive. Examining their interrelations is thus necessary when examining constructions and experiences of jazz places.

The Village Vanguard, one of Upstairs' referents and the main subject of this dissertation, can also be fruitfully examined through the lens of timespace. The club's place-making vibes are inherently temporal in that they refer to the venue's past, its perceptible history. The owners of the Village Vanguard play into jazz fans' desires to feel "close" to the club's history, employing a spatial strategy of nostalgia that "shows" patrons the club's past. I argue, then, that the Village Vanguard also uses a strategy of elsewhere-ness, not because it transports patrons to a different location, but rather because it transports them to a different time. The Village Vanguard seeks to present patrons at its live shows with not only an experience of a contemporary club in its current scene, but also a glimpse into what the club may have been like in a bygone era of jazz. The club offers an experience not just of the Village Vanguard of today, but of the Village Vanguard of the past. Given that time and place are jointly constituted, in Massey's terms, by transporting patrons to a different time, and thus to a different place, the Village Vanguard is elsewhere of itself.

The use of the historical imagination to manipulate the experience of time constructs the Village Vanguard as elsewhere of itself. Consider again this *New York Magazine* article, quoted earlier in Chapter 3.1, which frames the Vanguard as a special, otherworldly (elsewhere) place:

Shoulders hunched against an evil wind blowing up Seventh Avenue South, turn right under the red canopy at No. 178 and pull open the famous door that Charles Mingus once ripped from its hinges: A saxophone, cymbals, warm, smoky air gust up from the bottom of a steep flight of narrow stairs. Descend into a cluttered

little room shaped like a slice of pie; shrug out of the overcoat, find a table and maybe a drink, look around, listen hard, and smile. Another night at the Village Vanguard.²¹⁸

The passage continues, adding a temporal layer that frames the Vanguard not just as physically elsewhere, but temporally elsewhere: “Another night at the Village Vanguard – it could be any winter’s night of any year back to 1935, when the redoubtable Max Gordon first opened the place.”²¹⁹ Here, the author emphasizes not that the Vanguard necessarily takes one to different location, but rather the same location but at a different time. He continues:

in another 50 years, when our grandchildren want to show their grandchildren what jazz is about and what New York used to be like, may they still be able to lead the young ones through an evil wind on Seventh Avenue, down the stairway at No. 178, and into the warmth and smoke and sound, to smell the green felt walls and the whiskey and feel Max and the music pouring over them for another night.²²⁰

As with all places, we cannot fully understand the place making processes and resultant meanings of the Village Vanguard without considering time. Given the well-established tradition in jazz writing of framing the club as an historical place and (re)constructing its haunted landscape, “the present Vanguard,” as Kim Teal concisely states, “is always in

²¹⁸ Eric Pooley, “All That Jazz: Down on Seventh Avenue, the Village Vanguard Has Been a Music Mecca for 50 Years,” *New York Magazine* 23, no. 50 (December 1990): 107.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 108. Note how this passage plays into the common trope within Village Vanguard discourse discussed in Chapter 1 that the club has a degree of permanence and has survived many changing historical conditions. In this way, discourse about the Village Vanguard’s future resembles common understandings of other historical places like, say, the Eiffel Tower, whose existences do not rely entirely on sufficient economic profits. Though I do not speculate here on what the Vanguard’s future might actually hold, this trope in the discourse engages with time and place in that it frames the club as immune to the threats of time.

dialog with the past.”²²¹ The joint constitution of time and place and the compression of time-space is central to the ongoing dialectic of place construction at the club. In order for the Vanguard to achieve elsewhere-ness, to transport patrons to a different time and place, it necessarily compresses the metaphorical distance between the past and present club, bringing them phenomenologically together.

Time-space compression is a paradox. It is a paradox because time-space compression is, inherently, expansive. When time-space is compressed, we come into contact with far away times and places and our experience and knowledge of the world is expanded. As we extend our reach through time and space through creative uses of place, we expand the boundaries of what and when we can experience. Perhaps the paradox between compression and expansion can be explained away by noting that compression and expansion are simply imperfect metaphors. However, this paradox of simultaneous expansion and compression in jazz place is a productive tension because it reflects the complexity of place making processes in jazz and our experiences of those places. The following section (4.2) will examine the expansiveness of jazz place and how, as we expand the physical and temporal borders of jazz, we make explicit the criteria for inclusion and exclusion that operate in common representations of jazz history.

