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# Loosening The Saxophone

Entanglements of Bodies in the Politics of Free

Improvisation

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# Abstract

*Loosening The Saxophone. Entanglement of Bodies in the Politics of Free Improvisation* follows the works and practices of women, spit and non/human bodies within political spaces of free improvisation. This practice-led research establishes an entangled research method, in writing and practice. It develops a method of story writing focussing on an entanglement between socio-political free improvisation performances, my own practical development with the saxophone and a feminist writing approach giving accounts of female, liquid spaces. The touchings of my tongue, spit and hands on the saxophone's body are explored allowing an entangled relationship between performer and instrument that might challenge masculine performance spaces.

The masculine space in this thesis is defined as one that establishes hierarchical structures of performance approaches in free improvisation. A technofeminist critique is used to challenge these dichotomous ideas by working through scholarly case-studies and my own playing. The female critique used here is that of loosening body boundaries through enactive relationships. My feminist improvisation uses this loose and liquid approach by establishing different playing and preparation techniques of the saxophone. It is through touch that our bodies materialise into a momentary performance.



# Declaration

I declare that this thesis is an original report of my research, has been written by me and has not been submitted for any previous degree. The experimental work is almost entirely my own work; the collaborative contributions have been indicated clearly and acknowledged. Due references have been provided on all supporting literatures and resources. I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

(Tina Krekels)

June 2019



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Writing, thinking, reading, and playing make connections of different voices. This thesis does not exist in isolation, but in an entanglement with many different others.

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You will find the recordings on the accompanying USB stick. Each album and track are clearly labelled throughout this thesis, the appendix or on the USB stick itself.

# Introduction

Free improvisation can involve listening, acting, reacting, dominating, rejecting... It is always entangled however in a network of different things. These things are also networked in themselves, bringing more and more connections to the surface. We could argue that this is space:

‘Space’, in this way of telling things, is an expanse we travel across. (...) It is an unthought cosmology, in the gentlest sense of the term, but it carries with it social and political effects. So easily this way of imagining space can lead us to conceive of other places, peoples, cultures simply phenomena ‘on’ this surface.<sup>1</sup>

Free improvisation can be considered, following Doreen Massey, as a very tightly-meshed network of different contributions, and some of these will be discussed in this practice-led thesis linked to my writing and playing on or with the saxophone. Following Sarah Ahmed’s work on the killjoy,<sup>2</sup> I will start this research with a feminist manifesto against established free improvisation ideals.

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<sup>1</sup>All quotes are presented in their original format, including American spelling, Italics and brackets, except if stated otherwise.

Doreen Massey. *For Space*. SAGE Publications, 2005, p.4.

<sup>2</sup>For the purpose of this thesis Ahmed’s ‘Killjoy Manifesto’ gives some context. Sara Ahmed. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 251.

# A Manifesto For Feminist Improvisation

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is opposed to daily dedication to individualist practice routines of their chosen instrument. Daily routines of spitting exercises are mandatory for all who want to be resistance fighters against traditional Western, capitalist, male music performance rules.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is a professional art form of spitting and low-labour practice routines. We practice our non/human bodies into machines of littlest effort. Natural bodily fluids are amplified with technology. Smallest physical movements turn knobs on sophisticated electrical machines.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is laziness in front of others. No muscle contractions. No sweat.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is always already discussing the resistance and killjoy aspects of low-labour musicianship. Our practice is political, resisting capitalist structures of work. Resisting male erected playing techniques. Our free improvisation renounces hard work and practice routines by all means. We are a feminist culture of lazy fuckers.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is the chaotic, bodily exchange of fluids.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is not fun. We renounce happiness. Everything needs to be criticised, including established free improvisation rules.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is a political force awakening society through feminist killjoy practices of audible tortures.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is about shared suffering and community resistance.

FEMINIST IMPROVISATION is our killjoy criticism, our tool to reconstruct neoliberal idioms in our own image.

SPIT -on-through-with-closing-in-of-near-inside-open- IMPROVISATIONS

## 0.1 Where To Start?

This thesis is practice-led; everything I discuss here is glued to my practice making sounds on the saxophone. My practice as a free improviser made me experience a diverse field of socio-political spaces, which certainly shaped the research questions (below) explored in here. The manifesto opens the thesis with a strong voice, with a deliberate attitude inspired by the works of Valerie Solanas' *Scum Manifesto*<sup>3</sup> and Sara Ahmed's *Killjoy Manifesto*.<sup>4</sup> Maybe, I wondered, we need to raise our voices to be heard, we need to kill joy when needed and be critical to push existing barriers. Let us begin by using this manifesto as a voice carrying this thesis. It is the voice of criticism towards the dichotomous and patriarchal relationship between humans and instruments (nonhumans). A voice highlighting loose, feminine and spitty performances of free improvisation.

When I play music, predominately with men, then often these musical spaces become restrictive for me to find my own voice, my own performance techniques and also to develop my own creativity. It was men who congratulated me that I sounded like Peter Brötzmann, that I am louder than the drummer in our band, that I am more of a man than some of the men I played with. So I wondered whether my playing on the saxophone, copying other established playing techniques contributes to a reproduction of specific gendered sounds or genres of music? Am I reproducing the masculine and patriarchal structures of free improvisation? Thus my central question of this research is: What are the patriarchal structures in free improvisation and how do I find a practical resistance?

I will explore this question in scholarly, but also practical ways. I will focus on three case studies to investigate resistance and masculinity in free improvisation. First, we will encounter the AACM, a black music collective that on one hand tried to resist the white dominant culture. Whilst at the same time established an all-male space,

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<sup>3</sup>Valerie Solanas. *Scum Manifesto*. Verso, (1971) 2015, pp. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ahmed, 2017, pp. 251.

excluding female musicians from participation. Thus we must investigate, through an intersectional view, the different forms of resistance within the patriarchal structures of improvisation. Following this we will analyse masculinity, in performance and sonic gestures, through the work of Peter Brötzmann.<sup>5</sup> It is through these two first case-studies that we will find an understanding of patriarchal structures in free improvisation, that can then be investigated with a feminist method. An analysis of the Feminist Improvisation Group will allow us to view their use of household tools on stage as a feminist resistance to the male free improvisation scene in the UK. Each of the case studies is a good example to show existing forms of patriarchy, but also forms of resistance to this. It is through the socio-political situ of each case-study that we can also understand the complexity of power structures, and how these operate through different forms of oppression. Whilst at the same time they allow me to develop my saxophone improvisation into a feminist response by using playing techniques and preparations of the instrument that might challenge erected improvisation structures.

Further to this, it is already important to state that for me there is knowledge that resides between technofeminist discourse, free improvisation, touch and social reproduction, which I will explore through a practical (in language/text) approach in this thesis. This methodology (more on this in the section on methodology) is entangled story-telling; my practical developments with the saxophone find further exploration in writing. The stories will entangle the scholarly and practical research and will interrupt the case-studies (more on this below in the methodology). On one hand they deliberately disrupt ‘traditional’ and hierarchical ways of writing, whilst at the same time they entangle the learned academic outcomes with a reflection of my personal practice. These stories find their full potential further to the end of this thesis (Chapter 3, section 3.6), where I describe my practical approaches using spit and different preparation of the saxophone to challenge masculine performance

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<sup>5</sup>The choice to discuss Brötzmann is personal. People mentioned that my playing occasionally sounded like his, and this playing was often related to an inclusion into male music spaces.

spaces.

### 0.1.1 Existing Spaces - An Overview

I found that most of the practice-led research in music practices remains within dichotomous, often binary structures of research.<sup>6</sup> Practice portfolios and the contributing academic text or critical reflection of the practice are often two separate bodies. These boundaries blur, undeniably, but they are handed in as two separate items (one being the written part, the other the ‘practice’). This is also what I am - partly - submitting here.

Most practice-led writing on free improvisation lack the actual liveliness of the performance; encounters that might happen when playing. Although some of this research follows an auto-ethnographic approach, they still remain within an academic voice, not fully exploring the potential of writing about free improvisation, where other participants and bodies might also find a voice within a specific performance. For example, in practice-led research, the work by Franziska Schroeder keeps the text and the practice as separate entities.<sup>7</sup> Although she discusses entanglement and touch as a vital agent within free improvisation, her writing doesn’t reflect the idea of touch, of sensuous, entangled materialisations.<sup>8</sup> I will describe my own approach to these challenges in the methodology section below.

It was therefore that apart from investigating in a scholarly way the history of free

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<sup>6</sup>I am predominately thinking about practice-led PhDs coming out of the programme I am contributing too as well. It seems like that the Creative Music Practice PhD has not questioned the dualisms present in the form and structure of these theses. I am not critiquing individuals here, but it was this binary structure that bothered me, especially in regards to a practice like free improvisation that is deeply entangled and complex.

<sup>7</sup>Franziska Schroeder. “The Body Skinned: Rethinking Performative Presence”. In: *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 14.4 (2010), pp. 60–64.

<sup>8</sup>Further I am thinking about the work by Georgina Born. “Music and the materialization of identities”. In: *Journal of Material Culture* 16.4 [2011], pp. 378-388. Georgina Born. “After Relational Aesthetics. Improvised music, the Social, and (Re)Theorizing the Aesthetic”. In: *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*. Ed. by Georgina Born, George E. Lewis, and Will Straw. Duke University Press, 2017. David Toop. *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation And The Dream Of Freedom. Before 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016.

improvisation and its gendered performance space that I wanted to find a practical, unifying method to entangle my improvisation in text. Instead my practice, my method, my research are *one* body that you find in front you.

## 0.2 Practice and Canon

I also started questioning my own practice and that of my fellow musicians, especially in respect to how much we reproduce patriarchal musical structures. I started wondering about women musicians and how they have found ways to find their own voice in the free improvisation spaces. Of course I have seen women perform, listened to their music and occasionally also read interviews or texts by them, but up to this point I have never fully engaged with the socio-political spaces they make music in. I wanted to find answers and ideas to situate my own questions and help me develop a different - personal - approach to free improvisation. As already mentioned, I find the socio-political aspects of free improvisation important to understand and it therefore is telling that practitioners and thinkers like Evan Parker, Eddie Prévost or Derek Bailey emerge almost all the time. I don't want to deny their contributions, considering Bailey's diverse presentation of improvisation in *Improvisation. Its Nature and Practice in Music*.<sup>9</sup> However, his diverse analysis misses a deeper understanding of socio-political spaces and leaves out women completely. In that way I also don't deny Parker and Prévost's practical contributions to free improvisation. What I do critique is the use of their voices and practices as canon.

It is their dominant presence within academic, but also practical fields. Parker becomes the 'virtuoso' sax player for case studies<sup>10</sup> or gets invited to write introductions to essay collections on free improvisation.<sup>11</sup> More so he even got awarded an

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<sup>9</sup>Derek Bailey. *Improvisation: Its Nature And Practice In Music*. Da Capo Press, 1993.

<sup>10</sup>See: David Borgo. *Sync or Swarm. Improvising Music in a Complex Age*. London: Continuum, 2005.

<sup>11</sup>For example: Evan Parker. "Introduction". In: *Soundweaving: Writings on Improvisation*. Ed. by Franziska Schroeder and Meál Ó hAodha. Cambridge Scholars, 2014.

Honorary Degree. Parker co-ran and founded the magazine *Musics* together with Bailey and David Toop and others.<sup>12</sup> There is an element of practitioners writing themselves into academic canons by publishing, teaching and also practical workshops. Performers and thinkers like Prévost and Toop come to mind, both I know from workshops and conference presentations.<sup>13</sup> As we will see through this thesis, it is/was men who ran and occupied the spaces of free improvisation, the socio-political fact is that these men controlled and produced these spaces, either by running their own labels, organising events and also their teaching.<sup>14</sup> For now however let us return to the beginnings of my research.

I started in a more traditional academic way by going through existing literature to find these resisting women and it is quite telling that I only found a group of women through the writing of a man. George Lewis' *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*<sup>15</sup> turned into some sort of handbook (also due to its size) helping me to engage with white music ontology and a needed intersectional view on social power dynamics in music. His book left me with more questions than answers, and it was especially the voices of the females in his book that resonated most with me. Lewis wrote a needed and important text on the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and its very specific political space, but in my opinion shies away from an actual engagement on sexism in musical groups, addressing the systemic sexism that we as socio-political musicians reproduce.<sup>16</sup> The above mentioned books by Bailey or Prévost do not mention the

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<sup>12</sup>David Toop and Steve Beresford, eds. *Musics. A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. ecstatic peace library, 2016.

<sup>13</sup>See: Edwin Prévost. *No Sound Is Innocent: AMM and the Practice of Self-Invention Meta-Musical Narratives Essays*. Small Pr Distribution, 1997 and Edwin Prévost. *The First Concert: An Adaptive Appraisal Of Meta Music*. Harlow: Copula, 2001. See: David Toop. *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation And The Dream Of Freedom. Before 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016.

<sup>14</sup>Again, the example of running the magazine *Musics* is important, but also UK labels like *Psi* run by Parker.

<sup>15</sup>George E. Lewis. *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>16</sup>Lewis mentions the likes of black feminists like Angela Davies and Michele Wallace, but his book is predominately about experimental music-making outside of the white canon.

work of women in free improvisation at all. In the anthology *Musics* we find very few texts, interviews or thoughts by women, for example *Women's Liberation Music Projects*.<sup>17</sup> However they are the minority. David Toop's book - co-founder of *Musics* - mentions the Feminist Improvising Group in passing and doesn't engage with the women's movement at all.<sup>18</sup>

As a student I have not once been presented with female improvisers, but had to find them on my own. Because of this, I started to understand the oppressive force of ontological 'man'. My education and my personal experiences as a female improviser made me angry, in the way that Ahmed talks about the 'killjoy',<sup>19</sup> namely that the killjoy becomes a method of using this anger to engage with a current situation. I wanted to write a strong and critical thesis that addresses an existing ontological patriarchy in free improvisation. I state this clearly from the beginning: it is nice that men have 'invented' free improvisation and contributed to cultural progress, but bluntly I don't care. As we have seen in recent years, institutions are being queered, de-colonised and diversified.<sup>20</sup> I see this thesis to be part of that movement, of voices challenging, questioning, dismantling and arguing with established patriarchal structures. We no longer accept the "brick wall job"<sup>21</sup>, Ahmed uses this metaphor to describe academic institutions not moving forward, not changing their processes, but rather try to include queer or gender studies into their already existing structures.<sup>22</sup> To me inclusion into patriarchy is not good enough.

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<sup>17</sup>Nicole Freni. "Musics, No. 13, August, 1977". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. Ed. by David Toop and Steve Beresford. ecstatic peace library, 2016.

<sup>18</sup>David Toop. *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation And The Dream Of Freedom. Before 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 297.

<sup>19</sup>Ahmed, 2017.

<sup>20</sup>A very limited overview, but women who at least have found a voice in academic contexts: bell hooks. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. Routledge, 2010. Especially the work of Sara Ahmed. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017. Thinking by Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, (1990) 2006.

<sup>21</sup>Ahmed, 2017, p.98.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 98.

### 0.3 Terms - Terms - Terms

Throughout this thesis I will use different terms, sometimes addressing similar or identical issues, but each of these terms can have their very specific and own historic and political context. Thus, I would like to clarify some at the beginning and already relate them to their academic/practical discourse.

#### **Improvisation**

I have already used the term free improvisation, so it will be good to start with an explanation. As previously remarked, free improvisation could be compared to the concept of space, and “if space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality.”<sup>23</sup> Free improvisation carries sonic symbols, as well as human and nonhuman relationships and it is in constant movement. Therefore Massey’s thinking on space as ‘plurality’ seems important to mention at this point, because I will continue talking about multiplicities and networked bodies. For her and for me, multiplicity means to acknowledge that a free improvisation performance is constantly in a process of being made, while at the same time referring to past events. This thesis in itself should be considered like this; it is a body of improvisation: by this I mean a constant weaving and mingling of stories.

Free Improvisation by its very nature grants equal access to everyone (in theory), meaning that anyone with the requisite creativity or curiosity could take on music-making (...) develop original playing techniques or build original instruments.<sup>24</sup>

Somehow free improvisation is associated with an idea of freedom. Above we read that this includes an accessible space of creativity, in theory a non-hierarchical space, a collective space allowing for different explorations of group music making, instru-

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<sup>23</sup>Massey, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Marta Blažanović. “Echtzeitmusik. The Social and Discursive Contexts of a Contemporary Music Scene”. PhD thesis. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2012, p. 2.

ment developments and generally an assemblage of performers coming together resisting and asserting given cultural and musical ideals. There already lies the crux of the entire myth around free improvisation. I will argue that these ideas about freedom and accessible spaces are false, at the very least not addressed by practitioners or academics. I believe that free improvisation practices remain within a patriarchal space, where a dichotomous structure between performer and instrument remains in place. Thus I would like to approach free improvisation under an intersectional view to challenge these structures through various different feminist methods. For now, let us ponder a bit more on freedom.

When people take to the streets together, they form something of a body politic, and even if that body politic does not speak in a single voice - even when it does not speak at all - it still forms, asserting its presence as a plural and obdurate bodily life.<sup>25</sup>

Listening to Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, I wondered whether it was possible to relate their comment above to specific socio-political situations in which free improvisation performances might happen.

We will see that, from its beginnings, free improvisation is maybe more rooted in activism. The term freedom is often used in relation to free improvisation, but also in political activism as an expression of aspiration for an oppressed minority. In this context of free improvisation, and for the purpose of this discussion, freedom must be interpreted as part of improvisation's specific situation. Not all free improvisers and experimental musicians agree on the same ideals of freedom. Therefore, I rather come back to Butler:

(...) whether resistance is a better name for this freedom, since freedom does not emanate from a part of the soul or a dimension of one's nature, but is articulated in its exercise. And in the case of resisting occupation,

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<sup>25</sup>Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Polity Press, 2013, p. 196.

the specific form that freedom takes is resistance - or, at least, that is one dominant form.<sup>26</sup>

I think Butler's quote allows us to think about free improvisation as a resisting musical practice (which I also reflect at the beginning of this Introduction in my Manifesto). Resistance as an active force stands for a struggle, an activism, and as Butler says, resistance is the form that freedom takes. Free improvisation thus becomes a resistance, a doing-without what is demanded or expected. Resistance is activism, opposing forms of appropriation. This can include appropriations of culture, ideologies, economy and other things. Improvisation and other ways of experimental music making (often) resist not only culturally appropriated music, but also the symbols and rituals this appropriated music expresses. Butler talks about freedom as exercise. It is what we do that creates ideas or spaces of freedom, which certainly is reflected in free improvisation practices. This can include playing in different spaces, organising more on a DIY level, but also using the performance space as a means of political resistance (we will find examples of these throughout this thesis). Free improvisers are "willing to put their bodies in the way, to turn their bodies into blockage points that stop the flow of human traffic, as well as the wider flow of an economy."<sup>27</sup> These ideas will become clearer throughout this work. For now resistance is identified as a form of opposition against given and appropriated rules.

As well as free improvisation I use the term free jazz, sometimes interchangeably in respect to its sound, but really distinct in its historic meaning. Free jazz, as we will see in Chapter 1, is deeply entangled with the Black Power Movement, and the term free jazz carries this political-activist meaning. It is deliberately distinct from free improvisation, because it represents its own political and artistic history,<sup>28</sup> but

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 181-182.

<sup>27</sup>Ahmed, 2010a, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup>Free improvisation occurred later in history as well, namely the mid 1960s. See: Toop. *Into the Maelstrom*, 2017, p.14.

- and this is the crucial aspect - these artistic practices of course overlap. As we will see, George Lewis and also Peter Brötzmann agree on a ‘sonic’ mixture of free jazz and free improvisation.<sup>29</sup> The term free jazz is predominantly used when listening to the stories of black musicians and their use of the term in Chapter 1, but also when addressing Brötzmann or others specific playing techniques and sounds. Free improvisers copy playing techniques and styles by ‘free jazz’ musicians like John Coltrane or Albert Ayler, whilst Lewis already argues that the AACM and other musicians also reproduced the ‘European style’.<sup>30</sup> This thesis is not here to argue about distinct terms or correct uses of terminology, but it is important to state that free jazz and free improvisation have mingled. Whilst at the same time it is also clear that free improvisation isn’t a unified term either, hence why I used Massey’s quote above.

To me personally, free improvisation offers me a wider approach to the instrument and the performance space, more in relation to the Feminist Improvising Group (see Chapter 3) that used food, household machines and clothes to diversify the free improvisation space. In that context of ‘multiple approaches to free improvisation’ we should think about musicians like Andrea Neumann and in general the Berlin-based Echtzeitmusik musicians, who use a wide palette of instrument ‘techniques’ from reductionist, minimal music to DIY circuit benders and modular synth players.<sup>31</sup> The broad practices in free improvisation are impossible to list in this space, but there are some books giving a limited overview on what free improvisation might be.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Lewis, 2002.

<sup>30</sup>George E. Lewis. “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives”. In: *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002), pp. 215–246.

<sup>31</sup>Burkhard Beins et al., eds. *Echtzeitmusik Berlin. Selbstbestimmung einer Szene*. Wolke, 2011.

<sup>32</sup>A very limited selection on the diverse ideas around free improvisation: George E. Lewis. *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. David Toop. *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation And The Dream Of Freedom. Before 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016. *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*. Edited by Georgina Born, George E. Lewis and Will Straw. Duke University Press, 2017. Tara Rodgers. *Pink Noises. Women on Electronic Music and Sound*. Duke University Press, 2010. *Echtzeitmusik Berlin. Selbstbestimmung einer Szene*. Edited by Burkhard Beins et al. Wolke, 2011.

## DIY and Amateurism

On this note I occasionally refer to DIY or amateurism in free improvisation. These ways of performing or even organising concerts stand as critical and opposing attitudes to other ways of thinking or approaching free improvisation. I have already mentioned *Echtzeitmusik*, a collective of free improvisers, spaces, organisers and labels, that established itself through a DIY culture. *Echtzeitmusik* founded itself around squatting empty buildings in East Berlin<sup>33</sup> and labelled itself ‘Underground New Music’.<sup>34</sup> *Echtzeitmusik* is interesting for trying to understand the meaning of DIY culture, because they organised events by owning or co-owning the performance spaces, developed theoretical frameworks, workshops and book publications around their creative developments.<sup>35</sup> They allowed spaces of musical and scholarly explorations to emerge.

When I talk about DIY events or instruments then I mean approaches similar to the *Echtzeitmusik* scene. I played in squats, private living rooms, basements and other ‘non-music’ venues. I find myself more often in venues or musical events where I personally know the people, where we won’t receive a fee and where I might have to play through a guitar amp, because an actual speaker system isn’t available.

In that way I also use the term amateurism, but more in regards to ‘playing’ an instrument. Through the work of *Harry Pussy*, especially that of drummer Adris Hoyos, the ‘non-trained’ musician illustrates a refusal of work (pre-established playing and performance techniques). Amateurism stands for a conscious choice to play against standard musical practices, these musical standards are dependent on their socio-political spaces.

Typically, established musical knowledge conforms to standards and norms of technique, training, or education. These standards and norms

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<sup>33</sup>Beins et al., 2011, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>Blažanović, 2012, pp.25.

<sup>35</sup>Most of these ideas are presented in this book that they compiled and wrote themselves. Beins et al., 2011.

enact a powerful regulation of musical cultures. By performing music in opposition to these standards and norms, musicians appear to lack or reject musical knowledge entirely. As a way of knowing, amateurism offers an alternative to established musical knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Amateurism stands in opposition to ‘technique’. A refusal of established - predominantly - male ideals in free improvisation will allow a different approach to an instrument, but also the free improvisation performance in general. This refusal is what I will develop as a methodology of feminist improvisation. Very broadly, refusal of practice exists with the understanding that making music in capitalism is under capitalist relations. Thus when we make music, and especially when we reproduce existing ways of music-making, we reinstate the working conditions of capitalism. Namely that established ideas around work produce objects of knowledge allowing work to become the “primary basis of capitalist relations.”<sup>37</sup> When we reproduce established techniques, because they have become the ‘objects of knowledge’ then we create relationships of exchange under capitalist conditions. We will see how performers like Brötzmann and Mats Gustaffsson define their playing around understandings of capitalist working relationships.<sup>38</sup> It is exactly this idea around definitions of free improvisation practices that I find mostly within academic contexts, as Julia Eckhardt says:

A canon shapes one’s orientation for artistry, within the general history which is told. It comes along with musical training, role models and blueprints for the setting up of a career, and postulates cultural values inherent to artistic languages. It defines spaces. A canon is never a neutral account of what has been made, but an active tool in shaping

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<sup>36</sup>Benjamin Court. “The Politics of Musical Amateurism, 1968-1981”. PhD thesis. University of California, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work. Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Duke University Press, 2011, pp.97.

<sup>38</sup>See: Chapter 2.2

the very definition of the term ‘making’.<sup>39</sup>

It is exactly what Eckhardt already outlines as problematic and that I experienced as well. Namely that a canon, a repetition of specific musicians or techniques justifies or doesn’t justify my own creative practices within institutional contexts. I found these experiences problematic, to say the least, and I rather propose ways of finding enjoyment in our creativity, something that allows social relations to exist, but outside of a need to define our music making within institutionalised terminology.

### 0.3.1 Masculinity versus Feminisms

#### Bodies

The etymology of the Greek word dichotomia means “cutting in two.” Karen Barad asserts that this cut implies the notion of difference.<sup>40</sup> In actual fact differences are made through cuts; they are not found, but made. It is important to remember that some of the following encounters follow an ontological cutting into bodies that therefore establishes the differences in bodies (human and nonhumans) that have occupied Western society for centuries. When thinking about the saxophone as a tool, as detached from the human touch, then the saxophone is being cut off and made a separate entity in our ontology (see Chapter 2 and Conclusion 4). Donna Haraway and Barad have shown how thinking in dichotomy creates separate bounded bodies.<sup>41</sup> This helps us to consider the ‘cut’ between male and female, a binary structure establishing two distinct genders in socio-political spaces. The structuring of human and nonhuman existences around binary structures is established within masculine

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<sup>39</sup>Julia Eckhardt. “Self and Other, World and Music”. In: *Grounds For Possible Music. On Gender, Voice, Language, and Identity*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup>She critiques the dichotomous thinking of the Cartesian cut. Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 48.

<sup>41</sup>Especially Chapter One. Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, 1991, pp. 7.

ontology.<sup>42</sup> Woman and nonhumans walk around in erected and pre-conceived structures. Already in *Gender Trouble* Butler establishes ways of thinking about gender outside of the binary structures.<sup>43</sup> This questioning of gender within binary structures is a strong voice in my thesis. It will be through the work of the so-called technofeminists that I will try to establish a more entangled, connected material world of humans and nonhumans within free improvisation spaces.<sup>44</sup> Technofeminists use a “critical, speculative and queer position - in theory and practice - to question the coded relationship of gender and technology.”<sup>45</sup> Technofeminist theories like that of Haraway’s ‘situated knowledges’, where she argues that the body as site is central for knowledge production,<sup>46</sup> allow us to think about bodies (human and nonhuman) as entangled, situated and complex. Annie Goh already links Haraway’s thinking to a critique of dualisms within sonic practices:

Situated knowledges requires not only a complex embodied vision, but also the politics of situatedness - positioning, partiality, and an anti-universalism. Above all, the ‘god-trick’ as the view from above is most vehemently rejected. In making the case for sounding situated knowledges, I argue that both Haraway’s specific notions of embodiedness and situatedness are necessary in this feminist intervention in contemporary sound studies.<sup>47</sup>

In this research the saxophone will become the ‘site’, the tool and the space to help

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<sup>42</sup>Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, (1990) 2006, pp. 10.

<sup>43</sup>Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 59.

<sup>44</sup>The term technofeminism appears already in Judy Wajcman’s book with the same title. In there she already links the term to a feminist investigation in science and technology studies. See: Judy Wajcman. *Technofeminism*

<sup>45</sup>My translation: “...kritische, spekulative und queere Positionen an, die - in Theorie und Praxis - das kodierte Verhältnis von Geschlecht und Technik hinterfragen”. Cornelia Sollfrank, ed. *Die schönen Kriegerinnen. Technofeministische Praxis im 21. Jahrhundert*. transversal texts, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup>Donna J. Haraway. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”. In: *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988), pp. 575–599, pp. 581.

<sup>47</sup>Annie Goh. “Sounding Situated Knowledges: Echo in Archaeoacoustics”. In: *Parallax* 23.3 (2017), pp. 283–304, p. 288.

me establish a non-binary, a more queer view on our performance spaces. A body - and here I'll include humans and nonhumans - that materialises through touch.

### **Feminisms**

You already came across the term feminism, but really you will find feminisms throughout this thesis. We have already heard a little bit about intersectional feminism above, we will listen to black feminism,<sup>48</sup> technofeminism and academic feminism. All these different approaches to feminism have been fruitful and eye-opening to me personally, thus I would like to use feminism here as a practice and method making audible the struggles and resistance against dominant performance ideals. Feminism(s), to me, is a political act of solidarity and intersectionality. The focus here is on an entanglement of different political spaces that feminists have sought to answer with different specialist focus. The work by Sara Ahmed, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Michelle Wallace, Kimberlé Crenshaw or Audre Lorde to part focuses on racist and white capitalist sexism.<sup>49</sup> Further, all these women have established a critique against institutional, academic and juridical sexism and racism. It is especially their voices when we have to think about de-colonising academic canons, it is their voices we need to listen to when trying to create new forms of political systems and most importantly it is their voices that helped political movements to be active.

The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower.<sup>50</sup>

I find it important to address the white, dominant culture I come from. Hopefully, by analysing and critiquing these power structures, we can think about a more supportive empowerment with each other. Through the work of feminists of colour thinkers like Haraway managed to establish her ideas around 'cyborg feminism',

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<sup>48</sup>The use of 'listening' is explained through the work of Yves Lomax further below.

<sup>49</sup>See predominantly Chapter 1.

<sup>50</sup>Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984, p. 112.

an intersectional analysis of bodies within colonised, technological and hierarchical states.<sup>51</sup> Further to that, works by Haraway, Barad and Judy Wajcman focus a lot on materialist, technological, scientific and biological feminism, these women have investigated the entanglement and complexity of networked political spaces.<sup>52</sup> It is especially the focus on materialism that interests me most, specifically in regards to the saxophone. Its own active material, how it gets occupied by my bodily fluids, but remains a symbolic tool within our wider political space. Bodies (human and nonhuman) are materialisations of lived experiences. In fact, we as bodies reflect the white patriarchal system. We as bodies are proof that this oppressive system exists.<sup>53</sup> These feminist thinkers have found a voice within music as well, especially the works by Marie Thompson and Goh push to decolonise the ‘white aurality’ within music academic contexts.<sup>54</sup>

In this thesis I’ll explore bodies (non/human) that have participated in these oppressive musical structures, but hope to find practical methods to open up these patriarchal structures. Through an analysis with the help of all the feminisms mentioned above, I want to understand the saxophone’s history in a patriarchal free improvisation space and entangle it into a liquid and fluid state within its socio-political space. In order to address the question of whether the saxophone, or instruments in general are gendered male, Wajcman claims that “society itself is built along with objects and artefacts.”<sup>55</sup> This also means that gender is embodied in the material world and that objects “operate as a site of for the production of gendered knowledge and knowledge of gender.”<sup>56</sup> In line with Barad and Haraway, Wajcman says that objects have often been treated as ‘background objects’. Since the masculine

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<sup>51</sup>Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, 1991.

<sup>52</sup>See Haraway, Barad, Wajcman

<sup>53</sup>Ahmed, 2007.

<sup>54</sup>See: Annie Goh. “Sounding Situated Knowledges: Echo in Archaeoacoustics.” 2017. Marie Thompson. “Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies”. In *Parallax* 23.3 (2017), pp. 266-282.

<sup>55</sup>Judy Wajcman. *TechnoFeminism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

world is the systemic power in which we participate, these background objects, including saxophones but also other instruments or tools used to make music, remain within a male ontology.<sup>57</sup> In Chapter 2, I will discuss these power structures in order to conclude that the social space is always tied to objects. “Society itself is built along with objects and artefacts.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore the saxophone, and other tools used to make music, constitute the social experience as well as an aesthetic one.<sup>59</sup> Through the work of Jane Bennett we can learn that materiality in itself is vital, she “highlights the active role of nonhuman materials in public life” and calls this the ‘thing-power’.<sup>60</sup>

Here already is a connection between these feminist critiques, it is about patriarchal ontology as the background force shaping bodies (human and nonhumans), structuring us into categories. I will use a feminist critique to challenge these symbolic power structures and relate them immediately to my saxophone playing, where I amplify the liquid and wet things sliding through its body. The network of feminisms has shown to be most fruitful for my own practical development of this research. It will allow us to look at free improvisation spaces (including its human and nonhuman participants) as a moving and continuous, but socio-political situated performance.

The strength of feminism is that it is strongly attached to a rigorous social analysis - that is, one that meets certain evidence standards, yet always links research to a political practice of making a difference to the network and its effects.<sup>61</sup>

## Masculine and Others

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<sup>57</sup>See: Butler, (1990) 2006 and Ahmed, 2017.

<sup>58</sup>Judy Wajcman. *TechnoFeminism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004, p. 39.

<sup>59</sup>Georgina Born. “After Relational Aesthetics. Improvised Music, the Social, and (Re)Theorizing the Aesthetic”. In: *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*. Ed. by Georgina Born, George E Lewis, and Will Straw. Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 36.

<sup>60</sup>Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup>Wajcman, 2004, pp. 126-127.

However, to use feminism as a method of practice and research it will be important to go a step back and lay out some frameworks of research method. I have already said that the masculine or patriarchal world is our systemic power structure, it is also the free improvisation ontology. Above I already talked about the dichotomous thinking and structuring the world. Pierre Bourdieu already states that:

An inclusion into the system is based on homologous differences: high/low, bottom/top, front/back, right/left, straight/bent (and also deceitful), dry/wet, hard/soft, sharp/dull, bright/dark, outside(public)/inside(private) and so on, that also partly correspond to body movements [...].<sup>62</sup>

Bourdieu addresses the categorisation of binary structures in our ontological thinking, this is one of the ways I will define masculine practice in this thesis. It is a need to categorise practice or sound into existing structures. Women and other marginalised groups were labelled as weak, non-educated, slaves and working bodies. This creation of the western ontology is based on oppositions, binaries in order to prosper capitalism, to exploit marginalised people, to consider tools as accumulators of wealth (also in cultural context). Silvia Federici, but also Angela Davis show these political violent spaces, their affects on human beings, but also in a wider context on society and the world as a whole.<sup>63</sup> When defining other people as weak, worthless or in general as ‘other’ to white men, he can create a world based on his supremacy.<sup>64</sup>

We will see how women, especially the female AACM musicians or the Feminist Improvising Group, won’t have found easy inclusion into existing male-dominated free improvisation spaces (more on this in Chapter 3). Maleness considers the world in

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<sup>62</sup>My translation: “Eine Eingliederung ins System basiert auf homologer Gegensätze: hoch/tief, oben/unten, vorne/hinten, rechts/links, gerade/krumm (und hinterlistig), trocken/feucht, hart/weich, scharf/fade, hell/dunkel, draußen(öffentlich)/drinnen(privat) usf., die zum Teil Bewegungen des Körpers (...) entsprechen.” Pierre Bourdieu. *Die Männliche Herrschaft*. Suhrkamp, 2016, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup>See: Silvia Federici. *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004. Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Culture and Politics*. The Women’s Press (1984) 1990.

<sup>64</sup>More on this in Chapter 1.

hierarchical structures,<sup>65</sup> it often forgets that it comes out of a history of oppression and entitlement. In a more sonic context we can listen to Thompson's use of the term 'white aurality.'<sup>66</sup> She argues that ontology is really a white understanding of the world, it manages to exclude a diversification of relationships and continues to oppress 'other' voices. Through the works of Frantz Fanon, Sara Ahmed or Judith Butler we can already understand that the 'other' is always in opposition to the white man, as already said above, as women we are the 'desired other'. Fanon talks about this in relation to the black man mirroring the white capitalist supremacy, because the black man only exists within white ontology.<sup>67</sup> Whilst Butler analyses the gender binary through the ontological possession of the phallus:

Women are said "be" the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the "reality" of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position.<sup>68</sup>

Just to make clear, these binary ideas will appear throughout this thesis to give context to the struggles we are still facing. They also help to find counter practices to these erected structures. Through the work of Fanon and feminists like Butler I will show how women, but also instruments are designed (through language and political relations) to fit into these existing binary structures. Thus Butler's quote above allows us to see that breaking outside of the 'phallic ontology' might get us closer to what I already mentioned earlier, namely an entangled understanding of our spaces, which I'll label a feminist improvisation in this thesis.

### **Liquid Bodies Touching**

You will see that in Chapter 3, section 3.8, I will explore the saxophone as a female

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<sup>65</sup>Julia Eckhardt. "Self and Other, World and Music". In: *Grounds For Possible Music. On Gender, Voice, Language, and Identity*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2018.

<sup>66</sup>Marie Thompson. "Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies". In: *Parallax* 23.3 (2017), pp. 266–282.

<sup>67</sup>Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin White Masks*. Pluto Press, (1952) 1986, p. 83.

<sup>68</sup>Butler, (1990) 2006, p. 61.

body, often associated as a permeable and wet body that stands in opposition to hardness and masculinity.<sup>69</sup> I want to create the female body as a body that becomes a site of musical and performative resistance by using this ‘wetness’ to critique male spaces. I will engage with the oppression of the female body, especially its manifestation as weaker, dirtier and wetter,<sup>70</sup> and how we can use these ideas as a method of analysis, practice and critique. This liquid and wet understanding of bodies also allows us to consider the saxophone as an entangled body. It is never fully dry and in movement as well, be it through an actual occupation by my spit, the different temperatures outside and inside its body or my breath or touching on and through its body.<sup>71</sup> This is also part of my feminist practice; a very close, wet, dirty and entangled understanding of the nonhuman and human participants in free improvisation.

I consciously use the wet space as a feminist metaphor, on one hand to play with the binary idea of hard equals male and liquid equals woman, an instrument like the saxophone is ‘hard’ it is made out of brass, but at the same time can get really wet. It is these oppositions that made me think about ways of entangling or in fact de-entangling the saxophone out of its patriarchal world. I believe that you can’t define the saxophone as a unified instrument, it is in a state of change and I wanted to use that understanding of the instrument as a practical and methodological tool for this research. It is especially here where the theories of Bennett, Haraway and Barad - technofeminists - become most fruitful, the human is considered in constant engagement with the material world, we are bodies materialising as part of specific touching, and liquid substances kneading their way into the materials of the instruments. This connection of bodies (human and nonhuman) fuses separate entities. It is then that sound and touch can envelope these individual bodies into a momentary unit. In Chapter 3, section 3.6, I will fully explore how this feminist improvisation

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<sup>69</sup>Julie Dawn Smith. “Diva-Dogs: Sounding Women Improvising?”. PhD thesis. The University of British Columbia, 2001, p.79.

<sup>70</sup>Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 116.

<sup>71</sup>MacCormack, 2012, pp. 123.

can be a method of practice and research.

## Listening

In *Sounding the event* Yves Lomax writes as if in the moment of listening to an event unfolding.<sup>72</sup> In this work she explores writing as a form of listening, unfolding and theorising the event. Listening becomes a method to explore ‘silenced’ meanings, theories and voices and I follow Lomax in that way that I will listen to voices often silenced within academic discourse. When listening to marginalised voices outside the canon we can open up and explore other spaces. This is why when I cite women I will explore them through listening, I will give their voices more weight, more space to theorise and establish my own research/practice. This means that it is those voices I listen to that shape this thesis, it is their voices that allow me to develop my practice and it is their voices that expand and queer the space. Listening is also a friendly invitation to the reader to listen too. It highlights and emphasises the words and thoughts that are asked to be listened to.

Listen twofold. But listen even harder to that which is relegated to the background. Yes, listen to that other noise, which is in the background, just within earshot.<sup>73</sup>

I am aware that in recent research and practices musicians have queered spaces.<sup>74</sup> There has been an important shift in the understanding of allowing different voices to perform. I am aware that there is not one masculine world, that masculinity first of all has been going through cultural changes, but clearly also doesn’t just represent one group of people.<sup>75</sup> However, as mentioned I wanted to come to understand the still existing structured and masculine free improvisation spaces. Thus I found a historic view and an investigation into the ‘ontology of man’ an important task

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<sup>72</sup>Yve Lomax. *Sounding The Event. Escapades in dialogue and matters of art, nature and time*. I.B. Tauris, 2005.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>74</sup>I am thinking about artists like Juliana Huxtable, Terre Thaemlitz and RKKS. Also the the Sonic Cyberfeminists Research Group, see: [sonicyberfeminisms.wordpress.com](http://sonicyberfeminisms.wordpress.com).

<sup>75</sup>Paul Baker and Giuseppe Balirano, eds. *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018.

to undertake. On one hand to allow a contribution and critique of existing literature/practice, secondly - and more importantly - to allow other voices to emerge on the academic canon. It is through this analysis and historic investigation that I am able to develop a different practical method, one that entangles practice, research and writing. It is an invitation to listen to the words and sounds of this thesis.

## 0.4 Entangled Methodology

This introduction wants to lay a frame of reference for topics and ideas that are going to emerge throughout this thesis, however this thesis is in itself a body of assemblage and will reach its full potential through a reading process. The methodology of this research is a form of storytelling that allows the networked, multiple and liquid non/humans to present themselves. This practice-led research is really embodied in the text you have in front of you, the stories that will follow, but also the more case study-like essays *are* the practical part of this thesis (of course entangled with the music also accompanying this thesis).

During the progress of this research I started exploring the saxophone in different ways. I explore the saxophone's bell with my mouth, lick around the mouthpiece, and change the 'expected' sounds of the instrument and its body through preparations with small microphones, CDs or massage balls.<sup>76</sup> Following the works by Andrea Neumann and Mette Rasmussen I also started to extend and change the saxophone's body with these different objects, as well as playing on it elsewhere than just its mouthpiece and using playing techniques that are not that conventional.<sup>77</sup> These different playing techniques give me space to explore the saxophone's inside, stuff it with massage balls and used bows (mostly the wooden part) to play on the

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<sup>76</sup>Full descriptions of these different playing techniques can be found in *Servicewomen* 3.5, *Amateurism* 3.8 and *Chewing* 4.2.1 and in Chapter 3, section 3.6.

<sup>77</sup>Daniel Spicer. "Mette Rasmussen". In: *The Wire* 371 (2015), p. 16.

outside of its body.<sup>78</sup> Over the past years my practice has been influenced more by women and this was a conscious choice. Some of these women have influenced my research in different aspects and will thus appear throughout this thesis. I listened to AGF's text/voice pieces that have found a direct use in the story writing of this thesis, but also my later pieces as part of this thesis. These women are my companions - to use a Harawayian term here.<sup>79</sup>

When I started to play in ways I described above then it allowed me to encounter a lot of things, sounds, smells, and textures, that I never touched before. It was these very practical and close encounters with the instrument that made me wonder how to include Jane Bennett's 'thing-power' into text. Listening to Bennett's 'thing-power' we learn that materiality in itself is vital.<sup>80</sup> Following that, how could the saxophone become a character and a full agent in this thesis and research? What this meant for me is that the saxophone is the methodology, as already mentioned before, the saxophone will help me to use spit as a practice to queer this space.

Weaving was already multimedia: singing, chanting, telling stories, dancing, and playing games as they work, spinsters, weavers, and needleworkers were literally networkers as well.<sup>81</sup>

Sadie Plant weaves stories and histories of women, queers and technology into a new text. Her approach - that of weaving politics, gender, biology and technology - is similar to those of Haraway<sup>82</sup> or Barad.<sup>83</sup> All these technofeminists have networked history and politics, and made connections that often remained hidden. I follow their approaches in this thesis; like improvisation, weaving connects, but also carries

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<sup>78</sup> Ashley Paul uses the bow on the bell of her saxophone to create drone-like resonances, whereas I wanted to 'hit' the instrument with objects that would create shorter sounds.

<sup>79</sup> Donna J. Haraway. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Bennett, 2010, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Sadie Plant. *Zeros and Ones. Digital Women and the New Technoculture*. Fourth Estate, 1998, p. 65.

<sup>82</sup> Amongst others, see: Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, 1991.

<sup>83</sup> Amongst others, see: Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007.

symbols of past events.

My methodology is that of weaving a multitude of factors in free improvisation into practice, research and writing. Or in fact, the methodology allows these three distinct sections to become entangled. There are two very important works in art writing that have shaped the structure and form of this thesis, *Cosey Complex*<sup>84</sup> and *Reality Flickers*.<sup>85</sup> *Cosey Complex* is a collection of essays and works around the performance artist/musician Cosey Fanni Tutti, where “method may be put to work into practice [...]”<sup>86</sup> Cosey turns into a verb in the collection of essays, her work and body becomes the method of further explorations around creative processes. So you’ll find non-linear writing, sound as writing (i.e. Cosey Fanni Tutti’s music career as a creative impetus for writing) and her actual body (she worked as a sex worker) as a methodology for other practices, predominantly writing in this case. So she becomes ‘coseying’:

[...] Cosey from artist to cosey as a new adjective that conflates Cosey’s artistic expression with the everyday cosy adjective and cosiness in order to express the collapsing, proximities, multiplicities and mucosal viscosities between these surfaces of femininity.<sup>87</sup>

It was especially the idea of turning a body into a method by making it a verb or adjective that resonated most with me. It is also - as shown in the quote above - that close encounters with other bodies might offer spaces of femininity. By body I really mean an assemblage, a place of action. It is a corporeal surface where all sensing is happening inside/on/with. Body is understood in what I already outlined above, namely a more technofeminist understanding of non/human bodies, bodies that are entangled, that are “intersection of a multiplicity of bodies.”<sup>88</sup> It is this networked,

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<sup>84</sup>Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett, eds. *Cosey Complex*. Koenig Books, 2012.

<sup>85</sup>Katrina Palmer. “Reality Flickers. Writing With Found Objects and Imagined Sculptures.” PhD thesis. Royal College of Art, 2011.

<sup>86</sup>Fusco and Birkett, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup>Patricia MacCormack. “Mucosal Coseying”. In: *Cosey Complex*. Ed. by Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett. Koenig Books, 2012, pp. 123–128, p. 123.

<sup>88</sup>Arthur Kroker. *Body Drift. Butler, Hayles, Haraway*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012,

feminist theoretical framework that allowed me to develop this practical method of story writing. It is in those stories where the feminist improvisation practice emerges, the stories focus often around different views (for example the saxophone's view or the female gaze onto a male saxophonist). More importantly, these stories give voice to things that otherwise might be unheard, for example smells and tastes. Especially Bennett's writing on 'thing-power'<sup>89</sup>, but also Barad's agential realism<sup>90</sup>, the entanglement of the social and the material world, have shaped the approach to my stories.

I mentioned that Katrina Palmer's work was an initial help for my story writing, she develops sculpture as a narrative form:

It [the thesis] creates and describes its own form, and produces its own spaces in order to make the writing an artwork. An art school and the studio are reconfigured as the fictional site of production that features in the story of the work, along with institutional furniture, bureaucratic demands and idealised conceptual ideology.<sup>91</sup>

She further explains that the thesis "narrates its own materialisation."<sup>92</sup> Similar to Palmer my practice is also within language, but the stories I write are taken from experiences as an improviser and researcher. As in the quote above, the stories are descriptions of real events, but are processed into fictional entanglements of scholarly research, practice and practice development as well as historic contexts. Entangling the 'outside' academic research with actual experiences at performances and creating a - partly - fictional narrative allows me to show the focus of this thesis, namely a method of writing (practice) that is tightly connected to the actual process of making music. As said above, there have been attempts to include more auto-ethnographic writing into research on free improvisation. Especially practice-led research allows

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p. 15.

<sup>89</sup>Bennett, 2010.

<sup>90</sup>Barad, 2007.

<sup>91</sup>Bracket added by me. Palmer, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

these auto-ethnographic encounters to exist,<sup>93</sup> but as said already, I don't think these attempts come close to what Palmer and the writers in the *Cosey Complex* achieve. They manage to embody their artistic practice and let it materialise into language. Palmer's text especially materialises as a socio-political sculpture. It is her entire thesis that represents her practice and it is only through reading her thesis that the sculpture appears.<sup>94</sup>

I used the approaches described above, but wondered how to keep a coherent structure when integrating a form of storytelling into more academic case-studies. In the end I decided to work with changing voices. One voice being the more informal stories that interfere into the case-study like essays. There's a deliberate change of the voice's register in these texts. By this I mean that the case-studies are written in a language more in the tradition of scholarly research, whereas my stories fully explore the scope of free improvisation in language, so you might find more vulgar or rude language in there. From a more editorial perspective, these stories are openers, criticism, placeholders or reflections. Like a musical counterpoint, these stories add a different voice to the discussion. They are equally researched, based on actual performances, but altered and extended in ways to make them unrecognisable. The stories are carried by the voice of Ahmed's 'killjoy'.

As mentioned several times now, the connectedness of the material world within its socio-political culture really needed to be represented through a focused analysis of different free improvisation stories. For this thesis I focused on more 'historic' events, although my practice itself is more rooted in contemporary practices in art writing and sonic technofeminisms, but as said these two will appear side by side. Already I have talked about the need to critique existing canons and thus saw another need to engage with more historic events. It is for that reason I'll focus on the AACM, the Feminist Improvisation Group, Peter Brötzmann and a conclusive

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<sup>93</sup>I am thinking especially about the Creative Music Practice programme of this university.

<sup>94</sup>Palmer, 2011.

section to entangle these stories. Technofeminists like Plant and Haraway both write dense, networked and complex texts. It is through this complexity that we can see connections. The other important aspect of my methodology is that these stories are connected, topics and themes emerge throughout this thesis to keep and shape a coherent story.

### **She Saxophone**

The saxophone is a gendered female character in this thesis. She is Saxophone, a rhythmic agent, but still passive with no possessive pronouns. She can't speak of herself, you won't hear her say "my body is silver". Although she has an understanding of her 'thing-power', I wanted her to remain entangled at all times, so that she becomes the character to represent this liquid space, where body borders are not needed. The gendering of the instrument immediately gives her a different socio-political status; thus the gendered saxophone might question the pantheon of male improvisers and their techniques. More so, a female saxophone, like cosey as verb, allows a different materialisation of practice. It will put the saxophone into a different political space and give an agency of activism and feminism.

At the same time of course I am still - most of the time - the dominant character in our performances, thus she often remains in a subdominant role. In relation to what we have read above, the world is structured within Thompson's 'white aurality'.<sup>95</sup> It is especially the technofeminists and black feminists who have helped to critique these spaces of white supremacy, and is with their help that we can use the label 'nonhuman' for saxophones and other nonhuman bodies. The term nonhuman in my research is a feminist term, as explored, it actively participates in situated knowledges and can thus critique the patriarchal (white) ontology.<sup>96</sup> Following my use of the term nonhuman allows a shift of perspective and a listening process to the bodies/voices of my instrument. Thus I focus on nonhuman agency and allow

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<sup>95</sup>Thompson, 2017.

<sup>96</sup>Especially Thompson's critique on these movements as ignoring the social, anthropocentric renunciation and establishing a 'universalism'. *ibid.*, pp. 267.

a wider, networked view on our materialist world, but none of the women I quote - Haraway, Bennet or Barad - forgot the political space these things participate in. This is something that will become clearer in this thesis, as my spaces - as already described above - are always within a field of socio-political relations. The nonhuman bodies I discuss are political, tied into a network of colonialism, patriarchy and gender, following Harway's 'situated knowledges' mentioned above.<sup>97</sup>

Further to that, the saxophone is the method of this thesis and if we consider material or the instrument as part of an enactive engagement, and not as a representation, then this enactive relationship will allow us to view human and nonhuman relationships as entangled. When Saxophone speaks, when we will listen to descriptive voices about her body or the wider improvisation space then we connect to an idea of loosening the body of the instrument. Loosening the instrument into a liquid practice, one with spit, fun and amateurism, one that tries to be in the moment. Sounding bodies are in contact with each other, they melt skins into a prosthetic state. These stories will explore this fusing of bodies, the melting of skins as feminist practice. They lay groundwork of free improvisation spaces, other humans involved and give voice to relationships and events that otherwise you hardly read about, but that are equally important to understand our socio-political performance spaces.

In that context, sound, the performances or recordings of jam-sessions can be listened to along these stories. They function either as a different layer to the text, by giving meaning or context or they are more of a sonic accompaniment to the writing. Sometimes you may choose to listen to the music alongside reading (or not). The stories and recordings can - and should - work on their own as well.

My audio-recorded practice is listed in the Appendix and can be found on the accompanying USB. The tracks are clearly labelled within the main body of this thesis and on the USB stick, but you will find the full descriptions of the Practice-

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<sup>97</sup>Haraway, 1988.

led Research Portfolio in the Appendix, A.<sup>98</sup>

As said, however it is the language-based work in front of you that is the unifying practice. Of course the accompanying performances are important and they - as said - have shaped the writing, they show a change in practice approach. All of my practical developments are found in the stories, further in section 3.6 of Chapter 3. You will hear more of my personal voice and the practical development there, but really I invite you to read this thesis *as practice*. The main focus of this research is to show how a method of loosening, liquifying and spit can allow a writing/practice process to entangle existing scholarship and practice.

One thing that is very important for me to state: the written stories in this thesis are somehow procedural, they show you a 'progress' and development of my practice from its beginning to its final stages. They show how my feminist practice developed through the course of this research and highlight issues encountered during performances (whether social or instrument-related).

Over the course of this research I wondered how far I could re-insert, so to say, the text back into a free improvisation performance. The first attempt to do this is the last story in this thesis: *Chewing, Sucking, Eating*, 4.2.1. It was turned into a stand-alone sound piece with spoken voices. It uses different free improvisation recordings to collage the text and musics into one piece. To finish this research I took this approach further and wrote a text - based on the findings and writings of this thesis - for a live performance.<sup>99</sup>

I would like to open this research with a writing about one of my performances,

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<sup>98</sup>You will find more music than I refer to in the written part of this thesis; I want to give you a broader overview of my practice that I have been doing over the last years. First of all to show that my practice progressed throughout this research, especially when this research method allowed me to create writing reflecting my free improvisation practices that I could later use to write pieces. (Especially the work *Pardon, I have Tentacles*. The other reason why I included more sounds than discussed in this thesis was also to show the collaborative aspects of my practice and that I indeed do this practice because it is fun (which I will discuss at the end of this thesis). I want to make sure that there is a (free improvisation) life outside of academia for me.

<sup>99</sup>*Pardon, I Have Tentacles* was premiered at BBC's Tectonics in Glasgow, 6th May, 2018. You can find this on the USB stick: Pardon - Track 1.

where the feeling of group collectivity was disturbed by the space in which it took place.

# Performance Outfit

[Listen to: Tindegger & Usurper - Track 1]

wooden-sticks

drum-sticks

double-bass-bow

contact-mics

tape-recorder

flower-watering-can

metal-scrap

metal-shield

a-trumpet-thing

mouthpieces-of-brass-instruments

box

springs

caps person-wearing-cap

noise-pedals distortion-pedal

fuzz-pedal

delay-pedal

noise-gate-pedal

marbles

head-massager

pipe

tapes

plastic-lids screws pin-shaped-objects

nails

brushes-with-metal-hair

soft-brushes objects-that-are-percussion-tools

metal-spiral elf-shoes-with-bells

plastic-containers

cardboard-container

miniature-microphones-inside-saxophone-bell

audio-cables-attached-to-mixer

toothpaste-tube

toothbrush

trumpet-mute

coasters



karaoke and he's forgotten the lyrics. Tears. Uttering tears. Mournful tears. Decay. Bodily decay. I have the feeling I should know this song. Bowie?! He is a ruin of 2016. Dead. Bowie is a big idol for a lot of people here and elsewhere. I am seeing a lot of Bowie-inspired outfits here at this gig, flash colourful glitter-make-up, tight leggings, sparkly outfits. On stage the torturous self-flagellation continues. Melodies of sobbing lip sounds, facial expressions of despair, sadness. Old age. The old-aged body is crying about its youthful loss. Decay. Ruins. Self-righteous bodily decay. Projecting messages into space: The world is fucked. Bowie is dead and our bodies are getting old and weak.

Awkward, we are slightly embarrassed watching this guy on stage. Seeking for each other's help we try to comfort each other by standing closer. In the back, covered in the dark. We should all be holding hands really. We need bodily contact to feel safe here. Us against individuals. Individuals in costumes. Individuals and their loss. Individuals and their bodily decay. What did Marx say again: There is no such thing as an individual there is only society... I think something like this he must have said. The emerging sounds are vibrating in the air. Really heavy, smelly sounds. Individualist male performances, sweaty stinks of empty words escaping the mouth into the air. We can't escape. The sounding air is keeping us imprisoned. He's serenading his own personal loss. He's clearly not happy. Wacky looking guitar controller heating up the beats, an attempt to uplift the individual sorrow into a shared experience. A crippled performer on the floor now, hugging himself. Finding comfort in himself.