4.2 Coltrane’s Vibe and Time-space Expansion

The construction of the Village Vanguard as a physical site where patrons can see the past and access that which is supposedly dead and gone closely mimics discourse about

²²¹ Kim Teal, “Fred Hersch at the Village Vanguard: The Sound of Jazz Heritage at New York’s Oldest Jazz Club,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (2018): 451.

another phenomenon: stars. For a long time, Western culture has been fascinated with views of outer space. One of the most common tropes in discussions of outer space is how examining it reveals to us the expansiveness of the universe, both in time and space. Examinations of outer space reveal the spatial expansiveness of the universe by putting into perspective how large it is relative to ourselves and how little of it we have explored; it reveals an expansiveness of our experience of time as we reconcile seeing the light of stars in the present, but knowing that what we are seeing happened long in the past because of how long it takes light to travel. In our understandings of the expansiveness of outer space, the interplay between time and space is key: the universe feels so large in part because of the time it would take to traverse the space and that vast distance allows us to see traces of the past long after it has gone.

The Western world has long been fascinated with the notion that seeing a star is the equivalent of seeing the past. Writing for popular audiences, astronomers often discuss how “Telescopes can be time machines. Looking out in space is like looking back in time”²²² and how “Anytime we look away from the Earth, we’re looking back in time to how things once were.”²²³ These passages were written around the time of the successful launch of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), an event which reinvigorated this discourse in the West. The telescope’s creators advertised the

²²² “How Does Webb See Back in Time?” Webb Space Telescope, Space Telescope Science Institute, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://webbtelescope.org/contents/articles/how-does-webb-see-back-in-time>.

²²³ Webb, Sara, “A Cosmic Time Machine: How the James Webb Space Telescope lets us see the First Galaxies in the Universe,” *The Conversation*, July 17, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/a-cosmic-time-machine-how-the-james-webb-space-telescope-lets-us-see-the-first-galaxies-in-the-universe-187015>.

instrument by saying that it would allow humanity to “look much closer to the beginning of time.”²²⁴ Popular news outlets echoed this fascination, garnering excitement that the JWST would show us “the beginning of the universe”²²⁵ or “the dawn of time,”²²⁶ anticipating the telescope’s offer of “a new vision of the universe and a view of the universe as it once appeared new.”²²⁷ Outer space’s offer of a way to cheat the laws of chronological time has been represented repeatedly in various forms of media, further demonstrating Western culture’s fascination with seeing the past.²²⁸

The similarities in the discourses of stars and of the Village Vanguard are clear: they are both constructed as physical phenomena that give us a view of the past in the present—and not just an imagination of the past, but an actual, sensory experience of it. When visit the Village Vanguard it offers us a glimpse into what the hallowed jazz places of the past looked like, giving us that “view of the universe as it once appeared new.”²²⁹ The Vanguard is a place where one can intimately connect the sensory and imaginary experiences of place, a deeply affective combination. A central piece of meaning-making process in the social construction of the Village Vanguard is that the club offers a sensory

²²⁴ “Webb Key Facts,” National Aeronautics & Space Administration, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://jwst.nasa.gov/content/about/faqs/facts.html>.

²²⁵ “James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) – A Complete Guide,” Space.com, April 27, 2023, <https://www.space.com/21925-james-webb-space-telescope-jwst.html>.

²²⁶ Joey Roulette, “After Million-Mile Journey, James Webb Telescope Reaches Destination,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/24/science/james-webb-telescope-arrival.html>.

²²⁷ Dennis Overbye, Kenneth Chang, and Joshua Sokol, “Webb Telescope Reveals a New Vision of an Ancient Universe,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/12/science/james-webb-telescope-images-nasa.html>.

²²⁸ There are countless examples I could point to here, including one of my favourite films, *Interstellar* (2014).

²²⁹ Overbye, Chang, and Sokol, “Webb Telescope Reveals a New Vision of an Ancient Universe.”

experience that validates the imaginary ones. In other words, in that they both offer experiences of “seeing” the past, looking at the Village Vanguard is like looking at a star.