How did I get on stage? It is so bright I can't see anyone. The spotlight is right in my face. I can just about see shadows of creatures in front of me. Dark, bodily shadows starring, standing. This light is uncomfortably hot. I don't want to sweat. I am just sitting and I am getting already too hot. Sweat is a sign of giving in to the music performance as laborious work. We are here to resist individualist performances. We won't sweat, sweat means work. We are respiratory performers, minuscule gestures of air. That stupid spotlight is going to accelerate my body fluids. Deep breathing. We are trying to block out the projections behind us with our own bodies and objects. Artworks

heightening the individual over the social. Artworks of our time. Selfies, collage-selfies, dressed-selfie, there are pictures of children, nucleus families, people photo-shopped. Pictures of children wearing massive sunglasses. Today seems to be *the law of the individual concerned exclusively with satisfying her desires*.<sup>100</sup> Audience looking at their own selfies. Group of people looking at themselves. Projected mirror reflections of themselves. Their mirror-neurons reacting to their own gestures, faces, bodies. How will they learn from others? We need others to breath, think, progress. Our mirror-neurons need to learn from the other.

What is happening? I can't hear anything. Am I playing? I think so. Am I? Reassuring myself I am accelerating my breath through Saxophone. Where is everyone? Bow scratches on guitar iterating interruptedly from amplifier. Particles of undefined metal scored by brush with metal hairs glistening through speakers. There is too much background noise. Cackling. Humans. Our miniature dump is quiet. Sparse movements of sound. Small tools vibrating sonic gestures throughout widely spacial breaks. Our ears are trying to find each other. Breathing actions reflect from different corners of this space. Toothbrush stroking over wood in frantic repetitive movements. A rubbing consistent sound, harsh brushes scraping up and down. The same gesture repeating. Plucked guitar strings. Breath amplified. Fingernail flicking against metal sheet. There is so much dense air in the room. A heavy human presence hanging in space. We can't push through this heavy noise. Our bodies are moving, doing. There is so much resisting force from the audience. The toothbrush stops, it couldn't break through. The guitar and Saxophone continue in exchanging rhythmic pops. Saxophone's percussive pops, pressed down keys allowing a more effective pop. Tongue working with hard pressure on reed, creating a tension, waiting for the guitar to end its harsh string slaps on body, release of wet muscle. Repeating, repetition in increased tempi.

Human noise is strong. A collective of Bowie-inspired bodies, melting into a noisy cloud of resistance against our miniature dump. What do they want? *It seems, then, that we*

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<sup>100</sup>Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Verso, 2008, p. 75.

*have all-too-ready an answer. Why! They want shoes and chocolate and handbags and babies and curling tongs washed down with a large glass of white wine and a complaint about their job/men/friends.*<sup>101</sup>

They force us to be on our own, pushing us away. We can't hear each other. That fucking spotlight, there is sweat now dripping down my back. I stop doing anything, just listening and hearing the others. Sweat, the condensation on my skin forced out by the heat of this light and my annoyance over those noisy, irritating people. Sticks hitting harder on wood. Marbles moving around in metal bowl. Fuzz pedal turned up, boosting the amplified signal of guitar into distorted fuzziness. Squeaky Saxophone, seagulls flying over the heads of the audience. Restless sounds escaping the sparseness trying to find each other. Each on their own. Little spits, grunts. Blowing through pipe neck. He is wiggling the elf shoes. Keys on guitar. Plastic bag on contact mics. Turning up noise gate and spitting, metal sticks hitting wood, imitating my rhythm. An intimate duo of rhythmic spit and wood. Miniscule movements and rhythms. Expanding to the other objects now, hitting metal bowls, the lids, plastic boxes. A drum-kit made of useless objects. We are a slap-tongue and object-percussion toy duo. We are inside a dollhouse, small gestures. Tiny sounds. Delicate rhythms. Repetitive rhythms.

Too big. Too big. Need shrinking. Shrinking. Dismantling body. Miniature. Smaller. Make less. Too big. Too big. Shrinking. Take body away. Destruction of body. Taking apart. Destruction. Small as human hand. Mouthpiece resting in human hand. Touched by warm palms around body. Body gone. Tool in dollhouse. Miniature tool. Delicate. Too big. Mouthpiece and neck are enough. Appropriate for dollhouse. Deconstructed body. Fit for dollhouse. Air through small, slender body into microphone. Amplified, distorted breath sounds. Breathing. Controlled. Sparseness. Small toy duo on first play-date. Careful. Shy. Small. Come closer to dollhouse for deconstructed sonic bodies. Resisting big noises. Comfort in hands. Small.

Resisting the noisy air from around us. The guitar is taken over by their noise, too loud.

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<sup>101</sup>Nina Power. *One Dimensional Woman*. Zero Books, 2009, p. 30.

Destroyed the dollhouse. Annoying disturbing noise everywhere now. I take a break. I am listening to the room, the people. Getting out of our dollhouse, our space. All of a sudden the other performers are sucked away. They are gone. Their voices dispersed into the room. Their sounds sucked away by an underlying muttering of voices. Getting louder. The audience is talking. Not whispers. Cackles of human voices. Our sparse miniature playing got sucked away into background noise. We are not present. The audience is showing no interest in us. Sparseness can be silenced by ignorant noises. Our miniature dump is a buzzing sound object flying around the room. They are silencing us. Eliminating our sounds. Louder. More voices. A wall of babbling laughs and chatter. If I would lean closer I could possibly hear what they are saying. Moving my chair closer to the audience, lifting my head, extending my ears.

The others stop playing. The four of us are now looking straight at the audience. Staring. Silenced. Moving our eyes over the audience. Silently sitting in stasis. Suspending our performance. Waiting in our own discomfort. Confused by this ignorant behaviour we shyly move our bodies a bit. Creating a presence on stage again. A metal object is hit, quietly, almost inaudible. The other performer's bodies are moving to it, they are doing something. I use my mouthpiece and hit Saxophone. Very slowly and suspended for as long as I can. Sparse. Building up our previous miniature dump again. Occasional flickering of sounds emerge. Delayed in long breaks of sounds. One scratched metal sound. He is blowing into something, his breath pressed through a small tube. I am not comfortable, breathing frantically through Saxophone, imitating his tubal breath. Guitarist is speaking into a tape recorder: "Shhh! Shhhhh! Hush! Shhhh! Quiet. SHHHHHHHHHHHH." Noises of crushed paper. Silence. Voices talking. Strings. One damped slap-tongue. A breath. Almost too scared to disturb the audience's conversations. We are trying to hold it up. The tape gets played back through the guitar pickup. Quietly and not too present to disturb their conversations. I am out. I sit back. I watch. I look at people, see them holding their beers, chatting. Scan through the room. Look at those faces with Bowie make-up. Their tight leggings with pharaoh print. Golden latex, two massive pharaoh faces on his thighs. Other people dressed up in some trashy

80s glitter, glamour look. Massive hair, tons of hairspray. Glitter leggings, leather jackets, and frilled skirts or shirts. Some of their faces are painted with black bold lines or triangles. What marks are they? What do they mean? I have been in this exact same spot before. Wondered the exact same questions. *Material culture such as clothing became symbolic of an invisible cultural war between the classes.*<sup>102</sup> Style seems to be a main force in creating a force-field of belonging together. People share the meaning of specific ideas, objects and materialism. Make-up certainly is a very prominent factor of style, same as clothes. Those immediate symbols of performance show the others who they are. Standing out from crowd. *Such cultural codes are ideological, they are structured and pragmatic in so far as they represent a togetherness or belonging. They mean something to themselves and at the same time to the others.*<sup>103</sup> I have to smile and think about improvisers who often wear clothes that can be described as toned-down. Simple. Boring. I have even seen extreme cases where people taped over brand names on clothes. If asked, then most of us will probably say that we don't care about what we wear. We would be lying. I made a conscious choice tonight to wear what I wear to deliberately present myself as "I don't give a fuck about what I wear". No make-up, an old second-hand jumper, black jeans, ankle boots. A deliberate antidote to those with the Bowie make-up on their faces.

FOR FUCK'S SAKE, JUST SHUT UP!

Our guitarist got really annoyed. Angry shouting and staring. Woke me up and shouted at the audience. I am grateful he did that. That was brave. The guys are at it now, the guitarist woke us up. Ignoring the audience's muttering. Accelerating our playing, faster, louder, quicker, turning the volume up, faster, louder. I grab Saxophone of my lap. Fill my lungs with air and blow through her as loud as I can. Over the top of those voices. We are fighting back. Our peaceful, sparse dump music didn't work today. We need force, noise, volume, attack. Criticising the others. Turning them into an annoying

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<sup>102</sup>Patrick J. Williams. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

part of our performance. I have to apologise, I am being a pompous improvisation bitch here. *There can be joy in killing joy. Kill joy, we can and we do. Be wilful, we will and we are.*<sup>104</sup> Why are we not dancing along with the others? Why are we not dressed up and happily jump around? I am not Emma Goldman: “If I can’t dance, it’s not my revolution.” Although to be fair, she danced because anarchist activist were not supposed to show themselves happily dancing around. Goldman resisted what was expected of her. If I don’t dance, if I stare at a cackling audience, if I continue to play our sparse music then I am dancing my revolution. With Saxophone and my friends we are dancing in our sonic space.

Squeaking, loud, distortion. Closer to our microphones. Turning our volumes up. As loud as possible. That is still not enough. We are using our voices now. Screaming, all four of us loudly screaming through our instruments, pick-ups, microphones. The guitar gets put aside, instead the horn is picked up. This weird horn from Denmark is blown. A tourist souvenir. It sounds like a strangled goose. Sucking air through the horn. Such a weird instrument. A reversed horn, sucking instead of blowing. Screaming. Annoying as fuck. Finally, I can’t hear the audience anymore. We are a massive wall of screams and squeaks. Having left behind the dollhouses, full-sized bodies screaming. Bickering back. An aggressive flock of geese. Bickering. Croaking. Done. We won. We leave.

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<sup>104</sup>Ahmed, 2010b, p. 592.

# Chapter 1

## Resistance in Free Improvisation

In *Performance Outfit* (section 0.4) we have read about improvisation in its social-political space. We read about resisting a laughing and loud audience by playing quietly or extremely loud. Already in this story we learn about different forms of resistance in performance spaces.

In this chapter I will focus on the AACM, a black music collective resisting the white dominant culture. I want to give voice to groups that have no or very little visibility in the history of free improvisation. As outlined in the Introduction I want to present an intersectional approach (more on this below) to present sonic resistance in specific ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore I will investigate the power structures of patriarchy onto female musicians. It is here where we will encounter black feminist thinkers as another creative resistance to socio-political structures. Listening to the voices and thoughts of marginalised people helps to change existing academic canons. On the other hand, the black female musicians showed me how to establish my own improvisation spaces, stepping outside of pre-idealised performance techniques, but starting to play predominantly in self-organised gigs or venues. It is through their activism and fight for participation in creative spaces that we can learn about how power structures function, but also - and more importantly - how to resist by establishing our own creative spaces.

Improvisers of worldwide stature - such as (Charlie) Parker, Coltrane, Taylor, and Coleman - are (at best) mentioned in passing, while pages are devoted to the work of relatively obscure individuals whose written descriptions of their improvisations far outpace in quantity their audio documentation.<sup>1</sup>

George Lewis shows the racial divide in the history of free improvisation, and the lack of inclusion of black voices in white context.<sup>2</sup> It is those “obscure” individuals<sup>3</sup> who left a text who are more likely to be referenced and reproduced in academic, but also practical context. Therefore their practice seems to achieve a more meaningful impact.

In this chapter I will be working with academics who have tried to de-colonise the spaces of ‘white aurality’,<sup>4</sup> I will be listening to their thoughts and experiences and focus predominantly on their socio-political experiences. As mentioned in the Introduction, I consider this thesis partly as activism.

The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women.<sup>5</sup>

Intersectionality - following Crénshaw - is used as a working method to show the white power structures oppressing a diverse field of free improvisation. Whiteness is the political space that we have to decolonise in order to give voice to artists that

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<sup>1</sup>(First bracket added by me.) Lewis identifies the creation of whiteness in free improvisation, criticising the work of David Cope, 1993. George E. Lewis. “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives”. In: *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002), pp. 215–246, pp. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis mentions Malcom Goldstein and Derek Bailey identifying a gap of improvisation practices in music. See: Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>Thompson, 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Kimberlé Crenshaw. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. In: *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991), pp. 1241–1299, p. 1252.

otherwise remain voiceless. As said, I'll be listening to their voices and through that process find other spaces of free improvisation, outside of the white canon.

## 1.1 Intersectionality - Blackness

We begin by listening to the voices of African-American resistance musicians, their struggles and the formation of group belonging in music. I will focus on the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an all black music collective. Founded in 1965 the AACM describes itself as:

A non-profit organization chartered by the State of Illinois, the AACM is a collective of musicians and composers dedicated to nurturing, performing, and recording serious, original music (...). The AACM first coined the phrase Great Black Music to describe its unique direction in music. The AACM pays homage to the diverse styles of expression within the body of Black Music in the USA, Africa and throughout the world. This experience extends from the ancient musics of Africa to the music of the future.<sup>6</sup>

To give context to the formation and ongoing practice of the AACM musicians, we should discuss the socio-political space for African-American musicians during, before and after the civil rights movement. In general, African-American music has its specific history in the context of slavery, liberation and segregation. This music exists in its very specific embodiment, it is part of a wider network of entangled cultural practices, but under a dominance of white culture. As shown through the work by Goh (using Haraway) and Thompson a white ontology believes in a view from above.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>AACM. *About the AACM*. <http://www.aacmchicago.org/about/>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019).

<sup>7</sup>See: Goh, 2017 and Thompson, 2017.

Ontology - once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside - does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.<sup>8</sup>

Frantz Fanon outlines the space for an emergence of black music; blackness is always in opposition to whiteness, it remains within a space of otherness and not agency. Musics that have often been associated with African cultures (like blues or jazz) are in actual fact what Amira Bakara (LeRoi Jones) calls “American African Music.”<sup>9</sup>

A product of the man in this country; or to put it more exactly the way I have come to think about it, blues could not exist if the African captives had not become American captives.<sup>10</sup>

The idea that music in a cultural space defined by the white dominant class can allow ‘original’ ethnic music to appear is wrong, but allows for a marketisation of this music on the capitalist market, as well as on a socio-political level. When we remember Lewis’ quote from above then there is never an individual, bordered off cultural space. Black musicians in the USA are part of a mixed cultural space and don’t have a distinct, isolated sound. It is important to follow Bakara/Jones, Val Wilmer, and Lewis who argue that the music from the Black Power Movement is a fusion of African and European heritage as well.<sup>11</sup> However, we have to acknowledge that the political and social circumstances for black musicians are unique and therefore we could speak of a distinct social sound space.

The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright:

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<sup>8</sup>Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin White Masks*. Pluto Press, (1952) 1986, pp. 82-83.

<sup>9</sup>LeRoi Jones. *Blues People. Negro Music in White America*. The Trinity Press, 1965, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>See: Jones, 1965 and Val Wilmer. *As Serious As Your Life. Black Music And The Free Jazz Revolution*. London: Serpent’s Tail, (1977) 2018.

*It is the racist who creates his inferior.*<sup>12</sup>

Black identity exists under the binary definitions of superior and inferior, as Fanon shows, the white maker creates hierarchical structures to remain in power. When jurisdiction claims equality, the superior white creates borders inside societies to maintain race, gender and class relationships of power.

There was always a border beyond which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially. There was always a possible limitation to any dilution or excession of cultural or spiritual references. The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of white man's culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music.<sup>13</sup>

Music became a form of identification, where it is "potentially a basis for social structure. Yet I contend that music is not only a reflection of the values of black culture, but to some extent the basis upon which it is built."<sup>14</sup> However, American and European colonialism put African American music into Western frameworks that provided the grounds for 'accepted' jazz music during the 20th century.<sup>15</sup> Further, Sally Banes asserts that african american culture is always presented as exotic, wild, animalistic, and sexual.<sup>16</sup> In her view "white writers and other hipsters appropriated elements of black cultural style, from marijuana to sexual freedom to jazz prosody."<sup>17</sup> Banes draws the image of white people who were interested in the 'wild' and 'free' life of black people. This exoticisation reminds me of Irvin Schick's

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<sup>12</sup>Fanon, (1952) 1986, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup>Jones, 1965, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>Ben Sidran. *Black Talk*. Da Capo, 1981, p. xxi.

<sup>15</sup>Daniel Robert McClure. "'New Black Music' or 'Anit-Jazz: Free Jazz and America's Cultural De-Colonization in the 1960s'". PhD thesis. California State University, Fullerton, 2016, pp. 35.

<sup>16</sup>Sally Banes. *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Duke University Press, 1993.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

‘Ethnopedagogy’, which is the eroticisation of ‘others’, and especially the Arab woman as a sexualised body, which led to a belief in white male supremacy of invading these countries.<sup>18</sup>

The ‘Otherness’ which was central to Westerner’s concept of the Orient - it was what they were not - was expressed in terms which are both racial/cultural and profoundly sexual, both elements combining to define a terrain - the Orient - for control, power, and domination.<sup>19</sup>

It is not just that white writers appropriated black culture, they put it into a context of ‘otherness’. This yet again separates white from black, and maintains a separateness and division between people.

## 1.2 Cultural Colonialism and Resistance - Free Jazz

The white superiority analysed before might be summarised as cultural colonialism:

We’re colonial subjects in a decentralized colony, dispersed throughout the white mother country in enclaves called black communities, black ghettos.<sup>20</sup>

Cleaver, following Fanon, points out that black identity only exists within the white dominant culture, the white ontology. Thus, the political space during the Black Power Movement was that of the white dominant culture (and still is today).<sup>21</sup>

Assimilation became the process by which black folks could successfully enter the mainstream. Once again, the fate of black folks rested with

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<sup>18</sup>Irvin C. Schick. *The Erotic Margin. Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse*. Verso, 1999, pp. 67.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>20</sup>Eldridge Cleaver. *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*. Ed. by Robert Scheer. New York: Random House, 1969, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup>See: Fanon, (1952) 1986 and Cleaver, 1968.

white power.<sup>22</sup>

So far, we have seen how hook's quote above summarises jazz music, and its acceptance into mainstream culture. However during the period of the Black Power Movement, a different and more anti-colonial, following Fanon, form of activism became audible amongst black musicians.

During the 50s in Harlem, Charlie Parker's trickster alto sax provided the catalyst for bebop and for the counter-cultural scene that developed around it. By the time cultural nationalism and Black Power rolled around in the 60s, Bird had become a cultural icon among black intellectuals and artists, equalled in stature only by Billie Holiday and John Coltrane, not only for his art but for his political anger. Even when his music, his natty style in dressing, his existential alienation, and his troubling addiction to drugs seemed to fade into the margins as irrelevant to Black Power's affirmation, Bird's shadow lingered still to remind us of black creativity's crucial element, its profound deformation of white cultural hegemony.<sup>23</sup>

Wallace's quote shows how critical it is to use clothes, playing style, instruments and sounds as indicators of political resistance. Black musicians started to question their artistic adherence to western musical taste and clothes and concentrated on defining a more unique and distinct music.<sup>24</sup> Free jazz, and especially black experimental art, is a strong cultural example of a struggle to free a group of people from an imposed political identity. Free jazz and other black art forms are a refusal to conform to European expectations, by creating a black political space of resistance.<sup>25</sup> Free jazz not only extended 'conventional' playing techniques, or deconstructed the established forms of jazz or blues, but most importantly, free jazz is and was a

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<sup>22</sup>bell hooks. *Outlaw Culture. Resisting Representations*. Routledge, (1994) 2006, p. 214.

<sup>23</sup>Michele Wallace. *Invisibility Blues. From Pop to Theory*. Verso, (1990) 2016, p. 123.

<sup>24</sup>See: Lewis, 2009 and McClure, 2016.

<sup>25</sup>See: Wilmer, (1977) 2018, pp. 1.

socio-cultural movement.

I once wrote that early African American free jazz was characterized by contemporaneous reception as embodying a tripartite assemblage consisting of anger, noise, and failure. Everybody knows that failure is an orphan, but it occurs to me now that very little self-characterized art music confronts anger, perhaps because the artists are afraid to say what they might be angry about; we've allowed you extra resources and your own bourgeois playpen, so they tell us.<sup>26</sup>

The Black Power Movement voiced the understanding that the inventors of this 'angry' music were part of a colonised world, and that those were the conditions this music evolved in.<sup>27</sup> We need to consider the link between the Black Power Movement, including its radical forms like the Black Panthers, and the spaces it produced for black art to find a voice (including the AACM and the Black Arts Movement). This 'New Black Music' was "put together partly as a manifestation of a new black nationalism; therefore it has a place in the social history of free jazz."<sup>28</sup> Free jazz and experimental music, constituted as part of a black community and ideology, therefore emerges as potential forces of social action.<sup>29</sup> Free jazz "shows precisely how tight the links between social and musical factors are, and how the one cannot be completely grasped without the other."<sup>30</sup>

### 1.3 An Intersectional Listening To The AACM

What is compelling about the black social circumstance of the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of an analysis of aesthetics and politics is the

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<sup>26</sup>George E. Lewis. *Noise in and as Music - Interview*. Ed. by Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond. University of Huddersfield Press, 2012, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup>See: Wilmer, (1977) 2018, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup>Jones, 1965, p. 85.

<sup>29</sup>Sidran, 1981, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup>Jost, (1974)1999, p. 9.

apparent clarity of the relationship between the ideological dimensions of black culture and the material conditions in which they express themselves. Even where there was significant debate over the actual course that black liberation struggles should take by this time, as a whole, an increasingly urgent sense of collective self-determination and political will developed.<sup>31</sup>

The AACM was established in May 1965 by four people: pianists Muhal Richard Abrams and Jodie Christian, drummer Steve McCall and trumpeter Phil Cohran.<sup>32</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, I will keep the introduction to the AACM rather brief, and concentrate on its inner socio-political structure. The AACM was founded, in part to create a desirable artist space for black musicians. Broadly summarising, we could say that their music orientates towards jazz,<sup>33</sup> but also as a mixture of European avant-garde and free improvisation. In actual fact, the AACM could be considered a fusion of European and African culture heritage:

(...) these musicians often blend personal narrative reminiscent of an Afrological perspective with sonic imagery characteristic of European forms spanning several centuries.<sup>34</sup>

As described in the previous section 1.2, although black artists are within a specific socio-political field, their music and art reflect a mixture of musical cultures:

John Cage and Pirandello, Paul Desmond and John Coltrane, rhythm-and-blues and bebop, the tent show and the music school - this kaleidoscope of musical and social backgrounds is reflected, with varying intensity and clarity, in the music of the Chicago groups.<sup>35</sup>

During the period of the Black Power Movement, the AACM decided not to become

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<sup>31</sup>Hanson, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup>Wilmer, (1977) 2018, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup>Jost, (1974)1999, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup>Lewis, 2002, p. 236.

<sup>35</sup>Jost, (1974)1999, p. 167.

an interracial organisation.<sup>36</sup>

In this section we will focus on the AACM's lack of supporting female musicians, and listen to a black feminist critique in section 1.4. For now it seems important to state that the AACM became an all-black music collective. Remembering Cleaver and Fanon, then a space of black musicians is capable of forming a resistance to the dominant white artistic and economic force. An all-black music collective could identify as self-sufficient and self-organising, without having to adhere to or follow existing power structures.

The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: *Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks.* By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society.<sup>37</sup>

The AACM appeared to adopt this approach to black empowerment; a resistance to existing white artistic collectives and economisations. As mentioned through Bakara/Jones and Fanon, black people - although the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act were passed in the mid 1960s - were culturally and economically segregated at this time. But we should also always consider the broader economic field of precarious and low-paid labour.<sup>38</sup> For these reasons, the AACM chose to become a space for only black musicians. Shanta Nurullah observes:

Not wanting to be a part of the system, to go the white man's way. We would go our own way, and a lot of us fell on our faces economically. Phil used to preach that the black community should support the black musicians, and you shouldn't have to do anything else but your music. We had these great, talented people, and the world owed us recognition and money. I bought into that, and it was definitely downhill from there.

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<sup>36</sup>One of their first discussions on their identity, that also excluded women. Lewis, 2009, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>38</sup>See: Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Culture and Politics*. The Women's Press, (1984) 1990, pp. 74.

You can't demand that the community support you. Nobody owes you anything.<sup>39</sup>

These black musicians had to run and lead their own collective, their “practical role as grassroots academy and training ground for young creative spirits”, founding and establishing an artistic black identity based on “the idea of musical socialism,”<sup>40</sup> hoping that at some point this empowerment of black musicians could help to overcome the white dominant culture.<sup>41</sup> The AACM became a space not only of musical and creative exploration, but also a space for political and philosophical discussion, in which a black consciousness could be shaped.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.4 Listening To The Women In The AACM

I want to give space to a more intersectional view on the AACM, and this will involve listening to the very specific socio-political oppression black female musicians had to resist. In Chapter 3, we will hear other female musicians, who have been pushed into the background of free jazz and free improvisation. Often their roles were reduced to that of helping hands, organising festivals or positioned as ‘background’ performers. This is the same for women in the AACM, who were not granted access to the musical collective until the 1970s, and in actual fact it took another 20 years for the AACM to address its gender imbalance.<sup>43</sup> It seems controversial, considering that the Black Panthers for example had women standing alongside men to fight for their rights as citizens.

Since the 1970s black feminists have addressed that the fight against racism has often forgotten the fight for black women against sexism. More so, Angela Davis,<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 477.

<sup>40</sup>Wilmer, (1977) 2018, p. 153.

<sup>41</sup>Lewis, 2009, pp. 43.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 122.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 295.

<sup>44</sup>Davis has been an activist for decades, but for this purpose I quote: Angela Y. Davis. *Women*,

Audre Lorde,<sup>45</sup> Michele Wallace<sup>46</sup> and bell hooks<sup>47</sup> have all shown how “composing a blackness in which queerness, gender openness, trans lives and other non-linear alignments are foreclosed in efforts to maintain the rigidities of self-referentiality.”<sup>48</sup> We will see how this was also present in the structure of the AACM, considering the role and position of black women, we might be able to understand the musical and artistic structures within the AACM.

One unusually awkward moment for me as a black feminist was when I found out that white feminists often don't view black men as men but as fellow victims. I've got no pressing quarrel with the notion that white men have been the worst offenders, but that isn't very helpful for a black woman from day to day.<sup>49</sup>

Wallace here addresses the issue of a lack of intersectional consideration by white feminists. Further to that, I will listen to black feminists in order to present their issues and connect them to the structure of the AACM, and for that we invite Audre Lorde to speak:

Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less Black.<sup>50</sup>

In *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* Wallace shows that black male group dynamics exist within a wider social context,<sup>51</sup> where they had to ‘find’ their own sexuality and masculinity during the civil rights movement. During the times of the Black Power Movement then, the argument could be made that black men

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*Race and Class*. Random House, 1983.

<sup>45</sup>Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984.

<sup>46</sup>Michele Wallace. *Invisibility Blues. From Pop to Theory*. Verso, (1990) 2016.

<sup>47</sup>bell hooks. *Black Looks. Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.

<sup>48</sup>Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, eds. *Posthuman Glossary*. Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup>Wallace, (1990) 2016, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup>Lorde, 1984, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup>In the re-published version (which I am citing here), Wallace acknowledges some faults in her writing and revises her radicalism. See her introduction, pp. 28. Wallace (1978) 2015, pp.105.

were not only fighting for a racial freedom, but at the same time were trying to establish their own masculinity in a reflection to the white ideal.

Now that freedom, equality, rights, wealth, power were assumed to be on their way, she [woman] had to understand that manhood was essential to revolution - unquestioned, unchallenged, unfettered manhood.<sup>52</sup>

The role of the black woman became inferior to that of the black man. Although equally fighting for her right to citizenship, the black woman was never given the space to explore her own 'womanhood'. Davis<sup>53</sup> and Wallace<sup>54</sup> both identify a particular myth created by black men that slaves were also ruled by a black matriarchy. The myth presented black women as:

(...) gotten out of hand. She was too strong, too hard, too evil, too castrating. She got all the jobs, all the everything. The black man had never had a chance. (...) The black woman should be more submissive and, above all, keep her big, black mouth shut.<sup>55</sup>

Black women were intentionally defined as such, because they could be blamed for an 'emasculatation' of the black man, and therefore "give them a limited responsibility."<sup>56</sup> Davis and Wallace show that contrary to this myth, black slave women were in fact the poorest and the most victimised in society.