The combination of sensory and imaginary working together is, I argue, a large part of what makes Ravi Coltrane’s appearances at the Vanguard so special. As the bearer of the Coltrane legacy, Ravi not only lets us feel connected to the jazz past but lets us *see* it. Though there are many ways one might try to keep John Coltrane’s vibe alive and feel connected to that history, there is something uniquely special about the presence of Ravi’s body where audiences can feel that they are not only imagining history but physically seeing it.²³⁰ Such an experience can feel like “cheating” the regular flow of history, given that history, like death, in the Western understanding often implies gone or done, inaccessible to us except through memory and imagination. The visual aspect of Ravi’s performances validates imagined (read desired) experiences of closeness with histories of jazz for those who are invested in the jazz tradition.²³¹

Unlike stars, however, Ravi Coltrane’s performances at the Village Vanguard also give us a sonic experience of the past. Though one might use John Coltrane’s recordings as a sonic medium of connection to him, Ravi’s performances add a directly accessible corporeal source of sound that evokes his father’s vibe in a powerful way. As his history-conjuring music fills the Village Vanguard, the club’s haunted landscape is reiterated

²³⁰ Wrapped up in this is a privileging of the visual realm in Western culture.

²³¹ Interestingly, Ravi Coltrane has previously been compared to views of outer space. Jazz critic Andrew Gilbert described the experience of listening to Ravi saying that “the spacious, slowly coalescing melody felt like a view from the Hubble Telescope coming into focus.” See Andrew Gilbert, “A Coltrane Family Reunion at the SFJazz Center,” *San Francisco Classical Voice*, May 2, 2022, <https://www.sfcv.org/articles/review/coltrane-family-reunion-sfjazz-center>.

through sound. Music is, of course, a powerful place-constructing force at the Village Vanguard and musicians' and critics' use of sound in the construction of the club's landscape makes it unique from other, non-musical historic places. Here, sound is used to evoke the historical imagination to help create feelings of connectedness to the jazz past. One critic, for example, wrote of one of Ravi's performances at the Vanguard that "for nearly three hours he took us into his world, barely fitting its depth inside the four walls of the Vanguard. By the time we came back to Earth, it felt like only seconds had gone by."²³² Here, interactions of sound, time, and place come into focus as Ravi's music is said to be a catalyst for the manipulation of jazz timespace. As such, Ravi provides us with a way of keeping his father's vibe alive by bringing us closer to it and compressing the historical and imaginary distance between the past and present.

With Ravi Coltrane and the Village Vanguard and with stars alike, the imaginative and sensory experiences of the past expand the temporal and physical borders of what is phenomenologically accessible to us. By bringing us closer to the people and places of the past with time-space compression, our world is expanded. Barney Warf notes that "by accelerating the velocities of people, goods, and information, the world is made to feel smaller even as interactions are stretched over larger physical distances. The term 'compression' is therefore misleading: every round of time-space compression involves an expansion in the geographic scale of social activities."²³³

²³² Stevie Rowley, "Hypnotized by Tenor Sax: Ravi Coltrane at the Village Vanguard," *The New School Free Press*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.newschoolfreepress.com/2021/11/08/hypnotized-by-tenor-sax-ravi-coltrane-at-the-village-vanguard/>.

²³³ Warf, *Time-Space Compression*, 6.

Complementing Warf is Nat Hentoff who, writing in a jazz context, argued that “through the imagination, human consciousness is extended in time and place.”²³⁴

By expanding the boundaries of jazz timespace, writers also define its borders. As such, time-space expansion and compression are political projects that establish historical narratives with subtle but powerful criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In the case of discourse about Ravi Coltrane at the Village Vanguard, writers construct an expanded view of jazz timespace where the borders uphold patriarchal trends in jazz history. Writers expand these borders by making the past more easily accessible to audiences, but Alice Coltrane and the artistic and intellectual contributions of women and non-male artists are often left outside of these borders. Rather, these narratives focus on Ravi and his connection to John Coltrane and this discourse constructs a jazz timespace that upholds male-dominated representations of jazz history.

The manipulation of temporal borders to establish boundaries that uphold patriarchal ideologies in jazz is not unique to discourse about Ravi Coltrane. Tracy McMullen has examined the ways in which fears of the loss of the jazz past have resulted in efforts to preserve jazz history that ultimately, she argues, construct and uphold patriarchal constructions of jazz history.²³⁵ These efforts to establish control over the fleetingness of time create simplified images of jazz and the American nation. In these representations, jazz and the country and are portrayed as having clearly defined borders

²³⁴ Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is* (New York: Random House, 1976), 11.

²³⁵ Tracy McMullen, “If I Should Lose You: Keeping Jazz Alive,” in *Haunthenticity: Musical Replay and the Fear of the Real* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2019), 96-125.

that exclude women jazz musicians to create a sense of unity amongst male jazz populations.

Patriarchal uses and representations of timespace have been criticized beyond jazz, as well. In feminist philosophy, Fanny Söderbäck argues that the West has long associated linear time with men and cyclical time with women. She argues that a dissolution of these gendered associations of time and a more dynamic representation of how past, present, and future interact with one another will result in a more just understanding of time.²³⁶ In geography, Doreen Massey argues that the lack of nuance in discourse about time in the West (re)produces gender inequality. Specifically, she argues that although the social construction of gender has a strong spatial element, the West's long standing conceptual separation between time and space creates a static and undynamic view of place that does not allow for productive spatial politics.²³⁷ Discourse about Ravi Coltrane, then, participates in broad contexts of jazz and of Western society at large wherein constructions of temporality are part of a system of power that upholds gender normativity and patriarchy.

The process of time-space compression and expansion that is represented in writing about Ravi Coltrane and the Village Vanguard is thus a double-edged sword: these temporal constructions of the vibe offer a deeply meaningful and validating outlet for those invested in the jazz tradition, but also threaten to uphold discriminatory

²³⁶ Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time: On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019).

²³⁷ Massey, "Politics and Space/Time," in Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 249-272.

practices in and representations of jazz history. The vibe has the power to do both. How it is deployed varies constantly as different writers, listeners, and audiences both near and far move through the Vanguard's place and partake in place-making processes.

4.3 Jazz Pasts, Presents, and Futures

In the construction of the Vanguard's haunted landscape through invocations of the club's vibe, place makers are constantly playing with time. The vibe is inherently historical: it not only represents and reminds people of history but is implicitly said to *be* history itself. Given the temporal implications of history—that is, that history exists only chronologically and that time must pass for it to exist—a vibe is the manifestation of a moment in time. However, vibes are said to offer a sort of direct access to history that is, by widely agreed upon laws of time and space in the West, supposed to be inaccessible. As a living history that is constructed as something that is both near and far, both present and absent, defying standard logics of chronology, the vibe is a way for placemakers to play with time in place.

The Village Vanguard's landscape is, then, a site for the manipulation of time, since the inherently temporal vibes are a foundational part of its constitution. The ghosts that are said to haunt the club bend and manipulate time as they remain invisible while constantly reappearing when and as needed by the place's users. The resulting landscape is one where time and place, inherently connected constructions, are manipulated in tandem with one another and are co-constituted.

This manipulation of timespace is a powerful force in the construction of meaning in and of jazz place. The representations of the vibe's temporality that these writers create

fashions a landscape that validates the identities of those invested in jazz history and culture. The use of temporality in the construction of the Village Vanguard's haunted landscape reveals how these writers use jazz history to serve the needs of the present.

As discussed in Chapter 1.3, the production of landscapes is always a political act. Landscapes serve the needs of those who create them. As a form of representation, constructing landscapes puts the representer in a position of privilege as they can manipulate the place in their image. Landscapes, then, are sites of power where ideologies and values are embedded, sustained, and challenged. Chapter 1 examines how vibes are a central facet of the Village Vanguard's landscape and how reports of hauntings have constructed the place as a heritage site for the jazz tradition. Such representations do significant work in validating the meanings that jazz history holds for many people and creating a place to validate the cultural, symbolic, and economic investments they have made in jazz. Specifically, however, the role of temporality in those constructions carries significant political baggage untouched in Chapter 1 that the remainder of this section will deconstruct.

When placemakers play with time at the Vanguard, whether through the compression or expansion of time-space, they are asserting control over history. Tracy McMullen's analysis of attempts to control the past in jazz and popular music presents an argument that reconstructions of the musical past are attempts to fulfil "a fantasy that we can tame the ephemerality and elusiveness of flowing time."²³⁸ This desire for control

²³⁸ McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 10.

and mastery over time is a response to the notion that the perpetual forward motion of time threatens the loss of the past. One of the features of Replay—McMullen’s term for a type of reenactment of the past—is that it establishes “the belief that we don’t have to lose anything because we have the ability to master the passage of time.”²³⁹ The Vanguard’s vibe offers this same effect: in its manipulation of time, of bringing the past into contact with the present, jazz fans can feel a closeness with the jazz past and a sense that by controlling it they can protect it.