The question of black "matriarchy" is commonly misunderstood. The very term is deceptive, for "matriarchy" implies the exercise of power by women, and black women have been the most powerless group in our entire society (...) Black women's wages, even today, are lowest of all groups (...) But the status of black women can be viewed from two different viewpoints: one, as members of the larger society; two, within

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<sup>52</sup>Wallace, (1978) 2015, p. 87.

<sup>53</sup>Davis, 1983, pp. 23.

<sup>54</sup>Wallace, (1978) 2015, pp. 280.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

their own group. When they are considered as Blacks among Blacks, they have higher status within their own group than do white women in white society.<sup>57</sup>

The myth that black women had power was widely recognised as some kind of truth, and even activists like Cleaver believed that “I don’t owe you anything, black woman because (1) you sold me out and (2) you’ve always been ahead anyway.”<sup>58</sup>

For the purpose of understanding the AACM’s initial organisation as an all-male space, we need to consider Wallace’s analysis of the black macho as indicative of a historic moment, and of a black male movement that tried to establish black masculinity as a mirror image to the white man. It was the white man’s idea of what a black man should be.

To most of us Black Power meant wooly heads, big black fists and stern black faces, gargantuan omnipotent black male organs, big black rifles and foot-long combat boots, tight pants over young muscular asses, dashikis, and broad brown chests; black men looting and rioting in the streets, taking over the country by brute force, arrogant lawlessness and an unquestionable sexual authority granted them as the victims of four hundred years of racism and abuse.<sup>59</sup>

For Wallace, the image of the black macho was in direct connection to figures like Cleaver, Bakara and other Black Power Movement leaders. For her, these men established the black man as a violent, muscular and sexual body.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>This is a quote by Gerda Lerner in Wallace Michele Wallace. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. Verso, (1978) 2015, p. 274.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>60</sup>Part One: *ibid.*, pp. 67.

## 1.5 The AACM's Male Mentorship

For the AACM female artistic identity grew out of male mentorship, and an already existing body of male practitioners.<sup>61</sup> Women like Iqua Colson married to Steve Colson, or Maia (her artist name), who was married to Phil Cohran, were dependent on their husbands' artistic involvement and education. Iqua Colson became the first woman to enter the AACM in 1972, although her inclusion into the group was problematic and controversial, because male members questioned the need for female artists in the AACM.<sup>62</sup> Steve Colson acknowledges the controversial assembly to vote his wife into the group: "I got the feeling that some people just felt that it might interfere with, I guess, the camaraderie, the 'male bonding'(...)." <sup>63</sup> It was recognised that the AACM had issues accepting women as equal artistic contributors, and that they were generally considered as the wife of a man, who was already accepted into the artistic circle.

All of the women who became members were somehow connected with already active male members. I think that had something to do with, you know, the woman is supposed to walk behind you on the left-hand side, rather than right along-side you.<sup>64</sup>

The artist Maia has a personal anecdote to tell about being an 'attachment' to her husband, whom she met at an AACM meeting during one of his educational lectures:

At that point Phil was lecturing, he went way out in space somewhere. But I was out in space, so I was like, Yes! Here's somebody who knows what I'm thinking! He was talking about stars and how sound is hooked up with stars. Then he had us do a long tone, then the pentatonic, and

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<sup>61</sup>See also Chapter 3, section 3.6 on male mentorship and other female musicians.

<sup>62</sup>Lewis, 2009, pp. 295.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

he was explaining how it was connected to African people. I just felt that here I found what I had prayed for.<sup>65</sup>

Maia further states that she only had “a verbal contract to perform with Phil,”<sup>66</sup> which meant that her first creative explorations always existed under her husband’s control. It turned out that Maia’s entire musical career, and creativity came out of her husband’s mentorship. Reading between the lines of Lewis’ interview with Maia, it seems as if her husband was dominating their artistic relationship. She further acknowledges:

My whole world was built from his perspective. Even though I had my opinions, little by little if you buy into something, and you do something long enough, that becomes what you know. What I knew had nothing to do with everything else that was going on out there. I didn’t know that.<sup>67</sup>

On a contrasting note, John Coltrane and Albert Ayler both included their female partners in their own music. Ayler included his partner Mary Maria, with whom he even played saxophone duets, because he felt that he could help her to find exposure.<sup>68</sup> The same goes for Alice Coltrane, who continued being a successful musician, playing both with her husband’s band members and solo after his death.<sup>69</sup> Considering the AACM’s all-male space then, it does not feel surprising that some of these women who shared the same experiences went on to form their own all-female bands. Not surprising in the sense that if women were not allowed access to performance spaces, consequently they will have to create their own.<sup>70</sup> Having a space for their own explorations, creativity and the existence of their own identity. Not only that, but it also gave them a space to discuss their own topics, and ideas

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<sup>65</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 469.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>68</sup>Although no recordings of Mary Maria playing the saxophone are left. See: Wilmer, (1977) 2018, pp. 143.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>70</sup>I will discuss more on all-female spaces in Chapter 3.

on how to organise musical collectives.

## 1.6 All-Female Space

Escaping the male ideal of creative spaces asks for women to collaborate together. Shanta Nurallah became one of the members of the black all-female group *Samana*. When asked about her artistic development and gender inequality, she acknowledges that blackness comes with a basis of gender inequality:

Man is king and master, and woman must submit. (...) had me in turtle-necks and long dresses, so that no part of my body would be exposed except my face and my hands, no pants.<sup>71</sup>

*Samana* consisted of Shanta Nurallah, Maia and Nicole Mitchell, the group founded at a time when female membership was highly debated and considered controversial in the AACM.<sup>72</sup> In the case of the AACM, which did not want to lose their male camaraderie, an all-female group helped to give women a space to develop and explore their own ideas and form a body of resistance.<sup>73</sup>

Although arguably the ‘male camaraderie’ of the AACM allowed the men to discuss their politics and art, and therefore create their own kind of ‘safe space’. For the female artists however, they were excluded from an artistic movement that they felt they belonged to as well.<sup>74</sup> Allowing women to develop their own practice, and a resistance to patriarchal artistic structures. *Samana* wasn’t the only black, all-female group. There was also *Soujourner*, and these two all-female groups show

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<sup>71</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 477.

<sup>72</sup>(See section above 1.5) Satya Gummuluri. *Shanta Nurallah, The Sister with the Sitar: A Musician’s Journey*. <https://www.saada.org/tides/article/shanta-nurallah>. (Last accessed 02-04-2019). 2013.

<sup>73</sup>Marie Thompson and Susan Fitzpatrick. “Making Space: An Exchange about Women and the Performance of Free Noise”. In: *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 25:2 (2015), pp. 237–248.

<sup>74</sup>Considering the female participation in the Black Panther Party. Kathleen Neal Cleaver talks about this in *Women, Power, and Revolution*, 1998. <http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/cleaverwomenpowerrev.html> (Last accessed 02-07-2018).

how much a bond between women was needed for their own creativity to emerge and flourish:

I began to realize that I was getting something so totally different out of this all-female experience than I was getting out of a male experience. I know that playing with a women's ensemble is so different from playing with a men's ensemble, and I think that the more women come into it, the more women need to honor and support that female voice. I'm not talking about singing. I'm just saying that I think that what women bring to it is different.<sup>75</sup>

It was not just that all-female spaces would give space to a female creativity, but at the same time it might have offered some kind of 'safe' space for black women to discuss the white capitalist beauty ideal. Wallace and hooks, show how the mainstream media created a beauty ideal of white women, therefore black females were not considered 'beautiful' by their 'own' men.<sup>76</sup> Singer Abbey Lincoln acknowledges the "disappointment many black women experience when black men prefer white women aesthetically and sexually."<sup>77</sup> Having already established Davis and Wallace's analysis of black masculinity, we could attempt to look quickly at the fashion of the AACM. For that however, we must first understand:

That the white man made the black woman the symbol of slavery and the white woman the symbol of freedom.<sup>78</sup>

Following Cleaver's quote above, then it is important to point out the work of bell hooks on this in a more contemporary context. hooks discusses popular media culture from a black feminist perspective. She shows how access to material success, class status, and belonging to the white dominant culture has meant the rejection of blackness as a culture and history. For hooks this means that racism has been

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<sup>75</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 471.

<sup>76</sup>hooks, 1992, pp. 71.

<sup>77</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 201.

<sup>78</sup>Cleaver, 1968, p. 160.

internalised into capitalist structures.<sup>79</sup> Thus these movements have not resisted or changed our capitalist system. In fact, they have been internalised:

Despite civil rights struggle, the 1960s' black power movement, and the power of slogans like "black is beautiful", masses of black people continue to be socialized via mass media and non-progressive educational systems to internalize white supremacist thoughts and values. Without ongoing resistance struggle and progressive black liberation movements for self-determination, masses of black people (and everyone else) have no alternative worldview that affirms and celebrates blackness.<sup>80</sup>

The AACM can be seen as an illustration of misogynistic group dynamics, women were seen as a distraction from 'male-bonding'. Remembering Wallace, where she situates this idea of male group dynamics into a wider social context, and the history of white mastery: "more than any other group of women, black women have been deemed unfeminine and the furthest from the white supremacist ideal of beauty."<sup>81</sup> The black woman became a symbol of oppression instead of freedom. As Cleaver said, the white woman was considered a symbol to access economic wealth and status.

For this reason, it is worthwhile listening to black female musicians and their idea of beauty. How it gave them confidence to perform, and explore their creativity. Women in the AACM spoke out and questioned their husbands about the lack of support for black feminism:

(...) I asked Phil some years back, when we as black people reach Utopia, reach this point that we're reaching for, is that when you're going to deal with this issue that we have between men and women? Because the black revolution is more about the revolution of black men. The problems that

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<sup>79</sup>hooks, 1992, p. 118.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>81</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 201.

exist between men and women existed before racism came about.<sup>82</sup>

Female artists struggled to be seen as equals. The more often white women entered ‘their’ space, black women felt that their bodies and their artistic practices were not needed in the fight for freedom. Coming back to an earlier discussion, the white capitalist female beauty ideal - we are all exposed to those images - became the obstacle.

Dress and style became important markers of resistance; the Black Panthers are an example how the afro became a symbol of black freedom. Distinguishing their looks from the white mainstream meant a visual empowerment. Black females stopped straightening their hair as a protest, and an acceptance of their own body. Culturally, the afro became a symbol for revolution and protest and found its way onto the stage of black female musicians:

I saw those Afros, and I said, that’s how I’m going to wear my hair. I cut my hair off - oh, my daddy had a fit. You know, long hair, light skin, and I’m talking about, I’m black. I started seeing Nina Simone on TV, and little by little, the Afrocentricity started becoming more evident.<sup>83</sup>

The clothes of the AACM changed from “western-styled suits, dresses and hairstyles”<sup>84</sup>, to more African ethnic clothes and ‘natural’ hairstyles. Especially when some black women stopped wearing wigs or straightening their hair, their bodies became visual oppositions to the white beauty ideal. Nicole Mitchell’s engagement with black consciousness began when “looking for other outlets for her creative and intellectual pursuits. When she refused to straighten her hair.”<sup>85</sup>

As stated at the beginning of this Chapter, I feel that I should rather report on these black feminist issues, give voice to their thinking and issues, and relate their com-

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<sup>82</sup>Lewis, 2009, p. 470.

<sup>83</sup>(Maia in Lewis talking about watching the movie ‘Hair’) *ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

ments into a wider political space. With my approach I actually follow Lewis, who in his introduction states: “to explore the intersection of gender, class, and race in depth, including the construction of masculinity (...).”<sup>86</sup> Lewis’ report on the AACM, and especially the sections on masculinity and women remain quite uncritical, he gives voice and space to the thoughts and experiences of female musicians, but shies away from actually analysing these issues in a more intersectional approach. I took Lewis’ work on the AACM, but entangled them a bit further to black feminist issues on beauty, solidarity and artistic empowerment, whilst at the same time I used the work by Cleaver, Fanon and Bakara/Jones to show the wider socio-political space of black musicians. Having tied the specific black feminist issues into their wider political space, as well as their lack of inclusion into black artistic groups, I will use this first encounter with female issues as an opener of feminist critique.

## 1.7 Black Feminist Voices

For the AACM, as well as for other black artist collectives in Chicago, there is a connection to theatre and performance arts. The voice “not just as a singing medium, but also spoken and extended” becomes a key instrument in the resistance to white cultural dominance.<sup>87</sup> Although groups like *Samana* and *Soujourner* use instruments, the vocal form remains the main instrument for female musicians:

Comparatively, the most conventional vocal form in the music of the AACM is singing, although it is not unlikely that the voice is used principally in a quasi-instrumental way, with the words’ message secondary. (...) are instrument in conception and seem designed more for musical interaction with the instruments than to be accompanied by them in a traditional way.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. xviii.

<sup>87</sup>Jost, (1974)1999, pp. 172.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

The voice could be seen to represent black artists' struggle for cultural and political freedom. The voice is a very personal, embodied and emotive instrument. Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite* (1960) includes Abbey Lincoln on vocals. Her appearance on Max Roach's album is an activist voice, addressing the civil rights movement, the voice of a black woman.

[Abbey Lincoln] has a wonderful voice in the civil rights movement - a very important figure. This was of the time during the fights in the 1960s; you could hear the *Freedom Now Suite* by Max Roach, and she really was singing resistance songs "very good, very strong voice."<sup>89</sup>

The sound of instruments broadened into multiphonics and other extended techniques that also found their use in vocal performances.<sup>90</sup> Abbey Lincoln, Jeanne Lee, but also Linda Sharrock made extensive use of their voices as extended instruments, including various vocal techniques to express their creativity, like throat or guttural sounds and tongue clicks.

Listening to the album *Black Woman* (1969)<sup>91</sup>, Linda Sharrock actually offers more than just her voice; she is responsible for many concepts of the music that she and her husband made together. Sonny Sharrock acknowledges her growing influence on his work, saying:

If the woman is going to invade the holy territory of the artist, she's in a *lot* of trouble. You know, it's hard enough for a cat to make it, but being a woman must be really ridiculous because I know that people refuse to give Linda any recognition at all.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>My translation: "Eine wunderbare Stimme in der schwarzen Bewegung - 'ne ganz bedeutende Figur. Das war während der Zeit der Kämpfe in den sechziger Jahren; da gab's dann die *Freedom Now Suite* von Max Roach, und sie hat da wirklich Kampflieder gesungen ... sehr gute, sehr starke Stimme." (Brackets added by me.) Christoph J. Bauer and Peter Brötzmann. *Brötzmann Gespräche*. Berlin: Posth Verlag, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>90</sup>Lewis, 2009.

<sup>91</sup>Sonny Sharrock (guitar), Linda Sharrock (voice), Dave Burrell (piano), Norris Jones (bass), Mildford Graves (drums).

<sup>92</sup>Wilmer, (1977) 2018, p. 278.

He further admits that a lot of his artistic career comes from her fresh ideas, because Linda is not ‘classically’ trained and an amateur, she therefore pushed his ideas further.<sup>93</sup>

The whole thing that goes with being a musician, like the kind of women for the kind of sexual experiences you might have, it’s something that only a king might have. Musicians have a lot of things around them that are very unusual and this aura becomes a part of them. So they get to this point with the white ladies of having somebody with some money to help them, and it’s just too complicated. The way they treat their women is just another example of how they don’t respect them because they don’t respect themselves. If you can’t accept yourself, then you definitely can’t accept a woman - of any race.<sup>94</sup>

Linda Sharrock might be right in questioning the idea of ‘king musician’ as indicative spaces of patriarchy for her musical culture. After their divorce, Sonny Sharrock actually remained quite silent for more than a decade until he started playing again in *Last Exit*.<sup>95</sup> Linda Sharrock uses her voice, copying the extended techniques of the free jazz musicians. Her voice can be a percussive drum, a squeaking saxophone, a blasting trumpet. The voice becomes a medium of speech again. Many female free jazz improvisers used their voices to ask for freedom (see Abbey Lincoln above). The voice is a cultural space and brings with it political resistance:

Voice as sonic pathology occupies a multiplicitous and unruly space of transgression that disrupts the spoken territories of cognition and culture.<sup>96</sup>

Having listened to these women, it is crucial to acknowledge that history is proce-

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., pp. 268-269.

<sup>95</sup>See also section 2.1 for more on masculinity.

<sup>96</sup>Julie Dawn Smith. “Diva-Dogs: Sounding Women Improvising”. PhD thesis. The University of British Columbia, 2001, p. 36.

dural and following the black female musicians of the AACM we need to support their work by adding it into existing canons. As stated before, it is feminist activism to give voice to marginalised artists - in this case female AACM musicians and their specific socio-political situ. It is their resistance and that of the black artists mentioned above in general that on one hand challenge existing canons and also already critique existing (white) power structures. What we have explored in here is systemic racist and sexist power structures and artistic resistances to these. This thesis will incorporate resistance into the stories and my own practice, explored a bit later. Those analysed power structures will continue to appear in the following sections and will allow me to find ways of resisting these with my saxophone. In the next story we will see how group playing in political spaces - in this case a squat - immediately challenges hierarchical structures. It is here where we can see a link between the spaces (socio-political as well as actual spaces) of the AACM find their way into my stories as well as practice.

## Moving Skins

[Listen to: FUA - Dublin-live]

Saxophone is the nonhuman voice in an improvisation performance. A body materialising through touch, projecting real and sensuous qualities into a performance space. Outlining dependence on usability, embodiment and the ability to be present or just perceivable. Forming space and time, fusing into an intra-active state of bodies. During an improvisation performance boundaries between performer and Saxophone blur and fuse. There are actually no sharp edges visually either: *it is a well-recognised fact of physical optics that if one looks close at and "edge", what one sees is not a sharp boundary between light and dark, but rather a series of light and dark bands - that is, a diffraction pattern.*<sup>97</sup> Whose skin is sounding in space? We tune into a diffracted pattern, Saxophone is more than a tool, more than a prosthetic to my human body. Saxophone's sonic body is a dynamic materialisation, entangling with the human and the nonhumans as part of a performance. Saxophone acts from her inside as part of an entangled process with the human performer, intra-action is perceivable as part of a performance. Humans and nonhumans therefore come to materialise in the actual event. Here, we are reading and listening to the stories of skins, body boundaries that are the *material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering.*<sup>98</sup> Mattering means tuning into bodies that matter, materialising into the sounds we make or listen to. It also shapes and creates the non/human bodies of performances.

I often start playing by spitting into the mouthpiece and blowing air through it. While I shape the sounds of the spit with my tongue and throat, I heat up the body of the instrument. Slowly, taking time to warm it up. At certain moments spit drips out of the keys that I am touching, they get wet. Spit drips down the side of the mouthpiece while I use my tongue to stop it from dripping on the floor. Saxophone's body is getting

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<sup>97</sup>Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 156.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

warmer. The sounds get warmer, rounder, livelier. It feels less mechanical. The keys are warmer, they are nicer to touch. All movements are more familiar. The initial force of starting to play vanishes. Blowing air through the tube while sounds emerge from the bell slowly. My mastery over Saxophone is fading, I have less control.

According to our smartphones, we are at the correct address, looking up a barricaded, abandoned and old building. A big and unused hotel, its facade coming off, concrete crumbling, exposing the bricks underneath. Lost grandeur.

Are you sure, this is right?

Yeah, that's the address I have.

Really?

A stranger with scruffy clothes and dreadlocks approaches a small and hidden door to the side, starts knocking, the door opens, he enters. The door closes. We just go for it as well, knocking.

Hey, I think we are playing a gig in here tonight?

Come in. The guy immediately disappears over some bits of wood, up into narrow and wooden stairs, vanishing into an area labelled 'Residents Only'. This is probably where the squatters live.

Hello? Looking around, moving to the right of the staircase and standing in what used to be the reception hall of a hotel. It all looks about to fall apart. Definitely not safe, paint is coming off the walls. There is clutter everywhere. Chairs, cups, cutlery. There is a bar, a small kitchen. There is an A-frame board: 'Vegan cakes, stews and coffees'. Written in different coloured chalk. It seems like this place is occasionally open to the public. We continue walking through the big, old double doors and there is a library. Old, red armchairs. A big red, velvety couch that has seen its best days. Lots of bookshelves full of pamphlets about anarchism, feminism, Marxism, revolution, collectivism, vegan cooking, strikes, unions. I am picking a few up, flicking through them, stopping when I spot some interesting headlines. I am taking my time. Pamphlets from other countries. There is quite a vast collection. Not really reading, but taking them out of their boxes. Looking at the covers and turning the pages.

Where did the guys go?

There is a PA in the next room. The loudspeakers just about poking out behind the walls of cluttered bikes. Are we playing here? There are tools, lathes, welders.

What the fuck? Is this actually a bike workshop?

Looks like it, so where will we be playing, eh? I'll sit on the bike doodling around on Saxophone.

Ha! Well, let's just not worry about that. I am happy to sit in that shopping trolley and sing.

Well, where do you think people will be fitting in here? We also need space for a drum kit.

Fuck it, you're right, let's move and try to find someone.

Carefully walking up the stairs, trying not to bang our heads on the low wood boards that seem to be sticking out from everywhere. Slowly stepping over undefinable stuff on the floor, carrying all our gear through this space. There is a room on the right, labelled 'Ballroom'. The door is half open so we stick our heads in, the room is another crowded space, full of dusty, old, pompous armchairs and couches. Velvety armchairs, with wooden, decorated frames. Are they Victorian? I am not the vintage expert. It has a feel of it all being fake. Almost looks as if it is taken from a contemporary design magazine. This furniture doesn't look like it belonged to the hotel. The hotel is far too modern for that. Maybe mummy and daddy happily allowed them to grab any old furniture from grandma's garage. There are lots of people in the room. No one seems to give a fuck that we are standing there.

Hey, sorry, we are playing here today, do you know anything about it?

No. They continue talking to each other as if we have never entered their room.

Okay. So who puts up those gigs? Our friend who organised it isn't here yet, but there are lots of bikes in that room downstairs. We wonder whether we can move them?

Someone gets up and slowly makes their way towards us.

Wait here.

They vanish through a self-built gate just in front of another staircase. It is also labelled

'Residents Only'. Another secret, cordoned-off area that only the squatters seem allowed to enter. I guess those are the spaces where they actually want some privacy. It is their home. A woman is coming down through the gates.

Hi guys, how's it going? Do you wanna see the space?

Aye, that would be great.

Taking over. Comfortably warm now. Moving the metal skin. Vibrating. Resonating. Energetic. Stimulated. Keys feel smoother. Liquid substances are dripping down inside. Some escape through the holes. Her finger slipped. Hearing and feeling being touched. Resonating. Touching her. Listening to each other. One metal. One skin.

Sensuous and real space. A sensuous experience is a mutual prosthetic relationship between me and Saxophone. Our prosthetic relationship challenges hard, bordered bodies, instead the *instrument-as-mechanism becomes sound-as-appendage*.<sup>99</sup> The procedural process of a sensual and real create performance space, where space is a *product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made*.<sup>100</sup> One is the actual space, for example the room, reflecting real and sensuous objects and qualities. The other one is maybe a more intimate space that emerges through playing. This space is in a constant fluctuation between all humans and nonhumans involved in erecting the performance space. Tools are (re)produced to be desired in their cultural space. The tool's properties are learned, previously experienced and therefore part of an empirical knowledge that sits somewhere in the subterranean background of consciousness - for now. Coming back to Saxophone I could simplistically use this and assume that Saxophone is an object ready to be played to the standards I learned to be 'appropriate'. Human and nonhuman voices belong to space. Saxophone is sensual, real object and quality at the same time. Saxophone brings sensual and real space with it. It offers its skin to be touched. It is a *sphere of multiplicity, the product of social relations, and*

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<sup>99</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 217.

<sup>100</sup>Massey, 2005, p. 9.

*those relations are real material practices, and always ongoing, then space can never be closed, there will always be loose ends, always relations with the beyond, always potential elements of chance.*<sup>101</sup>

The entangled skins of human and nonhuman allow a formation of time and space that becomes perceivable to the other non/human participants in that space. You and I can agree that Saxophone is real. I can only perceive her realness once I listen to her soundings, touching her and the reality that she shows me. For this purpose, I will simplistically define reality as a space of constant fluctuations and change. Allowing the thought that Saxophone is therefore more than just a mere object, she is a multitude of qualities that I perceive and understand as real. Qualities are tensions and vitality that present an isolated instant, coupling, between time, space. Qualities are the feedbacks, the sounds that Saxophone is feeding into the space. Not just audible sounds, but vibrations. Careful touching through her resonating body, as well as more direct touching with its mouthpiece inside my lips, my hands on her keys, my spit through her body.

Events happen as the coming together of a contingent set of elements. There is no singular agent, we always need to consider the multiples and qualities of an event. Sometimes I play Saxophone without really exploring what she feeds back to me. Saxophone actively puts food into my head, my hands, my ears. I am so used to the feel, the body and the sounding results that I remain in a space of 'surface' performance. A very technical performance, where mind controls the body. Finger movements or playing techniques are the driving actor in those performances. Sometimes different non/humans become more noticeable, the heat of Saxophone's body, the spit running through it, the resonance emerging from the tube, the taste on the reed. At that moment I wonder what makes me less aware of my own body border? The crucial proposition could be to allow Saxophone to be entangled through skin. She no longer remains an isolated entity, neither do I. Although her and I are closely connected through physical touch, the other non/human performance participants are connected through other kinds of touches:

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Sonic

Cultural

Social

Political

Allowing objects and qualities to exist in the real and sensuous, they can become equal interlocutors within a performance. They all manifest an instant presenting time and space.

We are now climbing over skip, woods, boxes, more bikes, up and down stairs. This hotel is a massive maze. There are people in every room. There are things in every room.

Hey guys, nice to see you again. Sorry I'm late, I made some curry though.

That's great, cheers pal.

Shall we go and start clearing up that stage area?

Turning around, the other squatters' legs are flying in the air, people rolling on top of each other. They are doing some acrobatic, yoga things. Fucking hell! There are six squatters. Six of them and two of them are actually offering us a hand. I am staring at them with annoyance. We are moving the bikes out of the stage area.

Finally managed to get rid of the bikes by pushing them to the back of the room, along with shopping trolleys and all kinds of other detritus. There are few chairs that we put up, most people will have to sit on the floor. The space is dark, purple, brown and black, on the wall behind the stage it says 'Barricade Inn'. The only light sources come from one of those decorative fairy-light-chains and an old, tall floor lamp with a tassel lampshade in the corner. No natural light, the windows are barricaded with wood. A packed space, but still cosy and comfortable, like a comfy couch covered in pillows and blankets.

You guys probably need a table, right?

Aye, as usual do you want one?

Nah, I'll put my stuff on the floor.

We have our gear set up. There is a laptop, which is running a self-programmed synthesis

patch. This programme works with his voice in real time. He uses his minute microphone that comfortably fits all the way into his throat. It is attached to a soundcard, which interacts with the programme on his computer.

Listen guys, I programmed some amazing synthesis. It is going to blow your fucking mind.

Digital sounds are emerging from the loudspeakers. The frequencies are swishing up down, right, left? Uncontrolled madness cosyng into the furniture.

Sounds fucking shite, mate. We heard enough.

You're just jealous.

Sure, I mean, how can I compete? You're the master of digitalisednessness, whatever that fucking word is... computer music.

On the skin biological processes meet for a sensory experience between humans and nonhumans. After all the skin is the largest organ of the human body. A membrane that transfers sensory data into meaning and emotions, comfort and discomfort. The skin *fulfils the related roles of several other biological functions: it breathes and perspires, secretes and expels, it maintains muscletone, stimulates respiration, circulation, digestion, excretion, and of course reproduction.*<sup>102</sup> Saxophone's warmth, smell and movements make me want to hold her close to my body. I carry, touch, rub, wash - by flooding her with my spit - and stroke her. The skin is the transmitter between inside and outside. The skin's surface kept permanently alive through outer stimuli. Saxophone's skin, *which it shares with the mouth and carries out at least as much as the mouth does, is to be a site and primary mode of communication with other people, to establish meaningful relations; in addition, it is a surface for registering the traces left by those others.*<sup>103</sup> This *Skin-Ego*, the understanding of Self through the *auditory-phonic*<sup>104</sup> skin, which is an *auditory-phonic skin [...] formed as a wrapping of sound, through the experience of the "bath of sounds" which accompanied breastfeeding. The bath of sounds prefigures*

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<sup>102</sup>Didier Anzieu. *The Skin-Ego*. Karnac, (1995) 2016, p. 16.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

*the Skin-ego with its double surface, facing inwards and outwards, since this wrapping is made up of sounds emitted*<sup>105</sup> by both me, the performer, and Saxophone, the tool. We can have an understanding of our own, but also the body boundaries of others. It creates a bond and relationship with our surrounding world. The skin becomes the canvas, the mirror, a reflection for coenesthesia.