This dissertation argues that the Village Vanguard’s vibe functions to give present audiences a direct and unmediated connection to history. Similarly, McMullen argues more broadly that in attempts to reconstruct a musical past, their “liveness” and materiality are promoted and marketed as an encounter with an increasingly scarce Real in a hypermediated culture. It speaks to a desire to experience the materiality of the world in a way that is often considered lost in postmodernity.”²⁴⁰ The vibe functions in a very similar way, using a manipulation of time to achieve a sense of connection to something that is always seemingly at risk of being lost. If McMullen’s assertions are correct, which I posit they are, then the Vanguard’s vibe is historically situated in a larger context of contemporary attempts to achieve dominion over history in order to avoid fears of the loss of musics and moments that are deeply meaningful.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 13. Note that McMullen here is using the word “Real” in the Lacanian sense, referring to the ineffable world that resists representation and symbolization and that exists beyond the reach of direct experience.

²⁴¹ Note that McMullen in this book is speaking specifically about musical “Replay” or reenactments of the past. The Vanguard’s vibe is not a reenactment in the same way that McMullen’s case studies are, but my

This quest for dominion over time presents some issues. In addition to the threat of upholding patriarchal norms, seeking such control over time can uphold colonial ways of thinking about place. The effort to assert dominion over time in place, to “control the uncontrollable, stop the unstoppable,” in McMullen’s words, reveals a construction of place as something that *can* be contained and controlled.²⁴² This desire for mastery reflects deeply rooted colonial ways of thinking about place in the West in that it constructs place as something to be had, something that is discoverable and conquerable. Doreen Massey writes of how such representations of place treat space as a “surface” which leads to thinking of people and places as simply “on” this surface, “deprived of histories...immobilised, they await...[our] arrival. They lie there, on space, in place, without their own trajectories.”²⁴³ When the writers who construct the Vanguard’s vibe play with temporality, then, they engage in a discourse that threatens to create and sustain colonial constructions of jazz place.

The negative ramifications of the manipulation of jazz timespace are the result of writers using the past to serve their interests in the present. Indeed, past and present are the central focus of this dissertation, as they are with most studies of the construction of place. But what of the future? As a third category of time (in this construction), the future is not given the critical attention in scholarship that the past and present are. This may be because the future is even more fleeting than the past and seemingly impossible to

work aligns with hers in that we are both dealing with ideas of how peoples’ connections and relations to the past influence cultural production in the present.

²⁴² McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 10.

²⁴³ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 22.

analyze given that we cannot possibly predict what it will hold. Some of the scholars who have had the most significant impact on this dissertation, however, have looked to the future to imagine a better world, one where our constructions and uses of place and history contribute to social justice and racial equity. Through this lens I argue that the vibe also has positive political potential and can be a part of forging more equitable futures for jazz.

Oppressive ideologies are deeply rooted in Western thought and create hegemonic ways of viewing the world. As a response, scholars across disciplines have attempted to unearth and deconstruct these harmful ways of viewing the world and offer alternative ways of knowing—different epistemologies that can create and sustain more just places. Ashon Crawley argues that we should search for “*otherwise possibilities*,” to discover “infinite alternatives to what *is*” and that Blackpentecostalism is an example of a site where we can learn to find, “produce[,] and inhabit otherwise epistemological fields;”²⁴⁴ Katherine McKittrick asks “how do geography and blackness work together to advance a different way of knowing and imagining the world? Can these different knowledges and imaginations perhaps call into question the limits of existing spatial paradigms and put forth more humanly workable geographies?;”²⁴⁵ James Gordon Williams argues that “Black creativity represented in improvisation is the practice of spatial insubordination

²⁴⁴ Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2-3. Emphases in original.