Consciousness exists because of a skin-to-skin contact: I touch with my lips her mouth, my hands, my lips. I touch with my hands her body, my hands, my lips. *Consciousness resides in this contact. I being to examine it. It is often hidden in a fold of tissue, lip against lip, tongue against palate, teeth touching teeth, closed eyelids, contracted sphincters, a hand clenched into a fist. Fingers pressed against each other, the back of one thigh crossed over the front of the other, or one foot resting on the other.*<sup>106</sup> The skin is constantly exposed and at the same time it protects (our inner organs), it veils (our psyche) and it visualises bodily functions (sweat, blushes). The fold, the vulva, lips always touching, are always and already in a condition of pleasure: they need nothing other than themselves. Saxophone is the wet fold, a multiple that is not merely that which has many parts, but that which is folded in many ways.

What if we consider these non/humans as constant moving entities? The body as fluid substance, and the implications of the inseparability of sound and the corporeal Saxophone as a female body, a wet, liquid and flowing body. The performative body has been described as skin itself, an assemblage rather than a fixed entity. Performative bodies are dependent on collectivism, they constitute a self as part of a space of performers. *Skin on skin becomes conscious, as does skin on mucous membrane and mucous membrane on itself, there would truly be no internal sense, no body properly speaking, coenesthesia even less so, no real image of the body: we would live without consciousness; slippery smooth and on the point of fading away.*<sup>107</sup> Allowing the self to be in a constant state

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<sup>105</sup>Anzieu, (1995) 2016, p. 184.

<sup>106</sup>Michel Serres. *The Five Senses. A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. Bloomsbury, (1985) 2016, p. 22.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

of fluctuation that reacts to its environment. Bodies are milieus of different stages of self. The skin is a continuous interchanger between bodies and environments. The skin the bearer of ego, but at the same time the creator of space, sense and awareness. The touch of skins on skins, be they sensuous or real, are the formation of an intimate, floating space.

I can feel mouthpiece touching my lips. I am being touched. I react and start exploring. Mouthpiece. Reed. Ligature. I touch the reed with my tongue, I start licking the outside of the mouthpiece stroking over the sides where the reed and mouthpiece meet, I spit into the gaps. I become aware of something else being inside my mouth, while at the same time I am holding Saxophone, it is strapped around my neck. We are mutually touching and holding each other. The skin of Saxophone. Performance is a mutual process of touching and soundings. Both are ways of touching and being touched, but the distinction is important here as I am trying to show that from a very pragmatic point there is a mutual physical touch happening from me on Saxophone, as well from Saxophone onto me.

He plugs in his modular synth. Turning a few knobs, attaching some cables, sending signals around; short envelope synth sounds coming out the loudspeakers now. Very high pitched, they are cut off with the envelope shapes he is adding onto them. He is looping the rhythm. He puts his noise generator on and blasts it through the loudspeakers. Saxophone is starting to play a shrill high sound. It starts feedbacking. The distortion pedal is set to a high gain. Turning it down. All three of us are quickly blasting loud stuff through the speakers. Soundcheck = done. I am super tired now. I shouldn't have had that beer. I know it upsets my stomach. Still over an hour until the gig starts. People are arriving. I really don't feel like small talk. Can I not just be left alone? Forced friendliness: Hi, how are you? Nice to meet you. I see you also study with him. Yes, I came by plane this morning. Actually landed in Belfast and took the bus to Dublin. Yes, I play the saxophone. Really? Interesting. Wow. The weather? Yes, shite, eh?

Half an hour until the gig starts. Those acrobatic people have stamina. One of the

squatter girls is standing barefoot on some guy's shoulder. He is not holding her. Fucking amazing, how can they do it? I have to admit this is impressive. Why are they doing this in the middle of where we are about to start playing? You literally have to walk past them, trying to not touch them. Who knows you might knock her over.

The cello and guitar are playing first. I love free improvisation on the cello, this cello is amazing. A lot of scratchy, high bow pressure material going on. The entire body of the cello is used. Always amazing to watch cellists engage with the entire instrument. Hitting the body, creating percussive sounds. Snapping the strings until they almost break and listening to the effective 'pop' when it hits back on the fingerboard. I should explore Saxophone's body much more. I am about to vomit. Come on. Get yourself together and stop being such a whiney person. At least I am excited to play now. We are on next.

Having skin. Metal. Complex assemblages of tubes. Keys. Pads. The covering of soundings. Sweating. Vibrating. Coldness. Warmth. Veiling. Sounds. Inside. Outside. Reacting once being touched. Caressing. Body moulding into hers. Shape is melting. Fixed figures are lost. Mouthpiece is inside her mouth. Lips on lips. Intimacy at this particular moment. Metal skin on her skin. Extension into bounded body. One prosthetic. Metal-flesh body. Momentarily one body. Traversable skins reflecting in different directions. Touch forming body. Skin perceives sounding world, an attempt to make sense. Existence through touch.

Shit, I am feedbacking a lot. I am turning the distortion pedal off. I am slap tonguing along with his voice. He is doing his usual spitting, lip sounds. Very fast movements with his lips and tongue and spit. I like those sounds. He is using his minute microphone making those sounds more audible. The amplification boosts the sounds, they feel more present. To me it sounds like white noise mixed in with letting air slowly get out of a balloon. Gurgling coming from the back of his throat, while at the same time he is letting some squeaky, short air through. I start imitating those sounds with my lips and spit on my saxophone mouthpiece. The microphone on Saxophone is deep inside her

bell. It is a bendy bell mic with a clip-on. It allows me to stick the entire mic very deep into her body. The mic adapts to her shape. The sounds through the loudspeakers are coming from a different space, the inside of Saxophone. They sound a lot like the things he is doing, I am now making sounds with my lips on the mouthpiece. It sounds like exaggerating kissing or farting. The two of us get really into this sound world. Ignoring him and his modular synth.

I could not say what he is doing just now. Mouth sounds are emerging. We are both now playing around with sounds of our tongues, spit and lips. Harmoniously coming from us and the loudspeakers. Saxophone is taking over. She is well impressed to hear herself through the loudspeakers and all those tongue and spit noises blowing through her metal tube. The warm air through her body is changing her. Loudspeakers. There is a dislocation of bodies and spaces going on. Voice coming from his body, but also through the loudspeaker, the same with Saxophone. It all feels a bit dislocated. Occasionally all four meet and there is a moment of symbiosis. There is the modular synth, for fuck sake, I was having an intimate moment with Saxophone here! Why do you come in with your short, synth sounds? Digital resynthesis is coming from my right. Artificial sounds from the computer. Wonderland of technology. Hard to tell who is who, both are just coming out of the loudspeakers, there is no acoustic sound source.

We have been waiting on the machine to emerge. It is our time now, stop your acoustic nonsense and listen to some highly-sophisticated digital audio. Envelope shaping of the modular synth sounds. Crackling, crackling, short, attacks flying all over the space. Knobs and sliders are turned and moved. Cables plugged into different spaces. A constant change of sounds and dynamics They are talking to each other. A bickering conversation of distorted, short electronic sounds. Plong! A percussive tongue coming from Saxophone's reed. More. We are in a cloud of percussive, rhythmic short sounds, a perfect synthesis of digital, analogue and acoustic gear, people, sounds. There is a collective cloud now. It is unpredictable who or what is moving and shaping it. Short flickering of different material is audible. It is a collective spectrum. Eco-systemic organisms in a constrained environment. The space is filled by this cloud, the cloud is

our performance space. Saxophone has left. The cloud is gone. There is a noisy drone hanging around now. Building up like a wave and then falling down again. The sounds get distorted by some other analogue synth stuff. It starts cracking. Those sounds make me feel relaxed. There is something I find quite soothing about it. Sitting in the centre of a harsh sounding drone. It holds the previous tension. There is a plateau in the air now. Quite heavy and slowly moving. Voice throat sounds are coming in, the voice is distorted by some processing from the computer. It dislocates the voice from the body. Machine voice through loudspeaker and real voice through throat. The heavy analogue synth plateaux is pressing things down. It leaves. There is just the voice now. The space is much bigger now. Less occupied.

Acoustic perceptions are connected with the production of respiratory sounds, they give the self an idea of a filling and emptying cavity. Improvisation then becomes something else than just embodiment of objects and realisation of Self. The complexity of touch, feeling, qualities and vitality forms my current state of body. Not just my body, but an assemblage of different vitalities touching and sounding to and with each other. Saxophone and I are one space of an assemblage of vitalities. We are one skin, one Ego, assembled by acoustic exchanges.

This performance is one momentary existence. Dependent on some different non/humans with their own qualities, vitalities, touches, skins, sounds. The continuity of touch is expressed as a visual fantasy of a shared skin. The skin is an intra-active state, always in motion and exchange with other materialisations, signifying the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. Entangled non/human bodies, perceiving an exchange of borders. This moment is a spatial experience of real and sensuous actors. Real moves into sensuous space and vice versa. The physical touch of our skins allows a crossing. At those points Saxophone's qualities become so apparent that my forceful technical abilities onto Saxophone lose their hierarchical position. Technicality submerges and hides underneath a vitality of two performers trying to enter the other. We are limited by time and space, we don't always meet or exchange. For what will follow, a free improvisation performance is an intra-active practice of entangled bodies.

## Chapter 2

# Muscles, Saxophone, Man

In this chapter I will show how the saxophone can be a carrier of masculinity within patriarchal power structures. It is here where I connect wider political structures to the instrument I play, and focus on Peter Brötzmann whom I have been compared to when playing loud and fast. It is the loudness, but also the body postures that might allow a reading of masculinity. Through a close reading of Brötzmann's playing, but also personal anecdotes we can see how specific performance gestures can legitimise someone's presence on stage, and how further it allows for a dichotomous understanding of human over nonhuman.

Here, I want to draw connections between the saxophone's use in military and white masculine performance approaches. Especially how free improvisation practices are reproduced, even by women, in a very masculine way.<sup>1</sup> Thus, specific playing techniques or sounds legitimise a recognition and an acceptance into a specific cultural production, because "any act of cultural production implies an affirmation of its claim to cultural legitimacy."<sup>2</sup> The reproduction of 'known' sounds on the saxophone will allow an affirmation into existing cultural circles, I will explore these cultural

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<sup>1</sup>I already outlined what I understand by 'masculine' in the Introduction (see 0.3.1). It is a desire to label practices and things into hierarchies and categories. A form of control and power. We will see more of these 'hard, defined' borders in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Polity Press, 1993, p. 116.

affirmations that Bourdieu mentions to show that the saxophone is established with a specific preconditioned sound world.

The saxophone has been a militarised instrument, designed by Adolphe Sax to support French military bands in the 1840s.<sup>3</sup> Today the saxophone has to be purchased, it is branded and requires economic wealth. The saxophone is not only an object in a market, but is also a tool carrying historic, political and sonic symbols.<sup>4</sup> Instruments in western society are pre-idealised in so far as they represent a symbolic and sonic knowledge. There are ‘known’ ways of mastering the instrument to a required standard, either through cultural peer acceptance,<sup>5</sup> or graded exam boards, certificates and degrees. The saxophone in free improvisation is a peer-accepted carrier of symbols. This has partly to do with the reproduction of a musical canon, but also with performers’ technique and expression that become part of the cultural field. Like space, the saxophone is a multitude of difference and “produces its own diverse social relations - in the intimate socialites of musical performance and practice (...).”<sup>6</sup>

Specific scales, specific embouchures<sup>7</sup> and other more experimental or extended playing techniques can become expressions of knowledge and sonic technique.

The fact is that its fixation on technique draws pure art into a covenant with the dominant section of the bourgeoisie. The latter recognize the intellectual’s and the artist’s monopoly on the production of the work of art as an instrument of pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

A body mediates its history and symbolism into a presence, and consequently the saxophone comes with established hierarchical power structures. I am not saying

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen Cottrell. *The Saxophone*. Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 74.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 74.

<sup>6</sup>Georgina Born. “Music and the Materialization of Identities”. In: *Journal of Material Culture* 16.4 (2011), pp. 376–388, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup>An embouchure is the mouth technique, including lips, muscles, tongue and teeth to play a wind instrument.

<sup>8</sup>Bourdieu, 1993, p. 128.

that every performer reinstates these, but as we will see that masculinity is also present in more non-military, socialist or left-leaning improvisation practices. They may not wilfully represent a stereotypical ideal of masculinity, namely the strong, muscular holders of weapons and knowledge, but nevertheless we will need to understand the bodily-sonic-symbolic presence they mediate to other bodies.

At this point I want to bring some male saxophonists back onto the scene, men who have inspired my saxophone playing from an early stage; men who represent a specific way of ‘saxophoning’. And funnily enough, men who I have not often seen being discussed in UK academia.<sup>9</sup> I’ll predominantly focus on Peter Brötzmann - and I would have rather granted more space to female performers, but I have been compared to him and thus found it vital to understand what reproduction in free improvisation might mean. And how I can learn from this analysis to find different ways of playing that doesn’t reproduce this masculine spaces, therefore I will have to grant him some space here too.

## 2.1 Man-Machine Brötzmann

### Power Relationships of Instrument and Humans

Brötzmann and also other male saxophonists, have influenced my playing a lot, and they, but especially Brötzmann have left an important and big footprint on the free improvisation scene. Brötzman’s playing from the 1960s still resonates in his current playing, but also through spaces, instruments and other performers. It is exactly this resonance that I want to investigate as male. What makes a sound male? What makes a specific playing technique or body posture male? I will show that he and other male saxophonists, willingly or not, carry masculine symbolism.

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<sup>9</sup>As said in the Introduction to this thesis, the UK canon circles around specific male improvisers. I do believe it has to do with the fact that performers like David Toop, Derek Bailey or Eddie Prévost have written their own books. Whilst saxophonist Evan Parker is written in text through interviews or academic case studies.

Peter Brötzmann (1941, Germany). Male saxophone-ism, the suffix to visualise that Brötzmann is a state, an ideology, a way of playing the saxophone. A visual artist by trade, an autodidact jazz musician.<sup>10</sup> Innumerable collaborations across the globe. A unique, visceral, loud (not exclusively) playing technique on the saxophone. Left a sonic footprint with *Machine Gun* (1968).

This short biography does not come close to summarising Brötzmann's contribution to European free jazz and music activism, however it shall help you and me to consider his playing specifically as an antidote to - what he calls - "the English disease,"<sup>11</sup> the intellectualisation of the UK free improvisation scene. He generally considers himself in opposition to the intellectualisation of music through universities or the theorisation of music practices. Generally, Brötzmann finds the theorisation of music and practices by improvisers and academics problematic.<sup>12</sup> A uniformity of students leaving those institutions, or followers of specific playing styles will all be capable of playing to a high standard, knowing harmony and all other sorts of things about the technicalities of this specific music, "but if you don't know what to do with this knowledge afterwards then that is asking for disaster."<sup>13</sup> To Brötzmann, his music is about collaboration and people. It is about people's actual "shit lives."<sup>14</sup> There is the implication that Brötzmann critiques intellectualism over experimentation in making music. He even castigates the idea of master and student,

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<sup>10</sup>Brötzmann always refers to his music as jazz, whether he plays in set-ups resembling bands, like Last Exist, or more free improvisation collaborations. In actual fact, it is important to point out that Brötzmann sees himself as a follower of black musicians, predominately through the history of the saxophone and the musicians that made it widely known in the early 20th Century, like Sonny Rollins, Coleman Hawkins. (Christoph J. Bauer and Peter Brötzmann. *Brötzmann Gespräche*. Berlin: Posth Verlag, 2012, p. 18) Further to that, Brötzmann sees free jazz as a purely political movement, something that found its meaning in the civil rights movement in the USA. However, till this day Brötzmann and other saxophonists' music is still considered free jazz, because it is sonically far closer to Ornette Colemann and un-structured playing, then what traditionally is understood as jazz music, i.e. a more organised improvisation around specific tunes and scales. For what follows, I will use the term free jazz, although Brötzmann does not see a difference and prefers jazz.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Niklas Wilson. "Klänge wie ein Maschinengewehr: Free Jazz - vom Skandalon zum historischen Stil". In: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 161.3 (2000), pp. 42–49, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup>Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>My translation: "Nur wenn man dann hinterher nicht weiß, was man damit anfangen soll, dann fängt das Desaster an" *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup>Bernard Josse. *Soldier of the Road - A Potrait of Peter Brötzmann*. DVD. 2011.

where groups of students or other musicians have followed or copied the likes of Prévost, Parker and notably also himself.<sup>15</sup> Brötzmann continues:

They [UK improvisers] could think about formal and aesthetic problems, how to develop the instrument, what the fuck, things like that. And we had our essential problems and I think - not that I want to say that we made it more right or we were more real - but we [Germans] were in another, much more serious position. It's really so.<sup>16</sup>

Brötzmann establishes himself as 'other', opposed to expectations and reproduction of existing practices. This is something we will see throughout this chapter, namely that he feels the need to set himself apart from institutions, practices and even playing techniques.

## 2.2 Not Too Much On Technique, Please

For the purpose of the following discussion, we should take a very brief look at the diverse 'definitions' around the term technique. As shown in the Introduction 'technique' often becomes part of a cultural validation process. Through a technofeminist critique we will see how man engineers himself into an object, for example the development of the electric guitar.<sup>17</sup> It is the engineering or playing of an instrument that inscribes maleness into a body. In that regards Pauline Oliveros proposes:

Values often emphasized by male musicians and their critics include technique, intelligence, structure, precision, concentration, drive and so forth.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup>First bracket added by me. David Keenan. "Peter Brötzmann Redux". In: *The Wire* 346 (2012), pp. 32–38, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>Steve Waksman. "California Noise: Tinkering with Hardcore and Heavy Metal in Southern California". In: *Social Studies of Science* 34.5 (2004), pp. 675–702, pp. 267.

<sup>18</sup>Pauline Oliveros. "Harmonic Anatomy. Women in Improvisation". In: *The Other Side of Nowhere. Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*. Wesleyan, 2004, p. 54.

Technique, even in looser forms of music genres, still remains an important presence for practitioners, journalists, researchers and audiences. Free improvisation is situated inside patriarchal bodies of knowledge and is divided into technique (mastery over instrument) and performer (the one who holds technique); the dichotomies that are “inherent in the tradition of Western philosophy. Male/female, mind/body, or rationality/emotion.”<sup>19</sup> Daily practice routines and a thorough knowledge of the instrument often seem to be essential ‘tool knowledges’ for performers. The performer fetishises their own performing and technical abilities, their ‘working’ on instrument skills. The genre of free improvisation itself becomes fetishised as a highly skilful, technical art form.

I think that’s the most advanced music (free improvisation) you can play. To be ready, in every single moment, to change direction of the music all the time. Something is happening and you have to react. You can choose to react in a millisecond or you can choose to react in two seconds - but you have to have the technique. And technique is the key to communicate. Without extreme technique I couldn’t be an improviser, because then I can’t react immediately. (...) For me that’s [technique] is completely necessary. Without that, I wouldn’t be what I am now.<sup>20</sup>

Mats Gustafsson talks about free improvisation as the most advanced technique. He is also talking about it from a mental perspective, not necessarily just the actual technique of playing an instrument. There already is the problem of trying to find a conclusion on technique, because it is manifold and not universal. Technique can also encompass amateurism, even a wilful act of resisting playing and performance techniques will eventually be considered technique.<sup>21</sup>

We will see that Brötzmann’s playing involves endurance, loudness, agility and other

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<sup>19</sup>Julia Eckhardt. “Self and Other, World and Music”. In: *Grounds For Possible Music. On Gender, Voice, Language, and Identity*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2018, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Bracket added by me. Daniel Spicer. “Mats Gustafsson”. In: *The Wire* 349 (2013), pp. 39–44, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>We will see more on this in Chapter 3, section 3.6.

aspects that could be considered ‘technique’. Technique isn’t just a form of skilful playing, but it is also the performer’s representation of what they can do.<sup>22</sup> It is a form of virtuosity that includes the postures, language and sounds. Improvisers like Parker and Toop have discussed this issue around technique, and what technique might be, once virtuosity is no longer the key example of a technical performance.<sup>23</sup>

But now, the question of what technique is, is confused by the deliberate use of incompetence as a technique. You can’t say it’s technical incompetence, if someone wants to use incompetence in their performance. You can only say, what is the question that that now asks about technique?<sup>24</sup>

However, to think in hierarchical terms of technique amongst different genres of music remains within the binary thinking of master and tool; the dichotomy of this particular relationship. Reading Gustafsson’s comment above and considering Brötzmann, then they follow the cut structure of body (human) over body (nonhuman). This cut between mental, practical, physical and technique considers bodies in their isolated entities, rather than as an entanglement of bodies. This dualism between human and nonhuman, but also between mind and instrument, as seen in the quote by Gustafsson, creates hierarchical structures. It is through allowing your mind to be ‘ready’ to react at any moment that gives away this dualism. It is the “disembodied rationality” that Gustafsson talks about that Goh already links to a “masculinist separation from emotions [...] from the faculty of reason.”<sup>25</sup> It is important to remember this dualism, of mind (rationale) over instrument or general improvisation performances. Creating cuts - as seen in the Introduction - bodies

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<sup>22</sup>Waksman, 2004, p. 696.

<sup>23</sup>For more on this see: Steve Beresford and John Kieffer. “Technique and Improvisation”. In: *Musics. A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. ecstatic peace library, 2016, pp. 4-12.

<sup>24</sup>Steve Beresford and John Kieffer. “Technique and Improvisation”. In: *Musics. A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. ecstatic peace library, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup>Goh, 2017, p. 286.

become separate entities.<sup>26</sup> Those cuts allow ideas around technique to exist, later I will come to define feminist improvisation, where bodies are situated entanglements, where there isn't a need to separate human from nonhuman. We will see more on this in the next Chapter 3, but for now I wanted to establish an overview of dichotomous thinking, namely labelling something as technique or 'quality' allows categorisation and acceptance into specific musical genres and spaces.

Brötzmann considers playing within capitalist structures as work. In a simplified way work here is the creative process or making of music, thinking about playing as work or as an 'advanced state of mind' creates objects of knowledge, which are vital in a capitalist exchange process. They ensure "fluidity between production and social communications."<sup>27</sup> Brötzmann's physicality on stage is equally important to a sonic presence. Therefore exercising is:

(...) a strenuous, energetic attack, which suggests that engaging with the saxophone isn't simply a matter of mouth, lungs and fingers but something that exercises every muscle and sinew in the body.<sup>28</sup>

Some music might come across as stereotypical male: aggressive, loud, physical presence and strength. We could think of music like Punk, Heavy Metal or Harsh Noise. John Butcher even considers this form of playing a role-play: "for some people expression means a loud, stormy saxophone with bass and drums. I rather consider this role-play, at least today."<sup>29</sup> Role-plays work by switching into the character of another. We are all performing roles of others. Hearing Judith Butler<sup>30</sup> and also considering Fanon,<sup>31</sup> we are performing the gendered and social norms we were exposed to or are expected to represent. Our musical education, and our music

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<sup>26</sup>Barad, 2007.

<sup>27</sup>Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. *The Soul At Work. From Alienation to Autonomy*. Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup>Spicer, 2013b, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Niklas Wilson. *Hear and Now. Gedanken zur improvisierten Musik*. Second Edition. Wolke Verlag, (1999) 2014, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup>Butler, (1990) 2006, pp. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Fanon, (1952) 1986, pp. 72.

preferences are gendered and mimicked into our own gestures.

Brötzmann not only sees his own playing as work, but also considers that the relationship amongst musicians is work. I am thinking about Marx's *Verdinglichung* and Barad's criticism of this *Thingification*, namely turning relationships into 'things' taints how we view the world.<sup>32</sup> Everything part of a performance is a cultural and social symbol of free improvisation.

This confers properly cultural value on the products by endowing them with marks of distinction (a speciality, a manner, a style) recognized as such within the historically available cultural taxonomies.<sup>33</sup>

Making music with others is playing together, working towards something that all have contributed to. This is part of an identification process of musicians as part of a sonic, but also social group. Following Bourdieu's quote from above, specific sounds, performances or groups of musicians contribute to the symbolic goods,<sup>34</sup> but at the same time "genre is taken to be the primary mechanism for the mutual articulation of musically imagined communities and social identities."<sup>35</sup>

The other aspect of 'work' is of course that of physicality and physical effort, for Brötzmann nothing works without any effort.<sup>36</sup> Marx also says that work is in actual fact "exertion of brain, muscle and nerve (...)."<sup>37</sup>

If I want to blow out my lungs through the throat - and the entire body is connected by this and activated - so tense, and afterwards not only your head is empty, but you are also not able to eat anything after anymore(...).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Barad, 2003, p. 812.

<sup>33</sup>Bourdieu, 1993, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Born, 2011, p. 383.

<sup>36</sup>Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, pp. 139.

<sup>37</sup>My translation: "Verausgabung von Hirn, Muskel, Nerv (...)." Karl Marx. *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels. Werke. Band 23*. Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1962, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup>My translation: "Mir wirklich auch die Lunge aus dem Hals zu blasen - und damit verbunden ist der ganze Körper sowas von aktiviert, so gespannt, dass man hinterher nicht nur im Kopf leer

Again, one hears Brötzmann talk about this physicality, those tense muscle movements, an exertion of body, but he further states that “this means, that through this physical exhaustion concentration also happens in the head.”<sup>39</sup> This physicality has to do with effort, but not exclusively, Brötzmann also sees ‘work’ as something that he wants to do, that is fully his. Something that he considers to be his entire life, or at least to spend a lot of effort on this self-designed life. ‘Work’ is playing, his art, it is his constant doing of all things at that specific time, it is in actual fact nothing that he would necessarily consider as ‘legacy.’<sup>40</sup> Work, playing music for him is more in accordance to Borgo:

Learning to play a musical instrument involves an affordance relation as well. On the physical level, we develop a relationship between our actions with the instrument and our perception of resulting sounds over time. But our perceptions and our actions are also shaped by a social matrix in which sounds may be deemed desirable or not, and actions may be encouraged or not, depending on cultural and personal factors.<sup>41</sup>

As performers we establish a close relationship to the instrument, one that becomes culturally but also physically embodied. This relationship, as said above, becomes part of a capitalist working relationship. It establishes the performer and the instrument as cultural goods, as shown earlier through the work of Bourdieu, whilst at the same time creates an odd relationship between instrument and performer. Namely one that is closer to the worker and the machine. As seen through Borgo, one might play according to cultural or personal preferences. There is no longer a ‘free’ improvisational approach possible. The performance relationship then remains within a reproduction of cultural norms and thus also those of gender norms. As

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ist, sondern dass man hinterher auch nichts mehr essen kann (...)." Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 139.

<sup>39</sup>My translation: “das heißt, dass durch diese doch ziemliche Anstrengung, Konzentration auch im Kopf etwas passiert.” *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>41</sup>David Borgo. *Sync or Swarm. Improvising Music in a Complex Age*. London: Continuum, 2005, p. 177.

seen through Butler the participation in power structures, and in this case cultural power structures through practicing an instrument to desirable demands, established clear defined norms.<sup>42</sup> Considering Brötzmann as someone who reproduces a specific saxophone sound, thus a cultural good within our power structures, re-affirms existing and defined borders.

## 2.3 Sonic Masculinity

Although Brötzmann has an art degree, he is an autodidact on the saxophone. He is a trained painter and printer, and picked up the saxophone after a few failed attempts on the drums.<sup>43</sup> The fact that he did not receive any musical education on the saxophone, or music education in general, is something he likes to emphasise. “I always had a different sound, because of my "wrong" embouchure.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that Brötzmann considers himself as ‘wrong’ sounding and as self-taught helps to support his argument that continental Europeans are different to UK players. Instead of going through the school of musical education, he and other musicians in Europe were able to establish themselves as different, therefore creating another identity politics around their practice. Whereas the saxophonist Evan Parker could play scales up and down and sound like Coltrane,<sup>45</sup> Brötzmann could not. His sound was considered more messy, unfocused “a force of nature directed through the sax.”<sup>46</sup>

At its beginnings, Brötzmann’s playing criticised the domination of the white political supremacy, his earliest recordings are a direct response to the Vietnam War; a ‘sonification’ of the student revolts across Europe. About the album *Machine Gun*

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<sup>42</sup>Butler, (1990) 2006.

<sup>43</sup>Josse, 2011.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 26:30.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 29:55.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 29:55.

(1968), featuring an international octet of musicians:<sup>47</sup>

It was 1968, the streets here in the West were full of police, it was a very aggressive time, Baader-Meinhof and Vietnam and all that shit. People were shot. You can't separate yourself from all the shit you are in.<sup>48</sup>

The time in the 1960s was characterised by US-led wars; in France, Italy and Germany working class people and students were demonstrating against the bourgeois-capitalist society and the dominance of US culture. In Germany especially, the time was characterised by a rebellion against the old Nazi generation, who still held places of power. This movement was in part led by the Baader-Meinhof group. Brötzmann seems to draw a division between theory and actual practice; he seems to argue that his sonically loud saxophone playing was in direct relation to his political situation, and opposed to those UK players, because in Germany they were in a much “more serious situation.”<sup>49</sup> Similar to the AACM members, who had a different approach to their music making, because of a direct political impact on their citizenship. *Machine Gun* is certainly a direct sonic response to weapons, the military and war, the musicians of *Machine Gun* mimicked the sonic architecture and media world.<sup>50</sup> As said before and claimed in the introduction, it is this mimicry of the sonic architecture (the space of white aurality)<sup>51</sup> that will allow existing dichotomies continue to exist.

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<sup>47</sup>Evan Parker, Han Bennink, Willem Breuker, Fred van Hove, Peter Kowald, Suschi Niebergall, Sven Johansson and Peter Brötzmann.

<sup>48</sup>Keenan, 2012a, p. 40.

<sup>49</sup>David Keenan. “Peter Brötzmann Interview. Last Man Standing”. In: *The Wire* 345 (2012), pp. 38–46, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup>For more on social and architectural mimicry see: Elisabeth Grosz. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Taylor and Francis, 1995, pp. 103.

<sup>51</sup>Thompson, 2017.

### 2.3.1 The Saxophone

To give more context to the playing and socio-political space of Brötzmann and others I will present a brief history of the saxophone. I obviously concentrate on the saxophone, because it is the instrument I play and the the focus of this research. The saxophone isn't unique in its socio-political space or construction of design, but has specific historic meaning in the way it was used as a colonial instrument and then re-appropriated within the Black Power Movement, as seen in Chapter 1. I am predominantly interested to explore the saxophone as a masculine instrument, similar to the electric guitar, and linking instruments (or engineered objects in general) to a masculine desire within capitalist cultures.<sup>52</sup>

Military music-making provided a particularly significant outlet for Sax's [inventor of the saxophone] manufacturing activities, and later in the century larger ensembles, both military and civilian, would play a central role in bringing the saxophone to a wider public in Europe, America and beyond. From 1850 onwards, international markets became increasingly important for brass and woodwind instruments, because of the rising popularity of brass and military bands worldwide.<sup>53</sup>

The saxophone comes out of a military history, Sax developed the instrument around technological advancements of his time (i.e. keyworks), consciously inventing a new timbre for military bands to find access to the military market.<sup>54</sup> Similar, but around a century later, the electric guitar was developed out of radio-technology, became part of a DIY culture to express masculinity in respect to a tinkering process of engineering.<sup>55</sup> It is this link to technology or engineering, already explored by Wajcman, that is gendered and part of an active participation in capitalism.<sup>56</sup> Where

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<sup>52</sup>See: Waksman and Wajcman

<sup>53</sup>Cottrell, 2013, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 30.

<sup>55</sup>Waksman, 2004, pp. 267.

<sup>56</sup>Wajcman, 2004.

the passive consumer, women, become domineered by the technology advancements through men. We will see how this is also reflected in the design of the saxophone, but more in the way it is being played and used as part of free improvisation performances.

As said, the instrument's design is also reminiscent of militarism, in that it looks highly sophisticated, even though the actual manufacturing is quite straightforward. It is certainly an instrument of its time, looking technologically advanced and complex. The history of the saxophone is more diverse and is more known for its use across different musical genres,<sup>57</sup> it nevertheless is part of the instrument's history and its design and worth exploring to understand masculinity in instruments.

“The keywork (of the saxophone) is organised around the disposition of the two hands.”<sup>58</sup> Based on western scales, the C-major scale can easily be played by pressing all keys with eight fingers (excluding thumbs) and then lifting one finger after the other. The actual design of the instrument is purpose built, carrying the cultural symbolisms of control, reproduction of western scales and militarism through its linear and non-fragile design. Like clarinets and flutes, the saxophone's keywork reproduced the established Boehm system, and therefore reinstating a specific way of the technology of the keywork, and the way the instrument should be played.<sup>59</sup>

Writing on the machine is a gesture in which particular keys are chosen in accordance with the specific criteria of orthography, grammar, semantics, information theory, communication theory, and more, with the intention of producing a text.<sup>60</sup>

We could replace ‘machine’ with ‘saxophone’ in the above quote, a tool designed to create a pre-imagined text. A machine arranged in a particular way to fulfil a pre-imagined desire.

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<sup>57</sup>Cottrell, 2013, p. 127.

<sup>58</sup>Brackets added by me. *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 48.

<sup>60</sup>Villem Flusser. *Gestures*. University of Minnesota Press, (1991) 2014, p. 21.

When playing the saxophone, I or any other performer choose gestures in accordance with the specific criteria of a grammar in - this case - free improvisation. We are reproducing what has been established as 'ideal' performance techniques or practices. Villem Flusser's quote hints at what we can consider the muscular saxophonist; it proposes that the machinic body, the instrument, is a realisation of mind into body. Comparing this to the electric guitar, where Steve Waksman already analyses a link between the design of the instrument and musicianship, but also a specific sound world that comes with the instrument.<sup>61</sup> He shows that the engineering of the guitar was a process of tinkering and fetishisation that manifested in the electric guitar design we know today. This design comes with limitations, like the saxophone, there are ways to make the instrument sound 'unique', certain gestures (how you hold or play the instrument)<sup>62</sup> often are reproduced: "[...] so that guitarists who play in markedly different styles have nonetheless exhibited similar tendencies in the way they interact with the electric guitar as a cultural and technological artifact."<sup>63</sup>

Technofeminists have already established a criticism and a link between design and masculinity, how man engraved himself into the tools he built. Listening to Wajcman, where she defines the engineer and his love for the machine as a masculine desire:

Men's love of machines embraces the car, which has a central place in hegemonic male culture. A fetishized object for many men, cars symbolize for them individual freedom, self-realization, sexual prowess and control.<sup>64</sup>

As said above and also using Thompson's 'white aurality' then our sonic knowledge/practice are within constructed, (white) male spaces. It is the fact that labour

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<sup>61</sup>Waksman, 2004, p. 675.

<sup>62</sup>I am aware that musicians like Derek Bailey of course have found ways to change these gestures, with the saxophone however that isn't really the case. I will show in Chapter 3.6 how I manage to play on the instrument in ways that are not too expected, for example by playing through its bell.

<sup>63</sup>Waksman, 2004, p. 675.

<sup>64</sup>Judy Wajcman. *TechnoFeminism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004, p. 44.

time (i.e. engineering instruments), that men used their bodies, strength and rationale to design these things that supported their idea to be superior and the female was immediately excluded from these ‘superior’ spaces.<sup>65</sup> In the case of the saxophone this masculine space is that of the military, in respect to the guitar it is in relation to technology, two spaces and forms of political dominance. It is however not just the instrument that represents these power structures, but also the bodies playing these instruments themselves. Already pointed at by Wajcman, an instrument becomes an extension of masculine rationale or engineering into an object, but what does a body represent on stage? Further, when a performer plays the instrument then doesn’t that also come with some form of strength, physicality? Simply put, the practice of the instrument itself proposes a strict exercise of human over nonhuman. Comparing playing to bodybuilding, a very strict routine of mind over body. Bodybuilding requires forms of persistence, repetition, strength, endurance.<sup>66</sup>

Only a hard, visibly bounded body can resist being submerged into the horror of femininity and non-whiteness. The built body is an achieved body, worked at, planned, suffered for. A massive, sculpted physique requires forethought and long-term organisation; refines of graduated exercise, diet and scheduled rest need to be worked out and strictly adhered to; in short, building bodies is the most literal triumph of mind over matter, imagination over flesh.<sup>67</sup>

Playing the saxophone does require similar characteristics. The saxophone could also replace the human body in the above quote. After all, the saxophone is a sculpted and built body, part of a long-term relationship with the human and eventually its political or socio-political work.

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<sup>65</sup>Wajcman, 2004, pp. 114.

<sup>66</sup>Richard Dyer. “The White Man’s Muscle”. In: *Visual Culture and Gender. Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Volume III*. Routledge, 2014, pp. 78–104.

<sup>67</sup>Dyer, 1997, p. 82.

## 2.4 Male Saxophones

In the second half of the 60s we really wanted to create this shock: no tradition, make space for new things, in that sense we wanted to push a lot of things away.<sup>68</sup>

Brötzmann was asked to perform at Berlin *Gegenfestival* in 1968, performers and audience were asked to wear tuxedos or evening dresses.<sup>69</sup> You and I have just read that Brötzmann wanted to ‘create shock.’ He refused to perform in a tuxedo, and therefore he and his band were not allowed to perform. They were “a wild mob of free-jazz-men, who - already commissioned - because of their offensive stage habits were relegated from this year’s Berliner Jazztage.”<sup>70</sup> Although Brötzmann managed to create shock, protest against the status quo and offered a new sound world, he remained in the image of white masculinity.

At the same time, there is value in the white male body being seen. On that one hand, the body often figures very effectively as a point of final explanation of social difference. By this argument, white - and men - are where they are socially by virtue of biological, that is, bodily superiority. The sight of the body can be some kind of proof.<sup>71</sup>

Brötzmann and his exclusively male friends staged war by using the saxophone to sound like machine guns, performers battling on stage, they wanted to protest and emphasise their anger against the white supremacist wars. However, following Richard Dyer’s quote then, the visual presence of male bodies presents a hierarchical superiority, furthermore it represents a sexualised body, because it becomes a site of gaze and arousal.<sup>72</sup> It is especially the fact that they refused to fit into

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<sup>68</sup>Wilson, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup>We will discuss clothes and performance practices in Chapter 3, section 3.5.

<sup>70</sup>My translation: “(...) Horde wilder Free-Jazz-Männer, die - bereits verpflichtet - wegen ihres optisch beleidigenden Bühnenhabits von den diesjährigen ‘Berliner Jazztagen’ relegiert wurden.” Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 114.

<sup>71</sup>Dyer, 2014, p. 79.

<sup>72</sup>Pfeil, 1995, pp. 7.

the status quo of the bourgeois *Gegenfestival* in Berlin in 1968 that they are using their performance in very similar ways to Elvis Presley and other rock stars.<sup>73</sup> In relation to cultural meaning Bourdieu argues that a visual performance of strength and physique supports masculine stereotypes. Like specific sports, playing free jazz, moving in a specific way with the saxophone, playing specific fast and loud sounds are the “visual characteristics of masculinity.”<sup>74</sup> Volume turns into power. It becomes a sonic representation of control, over the instruments, band members, but also the audience. It becomes a performance of masculinity.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, *Machine Gun* remained in a bodily presence of dominating masculinity. This way of bodily presence, including the saxophone and its sounds, the body postures of the human body, masculinity expresses itself “mainly in posture, realising in bodily poses, positions and gestures that illustrate integrity, straightness, the erected body or its symbolic substitute of sculptors and statues.”<sup>76</sup> The instrument becomes the sculptor of erected masculine postures. It turns into an expression of control and dominance. There is of course also an interesting relation to the use of an instrument, where the tool becomes a site of masculinity. Tools are something that can be dominated, practiced and conquered.

An instrument, a tool, a practice like music comes with its historic symbolisms, and these can often be related to dominance. Having read Fanon in 1.2, where he shows how the white man created everyone else in opposition to himself, then in similar light players like Brötzmann establish themselves as different to other players.

(...) more immediate significance for the argument being constructed here, it has been contended that this kind of dichotomous thinking, to-

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<sup>73</sup>Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie. “Rock and Sexuality”. In: *On Record. Rock, Pop, And The Written Word*. Ed. by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. Routledge, 1978, pp. 319.

<sup>74</sup>My translation: “Die sichtbaren Merkmale der Männlichkeit.” Pierre Bourdieu. *Die Männliche Herrschaft*. Suhrkamp, 2016, p. 94.

<sup>75</sup>Frith and McRobbie, 1978, p. 319.

<sup>76</sup>My translation: “Die sich vor allem als Haltung äußert, verwirklicht sich in den körperlichen Posen, Stellungen oder Gesten, die alle in Richtung Rechtschaffenheit, Geradheit, Aufrichtung des Körpers oder seiner symbolischen Substitute, den Steinmalen, der Statue, weisen.” Bourdieu, 2016, p. 132.

gether with a whole range of the sets of dualisms which take this form (...) are related to the construction of the radical distinction between genders in our society, to the characteristics assigned to each of them, and to the power relations maintained between them.<sup>77</sup>

Establishing spaces of difference creates hierarchical, patriarchal power relationships, and I feel that these differences in musical practices and the masculinity of these practices are still part of the practice I participate in. The saxophone was used as a colonial instrument, and marketed by Sax himself as such. In fact Sax presented the instrument personally to Napoleon III.<sup>78</sup> Considering that the instrument was marketed and integrated into a military complex makes the instrument part of these power structures.

However:

(...) widespread evidence of civic and domestic music-making based around small ensembles of saxophones demonstrates a social identity for the instrument that is different from both its largely military usage of the nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup>

Through the work of Wilmer and Lewis, we have seen how the saxophone, but also free jazz are forms of musical resistance, trying to create a resistance culture against the white dominant culture.<sup>80</sup> We have seen how groups have reclaimed the instrument as a voice of resistance, and how European improvisers like Brötzmann used the instrument to critique the political status quo. Nonetheless, the instrument and its performers remain within patriarchal power structures that form, shape and exclude the possibilities that the saxophone can offer.

It is also in that way we need to consider the masculine use of the instrument and

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<sup>77</sup>Doreen Massey. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (1994) 2001, p. 256.

<sup>78</sup>Cottrell, 2013, p. 28.

<sup>79</sup>For more on the diversity of the saxophone see: *ibid.*, pp. 140.

<sup>80</sup>Chapter 1.

their performances, the free improviser also strengthens “the ties between masculinity and the instrument”<sup>81</sup> and it was through cock-rockers and other rock stars that the instrument (like the electric guitar) and the performance (like that of Elvis Presley) become symbols of “sexuality and virtuoso playing”.<sup>82</sup> I can’t help drawing a relation to the ‘cock-rock’ performers, meaning “music making in which performance is an explicit, crude, and often aggressive expression of male sexuality - it’s the style of rock presentation that links a rock and roller like Elvis Presley to rock stars like Mick Jagger[...]”<sup>83</sup> As Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie show, the ‘cock-rockers’ show their bodies as hyper-sexualised, strong and aroused.<sup>84</sup> The body becomes the site of sexuality and masculinity. The instruments (predominately guitars) or mics become phallic symbols, they allow loudness, which expresses power, because you are physically louder than the ones listening to you. More so, as already shown through the work of Dyer above, there is a value of a body being seen on stage.

In that regards I come back to Brötzmann and his and other bodies on stage. What I find striking about Brötzmann’s collaborations is that they are an overdose of male free jazz and noise bands; you and I shall look at *Last Exit* and *The Chicago Tentet*.

“Why did you ask for a jazz PA? You’re not a jazz group! You’re a heavy metal band.”<sup>85</sup> *Last Exit*, a battlefield of chaotic, loud, aggressive, male fights. A cluster of agitated rhythms, loud bursting saxophone, shredded, distorted guitars. The saxophone played in a punk-style manner, brutal, chaotic. *Last Exit* is more a free jazz/improvisation collaboration rather than a stereotypical rock or heavy metal band. Sonny Sharrock further states that their playing is not work, but “it’s picnic time.”<sup>86</sup> An implication that *Last Exit* is a group of men meeting to unwind on

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<sup>81</sup>André Millard. *The Electric Guitar: A History of an American Icon*. The John Hopkins University Press, 2004, p. 158.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>83</sup>Frith and McRobbie, 1978, p. 319.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>85</sup>Steve Lake. “Last Exit. The Living End.” In: *The Wire* 29 (1986), pp. 22–23, p. 22.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

stage. The band never rehearsed; the band only existed on stage when they were asked to perform. Their meeting place was the stage.<sup>87</sup> The audience watches these men sonically fighting, attempting to approach this message or communication that Brötzmann mentioned before.

More than this, the audience watches a symbolic male presence, “the combative, action man image, offering intensely physical performances.”<sup>88</sup> Opposed to a more organised free improvisation, these men are spontaneous live performers. It was always an expression of freedom, to do the things as they wanted to, not just for the individual, but also with co-musicians, to create something together. This music was “always an expression of an idea.”<sup>89</sup>

Then there is *The Chicago Tentet*, ten men on stage, playing loud, agitated music. Brötzmann’s mammoth collaborative project.

From the very beginning Jazz music is nothing else than living - in actual fact it is about survival: About the bottle of liquor, the woman in your bed and maybe a bit about work (...).<sup>90</sup>

*The Chicago Tentet* is full of male saxophonists: Mats Gustafsson, Ken Vandermark, Peter Brötzmann and occasionally Joe McPhee - who otherwise often plays the trumpet. Gustafsson and Vandermark are a generation younger than Brötzmann, but both often get described as macho men in free jazz along Brötzmann. These male musicians present a physical, muscular and male presence on stage. As argued before, human and nonhuman bodies carry symbolisms, carry meaning to their audiences. And, “the tough guy image has certainly been magnified by the provocatively confrontational stance [Gustafsson] has taken (...).”<sup>91</sup>

Earlier, I mentioned how succeeding musicians reproduce the practice already in

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>88</sup>Daniel Spicer. “Mats Gustafsson”. In: *The Wire* 349 (2013), pp. 39–44, p. 43.

<sup>89</sup>Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 54.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>91</sup>Spicer, 2013b, p. 42.

place; Gustafsson has taken the sonic world of the free jazz saxophone, but puts it into a very physical performance. Gustafsson often resembles stereotypical rock stars (like discussed above), who often do exaggerated poses with their guitars or their bodies on stage. The sexualisation of the male performer arguably started with Rock'n'Roll and the famous hip movements.<sup>92</sup> Similar to stereotypical images of 1960s or 1970s rock musician using their guitar as a masculine tool of dominance,<sup>93</sup> Gustafsson plays, lifts and holds the saxophone as a trophy, but too expensive to be smashed to bits like guitars often were.<sup>94</sup>

Jazz music has a tradition of saxophone battles, where solo saxophone passages were used to dominate the stage, show off ones talent and battle - in a sonic way - against another musician on stage.

During the heyday of rhythm & blues, blues-oriented instrumentalists, usually saxophone players, would vie to see who could screech, or moan, or shout the loudest and longest on their instruments.<sup>95</sup>

Maybe, this historic symbolism has carried through and seeing three saxophonists on stage at the same time, Brötzmann states: “there has to be a battle (...) and that’s okay (...) but luckily we are all different: (...) Mats our little Macho.”<sup>96</sup> It is difficult to say whether Brötzmann is sarcastic, but watching Gustafsson on stage or on video, one gets the impression of the previously described rock star, an acquired popular cultural way of showing a physical workout on stage. His physical presence and body postures are a form of exercise with the saxophone. Brötzmann continues to say that Gustafsson does his “macho-stuff in the middle of the stage.”<sup>97</sup> This ‘male music’ comes with a set of preconditioned ideals; Brötzmann here seems to imply that he is beyond this sexy image of a tough and strong musician, beyond that

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<sup>92</sup>Frith and McRobbie, 1978, p. 319.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., /ppno 319.

<sup>94</sup>See the performance essay *Muscular* on the USB stick under: Performance Essay - Muscular.

<sup>95</sup>LeRoi Jones. *Blues People. Negro Music in White America*. The Trinity Press, 1965, p. 127.

<sup>96</sup>My translation: “Gott sei dank sind wir alle so verschieden: (...) Mats unser kleiner Macho.” Bauer and Brötzmann, 2012, p. 82.

<sup>97</sup>My translation: “Mats, den lassen wir seinen Macho-Kram in der Mitte machen.” *ibid.*, p. 82.

macho image now, someone who can call the younger guys macho. Fortunately, there is enough footage and interviews available that can show how Brötzmann himself played with the image of a touring rock star.

Listening to an anecdote about Brötzmann from the late 1960s, expresses the gendered masculinity this music is part of. It presents the image of Brötzmann being strong and cool on stage. A man in the audience seems to be clearly annoyed or disturbed about their playing and thinks that he does not want to listen to their music:

While we were playing, quite a strong man from the audience comes towards the stage, grabs Brötzmann's neck, drags him from stage and punches him in the gob. Brötzmann's nose was even bleeding a bit. Fortunately Brötzmann remained cool. Wiped his nose and went back on stage to continue playing.<sup>98</sup>

Further to this, Evan Parker also explains that playing the saxophone, or this kind of music might have turned into a physical, painful experience. He states: "often we ended up with blood, it was a messy business sometimes."<sup>99</sup> Although Parker is actually talking about testing different mouthpieces, he confirms an image of the man fighting through the pain, performing in pain through the battle (the performance). Albert Ayler also deliberately used very tough plastic reeds, not only to show the physical exhaustion it requires to play on these rough reeds, but also to have a "sound that scared the shit out of everyone who heard him."<sup>100</sup> Not only might this kind of music create a violent tension amongst performers and audience, but also seems to involve physical pain for the performer, when playing this kind of music.

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<sup>98</sup>My translation: "Mitten in unserem Auftritt stand ein ziemlich robuster Mensch im Publikum auf, kam zur Bühne, packte Brötzmann am Kragen, zerrte ihn von Bühne und haute ihm eins in die Fresse. Brötzmanns Nase blutete sogar ein bisschen. Glücklicherweise ist der Brötzmann ganz cool geblieben, hat sich die Nase abgewischt, ist wieder auf die Bühne gegangen und hat weitergespielt" Peter Niklas Wilson. "Klänge wie ein Maschinengewehr: Free Jazz - vom Skandalon zum historischen Stil". In: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 161.3 (2000), pp. 42–49, p. 47.

<sup>99</sup>Josse, 2011, 30:14.

<sup>100</sup>Wilmer, (1977) 2018, p. 123.

It implies that this music is pushing the boundaries of physical comfort, to play this music man has to be in pain; it is a painful exercise to get these forceful sounds out.

In this chapter we gained a better understanding on how masculinity might be embodied in performance gestures and their labelling of the instrument. Through a technofeminist comparison of the guitar with the saxophone we saw how ideas around engineering and improvisation allow a categorisation of instruments and performers. It is their performance techniques and postures that allow an extension of their masculinity into the instrument and their performance spaces. This dichotomous understanding allowed me to question my own playing approaches and made me find ways of performing, opposed to idealised performance gestures (for example standing upright, playing loud and fast). The analysis of masculinity gives me ways to find methods of resistance (for example by sitting) with the saxophone. The following story was written as a response to the masculinity described before, it very visually describes the male body and his saxophone. The story embodies masculinity in performance gestures and the affect these might have on audiences. It is exactly these coded performance gestures that I stopped using as an outcome of this research.

# Muscular

## The female gaze on Muscular Saxophonists

[Watch: Performance Essay - Muscular]

*The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity - honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy - to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power.*<sup>101</sup>

Standing close to stage. Close enough to see all his performing gestures. His touchings on baritone saxophone. Physical exhaustion, exercise, the baritone strapped around his muscular neck. Every single of his slap tongues articulated to resonate and reverberate in this space. His saxophone turned into a percussive sonic body he is holding and hitting. Flicking his fingernails against the reed, while his muscles around the mouth tighten in accelerated rhythms to release percussive sounds from the baritone. Each of these slap tongues executed with visible physical strength. His body moves forward, leaning into his baritone. Holding his baritone tight. Lifting his upper body, breathing in. Tightening the muscles in his neck and around the mouth. I can see his veins pumping blood. Release of muscular tension around the mouth. His mouth opens. The sound of the tongue releasing a percussive sound from the baritone's reed. His skilful tongue stimulating the opening of his saxophone. Repeating those gestures, extending his muscles into the baritone.

Force on force. Two strong, contoured bodies. His hands tight around baritone's body, watching his wet tongue rhythmically touching the reed. Lifting one of his legs from the floor, physical force to dominate the baritone. His head is getting red, his veins expand more. He is giving it his best movements, the rhythmic slap tongues popping in quick gestures through the metal body. Making his muscles twitch and react. His muscular

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<sup>101</sup>Haraway, 1991, p. 188.

thigh muscles lifting the baritone's weight up. Repetitiveness of these muscular exercises causing him more physical pain, his face starts frowning. The baritone is forcing him to execute physical strength. Showing his muscular superiority to the baritone, to me. His veins get bigger. His arms tighten around the baritone, his arm muscles are visible. Strong, male muscles holding metal, strong, militaristic body. Visibility of planned, practiced gestures. He is exercising his body into his baritone's body, his muscles are within his baritone, his tongue surrounding the baritone's reed and mouth. This wet muscle joyfully caressing the outsides of the mouthpiece. His eyes are closed, concentrating on his muscular work. Closing his mouth around the mouthpiece, releasing his sophisticated wet muscle to release the baritone's muted body and allowing it to speak. Their bodies are rocking forward and backward. Releasing their physical exhaustion into all of us. He closes his eyes. There is the sweat coming from his forehead.

Invented to support French military bands around the mid 19th Century the saxophone became widely known through colonial activities of several Western European countries. The saxophone is highly constructed, designed with a specific purpose in mind. Layout of Western music-design, arranged in linear order to be executed. A metal body asking to be forcefully taken in control and mastery. Purpose-built to support a loud, militaristic agenda.

Praise to strength and power. Militarism. *Machine Gun*. Down with the powerless crackles, breaths of Feminist Saxophonizing. Militaristic sounds blasting through saxophones. Man's muscles dominating the mouth of a saxophone. Penetrating with force through the saxophone's body. Peter Brötzmann's *Power!* The visibility of the gendered male body is a value. Through muscles, militaristic execution, practice, labour the saxophone turns into an extension of male muscles. A built and mastered body - human and nonhuman bodies - they are achieved bodies, worked, planned, suffered for. A mastered body like saxophone requires forethought and long-term organisation. Graduated exercise, scheduled rests, routines and they must strictly be adhered to.

Listening to Anthony Braxton's *Reality of the Sweating Brow* in which he discusses

the cliché of equating physical exhaustion and musical performance: Only a sweating musician is a good musician. This *has to do with how white writers have come to interpret whether a given black musician is accurately 'doing the best' he or she can, or whether that musician is merely 'coasting' - or not 'really trying to be creative' ... A black so-called jazz musician's activity... is viewed not so much with respect to his or her given music offering, but instead with respect to whether that person's emotional surface output is viewed as sufficient.*<sup>102</sup> The actual physical 'look' of the performer is more important.

The baritone is blasting out loud, aggressive multiphonics, layers of notes, a special playing technique. Strong and steady they continue sounding. A big instrument with a loud and strong voice. Hold by tight, strong hands. Triggering the *Machine Gun*. In rhythmic perfection multiphonics shooting into the space. Brötzmann's classic *Machine Gun*, an icon of male saxophone practice. One of the many saxophone gods of improvisation, Evan Parker, Albert Ayler, John Butcher, Mats Gustafsson, Joe McPhee, Ken Vandermark - we must take a breath there are too many. Their bodies, like those of all gods, carry the signs of hard, planned labour, the spirit reigning over the flesh. There they stand and play, strong and erected, male sculptures, saxophone divinities. The icons of my practice. Those improv gods are idols. Bodies asking to be reproduced in sounds. We are reproducing them with our saxophones. A male, military tool reclaimed by women as empowerment. Female saxophonists imitating the voices of the gods. Images and bodies constructing the saxophone.

The baritone's body is hard and contoured, resembling an armour. Practice, performance like bodybuilding has three goals: mass, definition and proportion. Mass or muscles, literally a quantities measure, the more multiphonics, the more gun-like sounds the better. Definition: the clarity of which one group of gestures or sounds stands out from others. A big repertoire differently toned and practice to create an aesthetic

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<sup>102</sup>Paul Steinbeck. "Intermusicality, Humor, and Cultural Critique in the Art Ensemble of Chicago's "A Jackson in Your House"". In: *Jazz Perspectives* 5.2 (2011), pp. 135–154, p. 144.

unified body. Proportion: visual and sonic balance between all different performative components.

Loudness. Blasting noise out of metal body. Triggering his muscular neck to expand even more. I am thinking that it must surely explode at some point. Persistence. Fighting through physical exhaustion. He can master the baritone. The more power, the more physical strength the better the male body feels. This defined, hard, silver, strong body, covered in keys, wires, patches. An erotic tool. Beautiful. Man, the hard, contoured, muscular mind over woman, the soft, wet, permeable flesh. Now he is moving, lunges, exercising with his baritone. The weights to tone his body. Make him feel superior. I am dancing along. Loving every bit of it. His firm, peach-like arse almost in front of my face. I could just about touch it. Grab it. Man, this music is fucking amazing. I love it.