²⁴⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxvi–xxvii. McKittrick has also pursued this work in Katherine McKittrick & Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2007).

that highlights the value of Black humanity while refuting the belief system(s) that consistently invalidate Black humanity”²⁴⁶ and that African American improvisation is “a practice of producing space that reflects the radical imagination for a better future.”²⁴⁷

In their multidisciplinary approach to revealing alternative ways of knowing, these authors all imagine a just future. There is much to be said about each of these authors’ work individually and in conversation with one another, but I will address for now only that they all agree that knowledge and place should be open and dynamic for the future to be equitable. Crawley argues that “blackness is released into the world to disrupt the institutionalization and abstraction of thought that produces the categorical distinctions of disciplinary knowledge” and that rejecting disciplinary ways of knowing that attempt to simplify and constrain the world will lead us to the “openness to worlds, to experience, to ideas.”²⁴⁸ McKittrick argues that a view of space as static, “the idea that space ‘just is,’” problematically “calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore who, we are,” but that we can correct this with a more dynamic and open view of space, understanding that “Geography is not...secure and unwavering: we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is.”²⁴⁹ Williams argues that “African American improvised music is a practice of ‘living geography,’ a practice of sonically improvised space-making that contests and disrupts the

²⁴⁶ James Gordon Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines: The Politics and Practices of Black Musical Space* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2021), 6.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 3.

²⁴⁹ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi.

marginalization that buttresses the *falsely imagined neutral and transparent* spaces we share.”²⁵⁰ All of these authors agree that to create more equitable geographies we need to look towards the disruption of restrictive and hegemonic ways of viewing places and our relationships to them.

I contend that the Village Vanguard’s vibe is an opportunity for such openness, for a disruption of normative and hegemonic ways of knowing jazz history, time, and place. From a literal perspective, the vibe is clearly an “alternative” way of thinking about the world: its likeness to ghost stories, its offering of communication with the dead, and its power to manipulate time and space are all features that many scientific ways of thinking about the world would deem as at least partly fictional or imaginative (and thus, implicitly, incorrect or false). These features are part of what makes stories of the vibe so enticing for readers and fans and that reveal its “otherwise” nature. As this chapter has examined, the vibe plays not only with place but also with time and, in so doing, the vibe presents an imagination of history that is not limited by simple linear time. With the vibe, writers imagine a non-linear construction of jazz time in order to get closer to the past. The vibe presents an understanding of the flow of time that is logical, though not necessarily chronological. With this temporal play, the Village Vanguard’s vibe constructs a haunted landscape of the club that invites speculative play and openness and offers that unmediated, anachronistic moment of contact between past and present.

²⁵⁰ Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines*, 6. My emphasis.

For a telling example, I return to a poem by Jeff Levenson quoted in Chapter 1 that encapsulates this speculative view of place and time at the Village Vanguard that constructs the vibe as a disruptor of dominant epistemologies:

Deep within the vanguard darkness
 Lovers enraptured by spirits
 Set time on its ear.
 “Vibes,” they say
 Is that ghosts?²⁵¹

This poem constructs the Vanguard as a place where linear time is disrupted, as the author states that here time is set “on its ear.” Narratively, this disruption of time triggers an awareness of the vibe; either within an altered temporal landscape the vibe can appear or, as it appears, we realize the temporal disruption was the vibe’s doing. Writing about vibes in a different context but with a similar construction, writer and journalist Mary Retta argues that “time is not an arrow but a shimmering pool; we submerge and take laps around the boundaries of aliveness,” and that “vibes are moments when the world stands still...vibes exist where time does not.”²⁵² In a similar vein, Levenson centers alternate understandings of temporality through the vibe in a construction of the Village Vanguard’s haunted landscape, allowing the past to flood into the present and exist simultaneously with the future.

²⁵¹ Jeff Levenson, “For Max Gordon, and Others Similarly Possessed,” *Downbeat Magazine*, September 1987: 65.

²⁵² Mary Retta, “On Vibing: On Vibes, the Apocalypse, and Non Linear Time,” *Close but not quite* (blog), January 28, 2021, https://maryretta.substack.com/p/on-vibing?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email&utm_source=twitter. Retta here is writing about vibes as an alternative view of and relationship to temporality that rejects oppressive colonial and capitalist ideologies of time.

The musical implications of the phrase “set time on its ear” are likely no accident. This phrase puts the sense of hearing at the center of this disruption of time and knowledge, highlighting the power of music to construct and reconfigure places. Following the work of Williams, sound is a medium through which people create places of meaning and exert agency in their relationships to and occupation of those places. Here, the reference to sounding and listening bodies highlights the importance of music in the temporal aspects of the Village Vanguard’s haunted landscape.

In its play with time, this poem also blurs the lines between the present and the future. Every word in this poem is saturated with mystery: physical metaphors like “deep,” “within,” and “darkness,” phantasmagorical language like “spirits” and “ghosts,” and words that capture those feelings so hard to define like “lovers” and “enraptured” all contribute to this poem’s effectiveness in portraying the unknown and the uncanny. Perhaps the most effective feature of the poem in this regard, however, is the final punctuation that ends the poem with a question. To me, this question mark is the sign of something unknown and unresolved. It does not attempt to categorize, define, or contain its subject. Here, this lack of resolution in the comprehension of what the *vibe is* poses no problem. Rather, the question mark signals something that is gladly left open, something speculative that imagines pasts, presents, and futures simultaneously, temporarily escaping restrictive formulations of linear time.

In this construction, the Village Vanguard’s vibes present an “otherwise possibility” for knowing and being in place. The *vibe* offers an openness of both time and place not granted by dominant Western epistemologies. This construction adheres to

Doreen Massey's view of a "radical openness of the future" that resists colonial thought by not taking the future nor space as predetermined nor inevitable:

Only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics. Only if the future is open is there any ground for a politics which can make a difference.

...

Not only history but also space is open...Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else. A space, then, which is neither a container for always-already constituted identities, nor a completed closure of holism. This is a space of loose ends and missing links. *For* the future to be open, space must be open too.²⁵³

Those "loose ends and missing links" contained in the question mark at the end of the poem are evidence of the *vibe*'s potential to manipulate time and construct jazz place in an anti-hegemonic way. The *vibe* is a spatial realization of McMullen's version of openness of the present and future, based on Buddhist notion of emptiness: "Emptiness acknowledges that we cannot find a permanent, unitary, independent anything. Neither a self nor an object. When we examine the world closely we find that everything is impermanent, multiple, and interdependent...[existence is] impermanent, multiple, and dependent on conditions."²⁵⁴

The *vibe*, then, can have politically negative ramifications while also be the product of imaginations of just futures. This reflects the simple truth that the truth is not so simple. The *vibe* is not inherently harmful nor politically productive, but it does have

²⁵³ Massey, *For Space*, 11 – 12.

²⁵⁴ McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 23. The *vibe* can adhere to McMullen's call for "an acknowledgement of the real complexity of life as subjective, blurred, connected, impermanent, and unlocatable." (24)

the potential to be both. In the same way I view the Village Vanguard's vibe, Crawley notes that Blackpentecostalism, the object of his study, is not necessarily utopic and certainly "not free of the problems of marginalizing...but something is *there*, in the aesthetic practices, aesthetic practices that *are* collective intellectual performances, that serve as antagonistic to the very doctrines of sin and flesh that so proliferate within the world."²⁵⁵ I understand the vibe to be a way of knowing and of relating to place that generates sites of power that can (re)construct oppressive social structures but that also holds the possibility to disrupt those same systems of domination.

Constructions of the vibe reflect a deeply meaningful investment in jazz, its music, its people, and its places. The desire to construct the Village Vanguard using the inherently temporal concept of the vibe fulfills a desire for an anachronistic moment of contact between past and present. It is about the future, too, however, because this identity-validating practice is, at least in part, about imagining, creating, and sustaining a future of jazz practice. The vibe is a discursive community-building practice that brings together those who are "similarly possessed" to offer an alternative to hegemonic structures of power in jazz. Although sometimes positive change requires new ways of knowing, the vibe offers an already-paved path to just futures. In that regard I share Crawley's optimism that "alternatives exist—*already*—against the normative modes under which we endure. If we so choose to join up with the alternative, all the better. The work is to make apparent the fact of the resonance of alternatives, to let folks know that

²⁵⁵ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 24. Emphases in original.

we are here engaging in otherwise work. And that is a beautiful thing.”²⁵⁶ The vibes at the Village Vanguard, then, are an alternative way of constructing jazz timespace that offers the potential to create a more just future for jazz history.

²⁵⁶ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 31.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name: Mark McCorkle

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2011-2015 B.Mus.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2017 M.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2017-2023 Ph.D.

Honours and Awards: Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Canada Graduate Scholarship - Doctoral
2018 - 2021

Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2018 - 2019

Related Work Experience Graduate Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2015 – 2022

Teaching Assistant
University of Windsor
2014 - 2015