*Only a hard, visibly bounded body can resist being submerged into the horror of femininity.*<sup>103</sup> A mastered body is an achieved body. The contours of the baritone and his muscles melt, who is harder? His body covered in a sheen, metallic glittering. The sweat of his forehead dripping onto the baritone's keys, his skin giving away, opening up over the strengthening, enduring exercises. He is performing, working. His baritone is getting softer, the hands touching it created a fluid border, from flesh to metal. *Breath is an essential condition and part of voice, breath is compelling and intriguing in that it is both bodily and not. Breath starts in one body and then connects to - communicates with - another.*<sup>104</sup> The breath and spit running through its inside breaking the hard contours of bodies.

She holds her saxophone tight with strong arms and tightened muscles. Moves her body forward, leaning into the shape of this iconic male symbol. Controlling her saxophone. Using the *Machine Gun*, repetitively executing perfect rhythmic guns shots. Moving her muscular body. Dancing in close contact with her instrument. She is exercising,

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<sup>103</sup>Dyer, 2014, p. 78.

<sup>104</sup>Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, & Theo van Leeuwen. *Voice. Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*. London: MIT Press, 2010, p. xxiv.

surrounded by a flowerbed. Outside. In bright daylight. She bends forward, holding her saxophone tight, pressing her body into the shape of the instrument. Hard, muscular, bordered bodies surrounded by colourful, bright, green landscape. Her rhythmic repetitive gunshots blasting over the flowers. Male shooting. Reproduced male sounds over flora and fauna. Male sonic reproduction over an inherited idea of femininity. Flower is woman and sonic noises are male. She is performing the male in woman. Multiphonic bangs. Repeated. Louder. Using his body. Repetitively. Exercising. Frowning. Lifting her legs. Moving the saxophone along with her routine. Dominance over metal body. She is starting to sweat on her upper lip. I can see her sweat pearls starting to assemble on her lip, they wait and while she plays power music, muscle music, they are tickling her. Annoyingly, in perfect streams they start moving down the sides of her face now. Does she not need to wipe them off?

His baritone is fucking hot. Covered in sweat. Lifted into the air. Pushed through with forceful breath and resonating with a manly force. The baritone's beauty of assembled manufacturing, instrument design. A western sonic gun, covered in complex and miniscule components. Women the body of reproduction, inseminated, birthing male sounds. Desiring male sounds. The saxophone god is our female Erotic. Our practice is male. Within male eroticism. This eroticism is a process of power, mastery, control. His jeans are very tight. His muscular body, the baritone, their sounds are strong and sweaty. He is pushing up his arse, while pushing the baritone down. The presence of his shoulder blades visible through his shirt. Controlled, trained loud sounds emerging from his melting body.

A saxophone. Want to be touched. Feeling sweat running over metal body. Spit running inside. Flesh touching. Spit and breath pushing and moving inside. Body with skin, metal skin. Releasing out. Massage. Spit. Slowly starts dribbling down inside. Tickles. Spit stuck in neck. Crackling, spitty, grainy noises. Human left sputum. Breath through entire body. Filling holes. Leaving traces pushing back into existence. Stream of spit slowly finds its way along interior. Passing discoloured metal inside. Wetting inside. Wet metal tubes filled with a stream of sputum. Touch inside and outside. Flesh holding keys,

pressing. Sound travels by breath. Noises. Noising. Wet lips closing in. Suffocating. Sucking. Forcing back. Vibrating. Tickled by breath. Passing sounds outside. Sweat on metal. Covered inside and outside. Metal skin broken into liquid form. Sweat touches keys. Touch fills holes. Spit fills holes. Pads and keys need to feel touch. Touch completes the bodies into a unit. Touch makes us one skin. One instrument. One body.

Female empowerment is not using the master's tool, *for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*<sup>105</sup> The idea of mind over flesh, the binaries of body and mind. The saxophone, the desirable, erotic tool. Men have defined the erotic, linked it to pornography and capitalism. Any body - human or nonhuman - is an eroticised thing within our society. Refusing to practice the saxophone, refusal of work. Refusing to desire the saxophone as a tool of empowerment, what is left? Enjoyment. Fun. Melting into another body through touch. Feminist saxophonizing can be understood as a dialogue within Western patriarchy improvisation practices. Focusing on the performative process, a sonic desiring. Focussing on the absolute value of the present moment. Intimacy of two bodies. Attentive listening of sonic bodies.

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<sup>105</sup>Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984, p. 112.

## Chapter 3

# Improvisation As Feminist Practice

This chapter gives more space to the female musicians who did challenge the patriarchy of free improvisation practices early on. I would like to use the first half of the chapter to discuss the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG). Using their practice, that of other female improvisers and my own, I will conclude by mingling our practices into an account of feminist improvisation of fluidity. It is here where I will fully explore a feminist improvisation practice, one that finds resistance to the described patriarchal structures before. Through FIG I will show how different improvisation approaches (like using household items to represent a female space) can establish a creative resistance to male spaces. Unlike women of the AACM, who wanted access to musical spaces, FIG used their performances - that often queered the male spaces - as ways of establishing their own improvisation practices.

As I am of course not a 1970s musician I will give voice to more contemporary artists who have found critical approaches to patriarchal structures. However, it is through groups like FIG, but also the female musicians of the AACM that I - for example - no longer had to fight to find ways to access improvisation spaces. Instead I am in a much more privileged position to explore my practice, through their

works and fights, but also through the examples provided by other contemporary artists. The practices of the female musicians discussed in this chapter allowed me to develop my own ways of playing with the saxophone that have been described in the stories already, but will find a more thorough description in the second half of this chapter.

To improvise was political: as a collective action without text, director or historical continuity it had no legitimacy in the institutions; it could act as a vehicle for the unspeakable; at its most potent it could subsume the individual (performer and audience) into a field of uncertainty, threatening the loss of self and the collapse of societal boundaries, though the limitations of that utopian vision are retrospectively apparent.<sup>1</sup>

Toop recognises the ‘utopian’ ideal of free improvisation as already problematic, male improvisers established free improvisation during a time of feminist activism. It was however men, who set out the rules for musicians to follow. Groups like AMM, SME and the Dutch ICP were, like the early AACM, an (almost) all-male club. Although performers, like Julie Tippets, Maggie Nicols, Lindsay Cooper, Irene Schweizer and others were involved in various improvisation groups throughout the 1960s, individual male performers like Evan Parker, Eddie Prévost, Peter Brötzmann and many more are still considered as some kind of ‘father’ figures within the free improvisation history.<sup>2</sup> However radical some of those groups or members considered their politics to be, this and their musical resistance usually never expanded into a discussion around gender. No link to the women’s movement happening at the same time as the emergence of free improvisation can be found.

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<sup>1</sup>David Toop. *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation And The Dream Of Freedom. Before 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>As said throughout, their works are part of the free improvisation canon in practice, but also writing. It is telling how Evan Parker is asked to write the introduction to *Weaving Sounds*, becomes the case study of Borgo’s *Swarm*.

### 3.1 Feminist Improvising Group - FIG

Maggie Nicols and Lindsay Cooper founded FIG in 1977.<sup>3</sup> The idea of FIG was to:

have an open and changing pool of women musicians that would bring a wide range of approaches to improvisation, varied experience to technical facility, and stylistic diversity to spontaneous performances.<sup>4</sup>

The group was open to all women with any or no musical skills, although arguably its founders have all been either traditionally trained or already participated in musical groups. The group was founded at the height of second-wave feminism in Europe in the 1970s, and therefore - as we will see - implements and addresses direct political issues concerning the conditions of women at that time. Most of these revolve around low-paid labour, care or child work, and domestic housework.<sup>5</sup>

FIG however wasn't the first all-female group to emerge on the free improvisation scene in the UK during the 1970s. The Women's Liberation Music Project started organising all-female workshops in 1977.

These workshops were essentially a women's space only, because of the obvious inhibition women feel, their lack of confidence engendered by male domination of the music 'scene' - as musicians, sexist lyricists, owners and bosses of recording companies, bands, in fact every aspect of musical production.<sup>6</sup>

As we will see for FIG, these already existing workshops for women gave them a

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<sup>3</sup>In fact, the group called themselves women's improvising group, but the festival organisers had billed them as 'Feminist Improvising Group', the group members took on this name. Julie Dawn Smith. "Diva-Dogs: Sounding Women Improvising". PhD thesis. The University of British Columbia, 2001, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>Georgina Born. "After Relational Aesthetics. Improvised Music, the Social, and (Re)Theorizing the Aesthetic". In: *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*. Ed. by Georgina Born, George E Lewis, and Will Straw. Duke University Press, 2017, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup>Nicole Freni. "Musics, No. 13, August, 1977". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. Ed. by David Toop and Steve Beresford. ecstatic peace library, 2016, p. 16.

confidence to discover their musical abilities.

FIG attacked the patriarchal structures of free improvisation "appear[ing] in drag, engaged in role-playing, performed domestic chores, peeled onions and sprayed perfume."<sup>7</sup> All this is in stark contrast to a more ordered, and structured way of performing. The main threads of the discussions and articles in *Musics* concern technique, questions of sound as being, and structure.<sup>8</sup> These texts are almost exclusively written by men, and this is problematic when women are not granted access to these practices, and more so when men perpetuate themselves in texts that become dogmas for further excursions into free improvisation.

Woman embodies a threat to male patriarchy, the rigid order of a society. Woman is wet, liquid, she is opposed to the male, dry body.

Fear of her serous nature and her ability to contaminate finds its origins in the association of the female body with a wet permeability that is seen in opposition to the dry, and by implication hard, male body.<sup>9</sup>

It is this 'origin' of the female body being wet that I will use to entangle a (my) different playing as a resistance to the male playing described in the previous chapter. As discussed in section 1.7 of Chapter 1, the female musicians were able to establish their own musical spaces; men no longer fully controlled their performance spaces. In the Introduction I have noted that I consider my research as activism, considering our current political landscape, where I feel we are witnessing a rise of conservative and masculine ideologies. I want to use this space to press and push more into masculine capitalism.

(...) This crowd reacts to the painful consciousness of declining potency with masculine bitterness, and with an anti-feminine aggression that is

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<sup>7</sup>Bracket added by me. Smith, 2001, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup>The collection of all *Musics* magazines gives a good overview on these topics. David Toop and Steve Beresford, eds. *Musics. A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. ecstatic peace library, 2016.

<sup>9</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 79.

increasingly marking daily life and international politics. (...) in the loss of male power, a symptom of the fearful perception of lessening potency of men in comparison with the rising potency of technique.<sup>10</sup>

Following Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi I want to use FIG as an example of how we can use their approaches also in contemporary performance settings, learn from their performance approaches and use deliberate performance techniques that challenge masculine spaces.

In Chapter 1 and 2, we already heard that what is male is defined as hard and strong. These same attributes describe improvisation practices, when words like control, strategy, fight, battle, and organisation are used. Improvisation comes with a lot of rules and idioms, of which we already saw a few in the course of this thesis.<sup>11</sup> From specific sound qualities and playing techniques to group organisation, improvisation is a container of structure which is predominantly ruled and designed by male performers.<sup>12</sup>

Listening to Julie Dawn Smith, who describes sounding woman as a “leaky container and that her boundaries are porous and penetrable.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of following male idioms in improvisation, a female performance (of course always depending on the intention and content of the performance) can disrupt the concept of hard and strong. The body itself can be a site, a space referring to lived and projected experiences uncontained by male ideas of structure.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Berardi, 2017, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup>See Chapter 1, especially the section on male mentorship 1.5, or Chapter 2 and the section 2.2 on technique.

<sup>12</sup>See: Introduction.

<sup>13</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup>Elisabeth Grosz. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Tayler and Francis, 1995, pp. 100.

## 3.2 Bodies

The body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: it is placed between psychic or lived interiority and a more socio-political exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface.<sup>15</sup>

For what we will discuss shortly, the body becomes a site of musical and performative resistance. As read in the above quotation, outer socio-political symbols inscribe meaning onto the body. The female body is especially marked as reproductive, domestic and inferior. The making of the female body is related to a wider political event of enclosures and privatisation of land and people, starting in the sixteenth-century.<sup>16</sup>

The control of land and its crops, people working on these lands, and the animals grazing the fields allowed a change in relationship between private and public, and private owners (the few) acquired power over lands, animals, people and knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

The body, then, came to be the foreground of social policies because it appeared not only as a beast inert to the stimuli of work, but also the container of labour-power, means of production, the primary work-machine.<sup>18</sup>

The bourgeois elite was aware of the potential danger of the body, since the body can be a site of resistance. Listening back to Butler in the introduction of this thesis,<sup>19</sup> body politics and musics as resistance, like that of FIG and the AACM, are

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<sup>15</sup>Elisabeth Grosz. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Tayler and Francis, 1995, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup>Especially the chapter on enclosures and Enlightenment. Silvia Federici. *Caliban And The Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004, pp. 114.

<sup>17</sup>Reece Jones. *Violent Borders. Refugees and the Right to Move*. Verso, 2017, pp. 162.

<sup>18</sup>Federici, 2004, p. 138.

<sup>19</sup>Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 196.

bodily resistances and political activism. The dichotomy between mind and body allows a conception of the body as solely mechanical:

The body is a conglomerate of mechanical motions that, lacking autonomous power, operates on the basis of an external causation, in a play of attractions and aversions where everything is regulated as in an automaton.<sup>20</sup>

Considering that the body was and is seen as functioning through external factors, for example through the control of wages, health care, land and access to housing, thus creating a dependent power relationship between capitalism and its workers, we can see how the female body has always been marked as marginalised.

I already argued that most text on free improvisation is written by men, and this echoes Silvia Federici's argument in *Caliban and the Witch* - linked directly to the non-representation of black musicians in these accounts of free improvisation - that oral and practical history were considered worthless during the Enlightenment. It was believed that some men, who read and wrote, had knowledge and were thus able to construct power systems around - what they considered to be - superior knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

(...) There can be no doubt that the witch-hunt destroyed the methods that women had used to control procreation, by indicting them as diabolical devices, and institutionalized the state's control over the female body, the precondition for its subordination to the reproduction of labor-power.<sup>22</sup>

We shall see how this orality and a practical use of free improvisation play a key factor in the performances of FIG, and how the female body is a social space that

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<sup>20</sup>Federici, 2004, p. 139.

<sup>21</sup>Especially Federici's analysis on the body and mind divide through Descartes and Hobbes. *ibid.*, pp. 130.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 184.

becomes the site of action in their improvisation. When female bodies entered a free improvisation festival in the late 1970s, their bodily appearance was enough to disrupt the hard, controlled established body of the male improvisation collective.

### 3.3 FIG's Body

FIG resonates with/in women improvisers, women who choose to make spectacles of themselves by sounding body, sexuality, knowledge, difference, freedom and experience.<sup>23</sup>

While Cooper and Nicols realised that free improvisation had become a very important activist music genre, they also noted that no women were actively engaged in making it. In fact, similar to female AACM members, UK women were involved in organising gigs and festivals, but actively had little chance to perform. Watson's biography of Derek Bailey received criticism not only for his omission of other important improvisers, but also of Bailey's female partner in his book. Commentaries on review websites read that Bailey's then partner Janice Christianson was completely written out of this biography.<sup>24</sup> "Janice Christianson whose Albion Music series was a serious vehicle for Bailey."<sup>25</sup> Christianson also organised festivals and gigs, and although not an active musician, she was an important figure, supporting Bailey and free improvisation throughout. Watson's biography of Bailey, creates almost an idolic image of Bailey, who also clearly needed collective support to stage his practice. And this collective of musicians finds little space in this biography.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Nicols herself notes the following:

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<sup>23</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 111.

<sup>24</sup>Ben Watson. *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*. Verso, 2013.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Acquaro. *Trevor Barre - Convergences, Divergences Affinities- The Second wave of Free Improvisation in England, 1973-1979*. <http://www.freejazzblog.org/2017/10/trevor-barre-convergences-divergences.html>. (Last accessed 12-06-2018). 2017.

<sup>26</sup>(As above, for more on this see:) Watson, 2013.

Well yes, I absolutely agree: Derek Bailey's book *Improvisation* is male centred, any women involved, not even on the margins, but as innovators to the scene, are just totally absent. They aren't acknowledged in the book. You know, Irene Schweitzer, she was in there at the beginning, and me, I was a pioneer of the voice in improvised music.<sup>27</sup>

As stated in the Introduction, written texts and interviews by Evan Parker, Derek Bailey or Eddie Prévost are considered the dogma of free improvisation. They are taught and reproduced as part of academic degrees, workshops and the practice of free improvisation itself. These men's thoughts and written contributions on free improvisation are certainly an important addition to the musical canon, but Nicols' above quote raises the question of who writes history?

### 3.4 FIG's Resistance

If it becomes possible for each musician to reach a point in his own performing experience, where it is only the perception and reaction to music (or sound) that matters and not who is making it or how it is being produced - then perhaps it will be possible to feel an accord with things, a completeness which is not a self-delusory state.<sup>28</sup>

This quote by drummer Eddie Prévost implies that some men were looking for a more phenomenological approach to free improvisation. That might be fine, but the theorisation of sound as a 'completeness of self' turns into the creation of an essentialist and exclusive performance space.<sup>29</sup> It creates genres that exclude others

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<sup>27</sup>George McKay. *Maggie Nicols*. <https://georgemckay.org/interviews/maggie-nicols/>. (Last accessed 18-04-2019). 2003.

<sup>28</sup>Edwin Prévost. "Musics, No2, June/July, 1975". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. Ed. by David Toop and Steve Beresford. ecstatic peace library, 2016, pp. 12-13.

<sup>29</sup>For more on this see: Edwin Prévost. *The First Concert: An Adaptive Appraisal Of Meta Music*. Harlow: Copula, 2011.

from entering these free improvisation groups with different ideas about their own practice.

As stated before, during the 1970s there was awareness of gender struggles, and women's projects existed in the free improvisation scene. Their voices were not taken seriously though, as a woman's social position was still considered "that of (house-)wife/mother and/or lover paid worker, and music is used to underpin both roles."<sup>30</sup> Further to Cooper's analysis, the 'housewife' is a social conditioning of the middle-classes, where "nineteenth-century ideology established the housewife and the mother as universal models of womanhood."<sup>31</sup> I am arguing that we need to consider all these issues as a lack of intersectional solidarity. Thus, avant-garde male musicians were also socialised with specific gender biases and it is important for us to critique these now.

Until the late 1970s, almost all music workshops were lead by men. Nicols herself was exposed to free improvisation attending the Spontaneous Music Ensemble (SME) gigs in 1965. She acknowledges that it was almost a revelation when she performed John Steven's workshop pieces and found herself excited by the fact that she could improvise as well.<sup>32</sup> However she experienced her creativity within a male space, similar to the women in the AACM<sup>33</sup>, thus Cooper rightly argues that when men teach they will continue teaching in their masculine ways, they will reproduce their own knowledge to women:

Men do use rhythm, technology, improvisation to express the same power and sexual dominance which oppresses women, but if women react by restricting themselves to melodic and acoustic forms rather than also using other elements in a non-oppressive way (for example electronic

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<sup>30</sup>Lindsay Cooper. "Musics, No. 14 October, 1977". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. Ed. by David Toop and Steve Beresford. ecstatic peace library, 2016, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup>Davis, 1983, p. 229.

<sup>32</sup>David Ilic. "Maggie Nicols. Living out your contradictions". In: *The Wire* 24 (1986), pp. 22–24, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup>See Chapter 1.

technology can be used to create gruesomely oppressive wall-of-sound style rock but can also be used to extend the possibilities of collective work) they perpetuate the old definitions of themselves.<sup>34</sup>

One of the main reasons for the foundation of FIG was arguably the need for an all-women performance group, which finds its roots with Nicols' involvement in the Women's Movement. FIG opened a more confident and enjoyable place for all the female improvisers. We can relate this back to Chapter 1, in which I discussed the need for all black-female spaces in order for women in that environment to step outside of their male mentorship, and have spaces for their 'own' creative endeavours. Although women-only spaces give women the opportunity to explore their own creative practices without the eye of the man, Fitzpatrick argues that inclusion and exclusion could be problematic when really "what I think this does not acknowledge or reflect is conflict as a foundational premise of a meaningful public political space, and women's ongoing role in this space."<sup>35</sup> What Fitzpatrick clearly outlines here is a visible resistance within a body politic. For her, the exclusion allows those all-women bodies not to become noise in the political world; not to be a resistance to the patriarchal structures. She wonders what women actually demand entry into, and is that really a form of resistance?

With FIG we thought it important that women should stick together, and do something together, and show others that we also can master playing as good if not better than male bands. We thought it was important to show that we are strong.<sup>36</sup>

Although FIG claims that they were refusing to worry about the approval of men,<sup>37</sup> at the same time they also couldn't help worrying about their male co-players'

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<sup>34</sup>Cooper, 2016, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup>Marie Thompson and Susan Fitzpatrick. "Making Space: An Exchange about Women and the Performance of Free Noise". In: *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 25:2 (2015), pp. 237–248, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup>Céline Coté. "Epiphanies: Les Diaboliques". In: *The Wire* 293 (2016), pp. 104–105, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

approval:

(...) when we started doing the festivals there was too much worrying about what some male musicians thought about FIG.”<sup>38</sup>

This shows that FIG considered themselves as a resistance to male improvisers, actively and artistically performing against expected improvisation idioms. While at the same time, being aware of the male gaze and hoping for acceptance into male improvisation circles. Most festivals were of course organised by men, most acts were male and therefore being brave enough to enter the stage, resisting those male expectations was challenging on different levels. Even more so when they found out that musician Alexander von Schlippenbach considered them not to be ‘good’ musicians:

Then we found out from [the organizer’s partner] that Alex had gone to him and complained about us being there saying that he could have found loads of men that would have played a lot better, that we couldn’t play our instruments (...).<sup>39</sup>

This already shows a pre-conceptualised ideal of what is considered ‘good’ and not ‘good’ music. The funny bit is that according to Nicols, Schlippenbach actually told them in person that he thought their music performance was “phenomenal. It was mad, it was anarchic.”<sup>40</sup>

The group did not seem so affectively powerful at a "purely musical" level. Indeed, for our critics our musical proficiency was questionable, and we clearly did not know what we were doing: our ambiguous, possibly feigned "incompetencies" and apparent lack of technical virtuosity were felt by such critics to be intolerable to witness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>David Ilic. “Maggie Nicols. Living out your contradictions”. In: *The Wire* 24 (1986), pp. 22–24, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 238.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>41</sup>Born, 2017, p. 55.

In the above quote, Georgina Born, a FIG member at this time, goes even so far as to acknowledge that their music wasn't 'powerful'. There were still aspects of doubt within the group as to whether their performances would fit into the patriarchal structures of free improvisation at that time. For this, FIG had to face their own performance strategies of resisting male idioms, but at the same time they felt unwelcomed, whilst they still wanted to be accepted into the same circles. Although FIG have no visible record in a historic context, their performances were part of a specific period in visual art as well. Consider the work *Semiotics of the Kitchen* by Martha Rosler from 1975. In this video work, Rosler parodies the stereotypical gender roles of women in the domestic household. She situates herself in a kitchen setting, displaying different kitchen utensils. FIG and Rosler critique the stereotypes of gendered roles in the household.<sup>42</sup> Let us return to FIG and their more theatrical performance:

The Hoover, softly whirring in endless vacuity, and the Kenwood mixer, grinding and circling, were shown for what they are - not liberators, but enslaving accoutrements, women's assigned instruments that allow precious little room to improvise. The women's last words, as they picked their way off the now slummy stage, smudged, exhausted and without their disguises, were: "Someone else can clear up this mess."<sup>43</sup>

Resisting this idea of established male free improvisation, by chopping onions on stage or mopping the floor, FIG performers turn into the 'leaky containers'.<sup>44</sup> Instead of presenting a studied, practiced free improvisation performance, they use their bodies, their assigned socio-political gender role as a humorous act of resistance. As already mentioned, FIG's (not exclusively) improvisational focus seemed to be on

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<sup>42</sup>I play with the Scottish performance duo Usurper, who sometimes use very similar deliberate humorous performance methods. Usurper can be listened to on the Album (as part of this thesis): Tindagger&Usurper. Further groups or performers using a more theatrical or humorous approach are: Joyce Whitchurch or The Bohman Brothers.

<sup>43</sup>Susan Hemmings and Norma Pitfield. "Musics, No. 15 December, 1977". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. ecstatic peace library, 2016.

<sup>44</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 94.

the use of domestic tools, queer dressing and an ironic use of domestic expectations of women.

The incorporation of everyday domestic 'found' objects such as vacuum-cleaners, brooms, dustpans and egg slicers - in Lindsay Cooper's words transforming "the sound's of women's work into a work of women's sounds" - highlighted women's work in the private sphere as well as the subordination of working class women as domestics.<sup>45</sup>

The vacuum cleaner, the broom, washing the dishes, hearing the washing machine; all those were part of (many) women's daily sound worlds in this period. Smith's quote points to another aspect of the use of domestic tools: they represented a private sound world that mostly women experienced. The domestic household was sheltered away, hidden. The domestic actions of cleaning and tidying up were done privately, when only the woman was around.<sup>46</sup> Smith is also right in relating it to a working class sphere, as women are still the main workforce in cleaning jobs and care jobs. All those jobs happening hidden away, in private. Putting this hidden, private domestic and female space onto an improvisation stage is an act of resistance.

### 3.5 Dress

Lindsay [Cooper] remembered how she'd had to wear long black dresses on stage when she was playing with orchestras, so she came on dressed like that; I [Maggie Nicols] found some water on stage and started mopping it up, Lindsay was playing with all sorts of domestic electrical gadgets.<sup>47</sup>

Presenting domestic household tools on stage as musical instruments, and wearing

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<sup>45</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 124.

<sup>46</sup>Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Race and Class*. Random House, 1983, p. 222.

<sup>47</sup>Second bracket (Name) added by me. David Ilic. "Maggie Nicols. Living out your contradictions". In: *The Wire* 24 (1986), pp. 22-24, p. 23.

clothes to represent a resistance visually gives a political form to FIG and others. Not only FIG's domestic actions on stage, but also their dress code challenged the established improvisation scene. Imagine the scene described above, one performer wearing some kind of ballroom dress, while the other performer wears an apron, and a bathing hat, and mops the floor. Clothes are symbols of culture, class and gender and they can certainly visually represent a deliberate resistance to established class and gender norms.<sup>48</sup>

It is not just the noise we make that produces the disruptive effect; it must also be a consideration of where we are making the noise. To move beyond the dichotomous self and other is to move beyond the logic of inclusion and exclusion in the spaces we create and dwell within: towards a public space which is given its political form and force through the way it is defined by the dynamic and myriad political movements who inhabit it. Difference here becomes productive, open, becoming.<sup>49</sup>

FIG's approach broadens the musical-political space into a space of musical and performative resistance. The fact that they chopped onions "whose fumes were forcibly wafted into the audience,"<sup>50</sup> shows an extension of the performance space into a more sensory space, which these women tried to occupy by using their own socio-political constraints as performance activism. FIG challenged women's work in the male dominant free improvisation space.

Deliberately playing with the fashion codes of classical music, using domestic tools mostly associated to the female household. The use of those symbols, the actions of mopping the floor allow a humorous engagement with patriarchal expectations, also in sound.

(...) Laughter challenges the threshold of intelligibility and normality;

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<sup>48</sup>Patrick J. Williams. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011, pp. 73.

<sup>49</sup>Thompson and Fitzpatrick., 2015, p. 241.

<sup>50</sup>Hemmings and Pitfield, 2016, p. 20.

she utters the limit, the place where the subject is both articulated and annihilated - inside/womb/life merges with outside/abjection/death.<sup>51</sup>

FIG members sometimes used to touch each other, roll around on the floors. Again, their intentional, visible display of resisting male performance idioms allowed them to challenge those established male improvisation scenes.<sup>52</sup> In opposition to isolated, contoured, strong bodies, FIG's mingling of skins, tools, bodies shows a challenging and different approach to improvisation. Physical touch, a comfortable display of touching each other becomes a threat to masculinity. It clearly stands in contrast, and reminds us of Smith's and Anne Carson's thinking about women as leaky and fluid.<sup>53</sup> Performers' bodies become part of the performance; they are no longer 'just' executing improvisation practices, playing on an instrument, but the actual human body becomes the instrument. One can imagine FIG rolling around on stage, hugging each other, laughing and making noises. Their corporeality tied into society's expectations of domestic duties turn into a performative spectacle on stage.

By violating taboos of musical propriety and masculinist competition that prohibited musicians from touching one another, FIG more than hinted at the possibility of sensuous and sexual relationships between women.<sup>54</sup>

Notably, Nicols and Schweizer are lesbians. Today, all perform in *Les Diaboliques* alongside Joelle Leandre, an all-lesbian improvisation group. In the early stages of an all-female, partly lesbian improvisation group, we could almost assume that gender and sexuality established a deep bond amongst the group members. Speculating, some were sexually not even dependent on men either, which allows for an even stronger resistance to male ideals. This further not only questions male dominance,

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<sup>51</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup>Similar to the documentary *Town Bloody Hall* released in 1971, in which feminists publicly question Norman Mailer's work.

<sup>53</sup>Anne Carson. "Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt and Desire". In: *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Ed. by David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 139.

<sup>54</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 124.

but also queers the male performance space.

Queer bodies are the "site at which the social implicates the psychic in its very formation" - definitely not queer bodies only at the level of the sexual register (although that, too) but queer bodies as a tangible hint of that which is most irrepressible, most present in the moment, most utopian in this doubled language of power as subjection and subjectivation.<sup>55</sup>

Considering the above quote, and FIG members using their bodies to touch each other, they used their skin-to-skin performances possibly as an expression of queering male spaces. Although Born disagrees with the idea of FIG being a queer improvisation group, she thinks that it:

(...) essentializes and subsumes FIG's practices under an idealized queer politics. It is to project later categories back onto the group and its improvisations. In the process overlooking what remained heterogeneous, contentious, troubling, and unresolved - and, arguably, most productive - in the experimental and politicized social aesthetics set in motion by FIG.<sup>56</sup>

Born might be right in questioning later categorisations of groups and musical practices, however lesbian feminist activism was a strong voice in the second wave of feminism and arguably played a role for some members of FIG. The fact that Nichols, Leandre and Schweizer play together in *Les Diaboliques* allows us to think that all-female and all-lesbian music spaces support a specific political and sexual intention.

"We are the only self-confessed political group doing improvised music."<sup>57</sup> FIG mem-

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<sup>55</sup>Arthur Kroker. *Body Drift. Butler, Hayles, Haraway*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup>Born, 2017, pp. 56-57.

<sup>57</sup>Potter and Cooper, 2016, p. 9.

bers acknowledged that their performances are political, not necessarily the fact that they are all feminists, but that their theatrical and spoken performances have political content:

I don't hold that the fact that we are all different kinds of committed feminists has any direct musical result. With our use of theatre and words, though, there is a political content.<sup>58</sup>

Interestingly enough, women doing this music are labelled 'unprofessional' or 'not as good as their male counterparts'.<sup>59</sup> Till this day, "public soundings by women produce a great deal of anxiety: the sexed female body breaks the silence of representation with its abject noise."<sup>60</sup> Here noise can just be considered as a sounding body, anything that makes a sound in a public space, a form of doing.<sup>61</sup> Remembering the Butler quote from the beginning,<sup>62</sup> particularly going on the streets, just showing a physical presence can be noise enough to upset the fixed identity of a public space. Is this female noise a threat to the male patriarchy of improvisation?

And I've said it before, I know, and I'll keep saying it! FIG is written out of the history: we're all socialised, and music is just another history, and it's passed down the male lineage, and we have been written out.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Sally Potter and Lindsay Cooper. "Feminist Improvising Group. A Discussion". In: *Musics A British Magazine of Improvised Music & Art 1975-79*. Ed. by David Toop and Steve Beresford. ecstatic peace library, 2016. Chap. Musics No 20, December 1978, p. 9, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup>Smith, 2001, pp. 133.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>61</sup>Thompson and Fitzpatrick., 2015, pp. 241.

<sup>62</sup>See the Introduction.

<sup>63</sup>McKay, 2003.

## Servicewomen

### Assembling a Performance Routine

[Listen to: Adam & Tina - Track 1]

Saxophone in her case. She's secured, padded, strapped onto my back. Comfy and warm. The reeds are loosely flying around inside. *Arundo donax* is a cane, the reed. It has been used for centuries to make flutes. The ligature ties it onto Saxophone's mouthpiece. It is the entrance to her vocalic body. The thickness, quality and age carry the flow of air into a tuned tone. Reeds have to be wet. Inside my mouth I delightfully suck, lick, spit onto it. This current reed is old, one of its corners is already broken off and I remember feeling more cracked bits with the tip of my tongue. Pushing my tongue against the left corner of the reed I felt the broken bit, slightly scratching on my sensitive taste muscle. Last time I played, I bit heavily into it, creating those squeaky seal sounds. Moving my teeth up and down the reed's surface, stopping at the top and repeatedly biting and disturbing the airflow. I can now hear them hit her body, if I move too much they will poke her, enter her through the bigger keypads. Sneak into her holes to find comfort. Reeds inside her metal body. Occupying her body. Annoying her from the inside, scratching along her cold metal tubes. Her silver body trusting my ability of carrying her safely to our performance.

Spit is the inevitable physical companion when playing. Those spitty, crackly and noisy sounds are undesirable according to my first saxophone teachers. Thick, slimy saliva often gets stuck somewhere in the mouthpiece or neck creating noticeable blocked sounds. Sounds sounding grainy and dirty, carrying a layer of disgust and impurity. Sucking hard spit is placed back into the human's cavities and Saxophone is clear and pure again. Clean of any human presence. A pure sound appreciated as a pre-desired goal, an accepted sound. A saxophone must sound clear and full. I taste her, her wavy, damp, old reed. Looking at my mouthpiece I realise old, crusty and hard saliva bits stuck on mouthpiece. Does saliva turn white when it is not washed off? I start scratching it off

with my fingernails.

All this time I spent perfecting my 'classical' saxophone sound, experimenting with different reed brands and strengths. Still carrying my reed cutter around in Saxophone's case, it makes reeds more durable, cutting a very small edge off the tip makes the reed sound fresh and full again. I wonder whether it is possible to cut it so short that playing becomes a physical nightmare, muscular mouth cramps. This reed won't last much longer, it has been drowned in spit, leftover food odours, my breath, toothpaste, coffee and the bacteria and fungi of my mouth.

Microphone is a translator carrying the signal to the mixer, amplifying our touching. Bell microphone. A small microphone attached to a long bendy cord, a clip at its end secures the microphone onto Saxophone's bell. This is our amp, the magnifier of our breathy, noisy, oral sounds. When we perform we are glued together, all three of us. A trio. The bell microphone is regularly pushed deep into Saxophone, its bendy body turned almost to breaking point, the head of the microphone hanging just above the spit pond assembling at the bottom of the bell. Right down into her inside. Creating feedback issues once we are plugged into our compact mixer. The noisy interference we like. Microphone and mixer make audible what usually only I can hear. Dribbling spit assembling at the bottom of Saxophone. A residue pond activated through breath. Used substances that microphone pushes back into existence. Live-streaming our touching. Listener and amplifier. Nothing is private. Nothing is free. Surveillance. Technology to make us louder. *The microphone makes audible and expressive a whole range of organic vocal sounds which are edited out in ordinary listening; the liquidity of the saliva, the hissings, and tiny shudders of the breath, the clicking of the tongue and teeth, and popping of the lips. Such voice promises the odour, textures, and warmth of another body.*<sup>64</sup> Popping, squeaking inside cheek flesh on mouthpiece. While her mouthpiece is far inside my right cheek, I push air into my cheeks, like a hamster, slowly letting

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<sup>64</sup>Steven Connor. *Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought*. <http://stevenconnor.com/topologies/>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019). 2002.

the air escape with muscular pressure into the mouthpiece, where microphone picks up the floating signals into the loudspeakers. Electrical feedback, disturbing the rather humorous fleshy squeaks sounding from my face.

Microphone, saxophone and I are almost linearly connected. A chain of voices, human giving voice to the nonhumans. Mouths touching her mouths. My neck weighed down by her weight, connected through a neck strap. Attached to the middle of her body. A constant heavy physical presence. Dragging me forward, down. Obedient to her. Adapting to her shape. My disfigured body. A cramping figure holding onto Saxophone. My sore neck muscles are dragged, they are too hurt to drag her up. My muscles give in and bend down. Closer to the microphone at the end, where its cable extends our physical presence. Transmitted waves and signals. Energetic power to electricity.

A compact 4-channel mixer. The actual amplifier. Allowing me to control our signals, sending dry signal into a distortion pedal. Making those breathy sounds even noisier. Harsher. Louder. Driving the signals to its maximum, a wall of harsh breathy noises. Minuscule tongue movements amplified through signal manipulations. Multitudes of sounds. A multiple of instruments. *Instrumentarium*.

Bended

Lean

Slim

Silver

Shining

Sticky

Mechanical

Constructed

Sounding

Sophisticated tool. Complex assemblages of miniature components covering this body. Saxophone, covered in keys of various sizes. Some are especially fancy, pearl-like buttons. Maybe it is real pearl? Green felt lurking from underneath some of the keys. A damp, mouldy smell escaping Saxophone's holes. A moist cave of fungi, moss and earth.

Mixed with an unclean oxidation of metal. A grandeur instrument of highly-skilled craftsmanship. Tiny wires connecting the small tubes to keys. A refined mechanism. Ergonomic design. Smallest hand movements lead to full exposure of her designed body. A thick layer of old clumpy dirt coating her. Inside her bell is a colourful world of other inhabitants. Shiny turquoise meets brown residue. Mould? Rust?

We are inside an Ex-Servicemen's Club. There's the Queen. Framed in the cheapest plastic frame. Looking over the room, keeping an eye on the people who served this country well. Man, that picture is at least 20 years old. She looks more human in this picture. Glorious. Proud. A gaze of her imperialism. A great nation. The Queen, the embodiment of political neutrality, right? Not a good idea to stare too long into her eyes, they might open a tunnel to dystopia where there are some with access to wealth and others who work for those with wealth. I should really take that picture down and throw it into the bin.

I am standing in a dark, wooden room. On the right a bar, a woman and a man staring at me. Do they know I want to take their Queen away? I did laugh pretty loudly when I saw it and I had all kinds of terroristic ideas against the royals? Her head will look nice in one of those medical preserving jars: 'last Queen of before Brexit'.

The ceiling in this place is low, wood panelling everywhere, built-in tables and benches all around the walls, a cavity in the back of the room. Folding accordion plastic doors are half open revealing the back-stage area. Just in front of those doors are two loudspeakers on stands. Erected. Tables. A guy wearing his headphones is sitting in front of his Mac, staring at the screen. The entire table is covered in some musical gear, lights in all colours flashing in rhythms. Behind an assemblage of erected tables, keyboard stands, a guy is singing through a microphone, controlling his synths and keyboards. More flashing lights from all that gear. Whiny, soft, hush voice underlined by delayed metallic sounds. I think someone stole his teddy bear. Now, the voice is looped, delayed, layered into the soft and hush sound scene. Not up for that shit, I am going to explore the space. Walking to the bar I order a water and look around. I feel uncomfortable, the woman's

eyes look up and down. Grudgingly handing over a pint full of ice cubes. I am sure I ordered water. That guy's voice is haunting me through the space. Delayed and looped it now multiplied itself into a choir of whiney, uttered nonsense. There's a pool table, a changing room and lockers. Why would they need lockers in here? Did they keep their old uniforms and salute to the Queen? Proud British Nation. The guy from the bar is breathing down my back, he clearly has been following me. I get it, I shouldn't be here, I was only looking for the toilets anyway. Creepy place.

I am flicking through the programme for tonight, looking for our stage time, 8:45pm. The teddy bear singer is now plonking around on the keyboard. He is the epitome of men and his toys. Expensive technology, erected on several keyboard stands, on top of each other, while he is hiding behind hushing into a microphone. Pathetic. 'Whizz-kids.' "One of the freshest new improv whizz-kid duos on the block. Adam plays modular synth and Tina plays sax. Or maybe they'll do something different. Fizzing snap, crackle, pop and strange deep vibes." Can I take all those programmes and chuck them in the bin? They'd be good company for the Queen. We are the new trendy emerging musicians on the free-improv scene? Highly skilful. Fresh. Mysterious. No one knows what we actually do. I am so fucking annoyed about this programme note. Who the fuck wrote that shit? Are we no longer allowed to be no-names? We now need a trendy garment to attract an audience? Who cares, we are niche musicians anyway. "Strange, deep vibes". That gets them coming. The word 'free improv' is out, old fashioned. Keep it open. Who knows what those highly skilful musicians do? For all we know they might play the saxophone and a modular synth. That's shocking!

He is bending forward plugging my cable into the DI - direct input. It needs a bit of a push. The soundguy's arse is pretty nice. My friend is fiddling around with his billions of patch cables trying to connect them on his synth. Bending down even further now, his arse *an image of an erotic movement that burglarizes the ideas contained in the mind, giving them the force of a scandalous eruption.*<sup>65</sup> I can hear my breath coming out of

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<sup>65</sup>Georges Bataille. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. University of Minnesota

the monitors. I take for granted now hearing my oral sounds, Saxophone's vocalic body through the loudspeakers. This disembodied voice, *the separation of the voice from the body from which it originally emanated*.<sup>66</sup> To me the loudspeakers are just our voice prosthetics. Like the microphone, they are used as an empty object to be filled with our voices. To the audience however this disembodied voice will make the physical human and nonhuman disappear, to them our voices are creatures vibrating in their ears and the space. Without fully concentrating on what I can hear through the PA or monitors I just start turning the knobs on my mixer. *The Solar annulus (...) to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun*.<sup>67</sup> If I'd plug the cable into the soundguy's arse would I see sparks? Ten minutes until the gig starts. I feel a bit dizzy, light, really need to eat something. Have to wait until I played.

He doesn't seem keen on playing tonight. Not bothered. Only loud shit, you say? I am turning my mic up as far as it goes before feedbacking. Guttural sounds. Pushing burps and tongue sounds through the small holes between the mouthpiece and reed. Need to create a pressure around the mouthpiece. It takes a lot of muscle work inside my neck and jaw. Lots of spastic behaviour. Tension. Muscle contraction. All to push some tiny, guttural noise through a bended, metal tube. Where is his loud stuff?

Our bodies are *locked into a cybernetic union*, only technology allows us to reach that point. *Our small gestures, the crackle and fizz of [his] electronics and [...her] mouthpiece pops, tongue slaps and hisses*.<sup>68</sup> Our sonic bodies are now locked as a sonic cyborg, *the boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other*.<sup>69</sup> Touching our

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Press, 1985, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup>Nikki Young. "Uses of the Erotic" for Teaching Queer Studies". In: *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40.3 (2012), pp. 301–305, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup>Bataille, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup>(Brackets added by me.) Stewart Smith. "Live Report: Glasgow's Glorious Traces". In: *The Quietus* (2016).

<sup>69</sup>Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, 1991, p. 164.

instruments and touching each other's sound through listening. Crackling noises. Filtered noises. All quite quiet. Concentrated. Small gestures. They start connecting to each other, melting into complex sonic bodies. The room is getting really full. Full of people. Some are sitting in front of us. Others standing all over the place. Cosy environment. Relaxing. He doesn't seem to be relaxed. The room is dark. We are sitting. Neither of us is looking up. The room feels good. The bodies vanish. Losing their shape, merging into the walls. Surrounding us. Closing in.

Thinking back. Beginnings. Practicing. Practicing. Daily. Fingers. Embouchure. Big sounds. Had to be mastered by her. Strapped to her neck couldn't escape. Executing her desires. Pushing altissimo notes through. Painfully. Forcefully. Strangling. Getting those high, squeaky noises out. Opening up. Blowing deep air through. Wide mouth. Taking it all in. Multiphonics. Layers of sounds. All those tortuous practices. Need for new sonic material. Less male-mannered material. Instrumentarium. Single parts of can be studied to produce new sounds. Separately. Individual. Take this body apart. Explore. Dismantle. Stuff with material.

I mimic the electronic rhythmic patterns coming from the modular synth. We can do that too. I am kissing the side of the mouthpiece. Sucking. Release. Pop. Tightening lips. Slowly letting air out into the mouthpiece. Pushing. Shaping the air. Closing keys. A whisper. I start speaking while playing. Not words. Sounds. Only coming from my vocal tract. From the back of my throat I press some air out. Hissing. Using my tongue to create a rhythm of my hissing. United hisses. Accelerating. Crescendo. Louder. There we are full blast at last! Loud analogue noise. He is at it. Strangling the neck to get the high-pitched sounds out. Trying to stay above the analogue noise. Fuck it, I give in. Free jazz doodle sax. I can only compete with this now by blowing proper loud multiphonics through. At the same time moving over the keys as fast as possible to create a sense of flow.

Torture. Much air, much noise exploding through all cavities. Her fingers up and down keys, touching. Stopping. Holding body tighter. Mouthpiece further into her mouth.

Screaming. With all her air pushing through body. As fast as possible, her right hand repetitively hits three keys at the same time. A beating sound emerges through bell and speakers. The modular synth is changing cables quickly. Creating further complex relationships. Noncompetitive rhythm. Wait until that's done. Full blasting modular and saxophone duo. Loud. Aggressive. Rhythmic. It moves.

There she is. She is asking to speak to me. She wants my voice. She wants me to speak through her. My voice wandering through the tube, passing the holes, the pads, keys. Exploding through the bell. Into the mic. A loud voice from the loudspeaker. I am hitting her. Using the mouthpiece-cap I hit her. Beating. My nails flicking into her. I am not going to allow her to take my voice. Flicking her with my nails. Hitting her with her mouthpiece. Blowing through her at the same time. The modular synth is accelerating. Different sounds. Simultaneously. Swooshing. Crackling. Short high oscillators trying to sustain. A high-pitched frequency. Cut off with an envelope generator. Noise. Blasting inbetween. Everything is connected. One module is dependent on the other. Inside a EuroRack. A box. Holding all modules. Cables sending control voltages, audio signals to each other. The connections are visible. A noise being swallowed by a filter. A small turn of a knob and the rhythm changes.

The room seems relaxed. People are engaging. Are they actually dancing? Are we actually like the new "whizzkids" on the block? Entertainment. They are not getting this. Mocking this whole thing now. Coughing into Saxophone. Spitting. Sucking. Sounding like I am choking on my own sucking. Doodling sweet melodies over a network of established modular sounds. Spitting. Laughing into Saxophone. Opening her body for other sounds. Slap tongues. Percussive instrument. Releasing keys and lip pressure at the same time. Loud drumming. Allowing the sounds to quickly speak and vanish. Swallowed by the box on the table. Swallowed by me. A stop. Just me and my sparse slaps. Breathing. Stopping the crowd from dancing. We are a complex instrumentarium. Hand-built sophistication. Not going to give you the free jazz saxophone stereotype. Listen to me. I am pushing my voice through Saxophone's body. Squeaking duck, strangled chicken wandering through her metal body. Decelerated air. Breathing. I look

up. End. Waiting for him. He is looking down. Thinking. I can see he's thinking whether to continue. Perfect moment to stop, pal. He plays. I am getting ready to join back in.

Actually, no, we are done.

### 3.6 More On Feminist Improvisers

So far I have given very little space to other female performers, and since Brötzmann's first albums, female saxophonists have entered the same stages and made similar music. They now play as loud, as fast, as controlled as their male icons. Not necessarily a consciously chosen icon, but one that is inevitably linked to the musical practice in which women participate. In 1968 *Machine Gun* had its place, as shown; its political situ allowed an aggressive, loud sonic mimicry of the real world, see chapter 2, section 2.1. This 'all-boys club' had to find a voice during those times, and maybe being loud and sounding like machine guns, when terror and war surrounded them was a way for them to give voice to their anger about this situation. As previously stated, their music is of course embedded into the social construct of gender, and especially that of white masculinity, which we women now reproduce.

Changing the scene for a moment, you and I will look at women who play in a similar way to Gustafsson and Brötzmann. Following on from FIG, I want to present women that have been influential on my own playing, and the development of my own practice as part of this thesis, and therefore I consider them worth discussing. Further to this, and as already briefly discussed in the previous section, the female body represents some sort of fluidity or liquidity. As the touches between FIG members challenged patriarchal structures, so did their theatrical performances. For the purpose of this thesis, where I want to explore my practice as entangled bodies, I want to use this space to give improvisation a female taste. Towards the end of this chapter I want to relate free improvisation to a wet, liquid and female space, in which non/human bodies start to entangle, and where 'hard' bodies are made redundant. It is in the last chapters of this thesis where I try to reflect a bit on my method used, namely the narration of my practice in the stories that interfere with the more academic case-studies.

As said at the very beginning, this body of research is entangled, like Palmer's

narrated sculpture,<sup>70</sup> my stories are my practice, the stories give voice to what I do when I play. Of course my practical approaches to the saxophone developed in and with other people's practices. I am influenced by having listened to the male saxophonists I have mentioned before, but I also got influenced by reading and starting to analyse socio-political spaces in free improvisation, hence why they were granted so much space here.

Hardcore and noise-rock music certainly create a (sonic) space of muscular physicality, predominately occupied by males. *Harry Pussy* is a noise-rock band, with drummer and vocalist Adris Hoyos, who is an autodidact on the drums with her then-partner Bill Orcutt on guitar. Below we will listen to a live footage that I transcribed from a video shot in 1997:

After having played a very fast, agitated, loud 25 second song, the band takes a rest, while an audience members starts shouting:

Fuck you, you fucking bitch! Shut the fuck up.

Thanks for coming down everyone. [inaudible] has a new album out and it's called: Fuck you, motherfucker!

She shows her two middle fingers to the guy in the audience.

Throughout their entire set *Harry Pussy*, but especially Hoyos personally gets attacked by this sexist man in the audience.<sup>71</sup>

A female drummer, playing very fast, loud, noisy, and physical drums, while at the same time she screams and shouts into the microphone. She is the key sonic aspect in those performances, and disturbs this highly male genre. Arguably, drumming requires physical movements, and Hoyos' physical movements are in contrast to the rather stiff guitar players who are on stage with her. Occasionally, you see her legs flying up and down, her hands over her head and her head rotating around. Her playing, her physical performance differs in no way from that of other male

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<sup>70</sup>Palmer, 2011.

<sup>71</sup>*Harry Pussy - Live 1997*. YouTube. (Last accessed 17-4-2019). 2002. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYcDm0bPgx8>.

drummers in metal or hardcore bands. The fact that a female body is occupying that space seems a disturbance to some audience members.

After *Harry Pussy* split up in 1997, Hoyos almost completely stopped making music, and has hardly given any interviews. Being self-taught, and playing in a very male-dominated music genre, Hoyos can be taken as an embodiment of the problems female musicians have to face when playing in a male dominated genre. In *The Wire* Hoyos is presented as a “goofy tough-attitude chick with a feral performance style,”<sup>72</sup> and her partner Orcutt as a “prodigiously talented instrumentalist.” She is attacked by her ‘own’ audience members, as well as by musical journalists for being a female within a male space. The woman can only be goofy, animalistic and wild, while the male counterpart, playing equally wild and feral music, is a ‘talented and prodigious’ musician. I am trying to give a little bit of space in this section to these brave and provocative female musicians, who have influenced my playing most and will get us closer to some concluding ideas about feminist improvisation.

I have found myself in similar situations to Hoyos, where I have been ridiculed for the way I look when I perform, especially when I played with groups that are more sonically similar to Brötzman and groups like *Last Exit*. The men I play with mostly use some sort of electronic instrument; they play modular synth, electric guitars or make use of some programmes on their laptops. It was through playing with them that I tried to use ‘electronics’ to alter my saxophone sounds. I used laptops and real-time environments to loop my sounds, granulate my playing, distort it and create different textures, layers and timbres with these real-time environments.<sup>73</sup> Similar to saxophonist Ashley Paul, who uses an array of different instruments and pedals to create layers of different sonic textures in her solo, but also collaborative performances.<sup>74</sup>

Playing with the guys who use their modular synth or other technologically advanced

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<sup>72</sup>David Keenan. “Harry Pussy”. In: *The Wire* 298 (2008), p. 55.

<sup>73</sup>I am predominantly talking about the software MaxMsp.

<sup>74</sup>Nick Southgate. “Ashley Paul”. In: *The Wire* April.350 (2013), pp. 34–36.

instruments made me feel like I had to alter the instrument to blend in and become part of that sound world. My first approach was to use the same methods the men were using - technology.<sup>75</sup> At those points I wasn't thinking about sounds and what I could explore with the instrument, but just thought I had to use the same instruments to look as if I was capable of using technology too. On top of that, when I then also played like Brötzmann or Gustafsson, loud and fast, I was congratulated at the end of performances, either that I sounded like Brötzmann or that I was more 'man' than the men I played with. When I wasn't congratulated then I was some 'weirdo who couldn't play' or I was apparently sexually frustrated. Like Hoyos, I experienced sexism in the spaces I performed in. Having shown how these spaces come to exist, namely through patriarchal power structures and dominance, then this research gave me space to analyse these performance spaces and I was able to develop my practice differently. As you have already read in the previous stories I started developing a very close relationship to the instrument. I reduced the amounts of technology I took with me and instead used very simple forms of preparation to enhance and extend the sound of the saxophone. I will explain this below through the work of other female musicians. As you and I will see later, this is how I came to develop this liquid and spitty performance practice that also became a voice in the presented stories. For now however I'd like to discuss some females who have used ways of preparation that I found influential on my own playing.

Performers like saxophonist Mette Rasmussen and cellist Okkyung Lee are female improvisers who (sometimes) play loud and noisy free improvisation. Loving their work, I cannot help but wonder whether women only get accepted into those closed circles of musicians by sounding like men and physically moving like men? There is very little written information about Rasmussen. Not only does she sometimes remind me of a sonic reproduction of Gustafsson, but she has extended her instrument and her playing further by preparing the saxophone with various objects, a

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<sup>75</sup>The Album *Auto-Erotic* on the USB stick as part of my practice portfolio still uses some of these MaxMSP patches I created at the start of this thesis and before.

technique that I have been exploring throughout this research myself, and that has been discussed in the performative texts in this thesis.<sup>76</sup> When preparing the saxophone, Rasmussen manages to extend the saxophone's voice into "multiphonic purrs, expressive leaps into flashes of altissimo, just riding the razored edge of controlled lyricism."<sup>77</sup> In discussing her preparation, she says:

I work a lot with preparing my horn. Trying to expand the extended sound capabilities, almost getting sounds that become physical and sounds that stand out as texture. Right now I tend to divide it in three different preparations: inside and outside preparations, and attached preparations - which is an attached sound to an already existing sound (...).<sup>78</sup>

While Rasmussen might reproduce existing techniques, her preparations on the saxophone will respond to those playing techniques in a way that will make Rasmussen have to respond differently to her own playing. As part of the preparation process, you can stuff the saxophone with bottles or cloths and try to play through it, but your breath gets 'stuck' and does not have the same space to extend and let the body of the instrument resonate. Taping keys together or down will also result in a different tone, but will also make the performer have to work around the instrument outside of their 'learned' comfort zone. What these preparations actually offer, I think, is a change of relationship with the instrument. Although we are part of the reproduction of sounds, the preparation of the instrument, adding microphones or other techniques will offer the players a different relationship to the instrument. The nonhuman tool will become the "process of building a network in the course of which the identities, capabilities, roles, and functions of human and non-human actors are redefined, displaced, and transformed in order to align them to a collective program of action."<sup>79</sup> I started exploring these ideas of preparation myself:

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<sup>76</sup>Particularly *Servicewomen* 3.5 and *Amateurism* 3.8.

<sup>77</sup>Daniel Spicer. "Mette Rasmussen". In: *The Wire* 371 (2015), p. 16.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Haenisch, 2013, p. 152.

Let us listen to Okkyung Lee's *Ghil*, her playing gets altered through the tape recording techniques used by Lasse Marhaug, each piece is a single take, there are recordings of improvisations with low-fi technology. Lee's *Ghil* was a first encounter to listen to a blurred border between a simple use of technology mixed with a traditional instrument. Lee uses tape recording and a cheap microphone as a method of production. She plays the cello with hard bow pressure and in general more so-called extended techniques, but the thing that mainly appealed to me was that Lee handed over the editing and post-production of her cello improvisations to Lasse Marhaug.<sup>80</sup> This means that the 'preparation' of the cello was done through different recording processes. Marhaug's recording techniques made her playing and instrument sound visceral, noisy and raw by recording on cheap mics and a vintage tape deck.<sup>81</sup> Marhaug deliberately used older equipment to create a harsher, noisier sound of Lee's cello playing. This is what I like about this album, the deliberate lo-fi use, the transformation of the cello into clouds and textures of noise. The album gets described as 'punkish' and:

(...) on which she sounds like she's actually *grinding* her bow into the strings whilst simultaneously see-sawing it across them. The pace is relentless, to the point of being destabilising, for one expects more drone and patience with the cello, as opposed to this kind of distorted freneticism.<sup>82</sup>

The last time I saw her perform live was at Berghain in Berlin in early 2018, where she performed with very simple technology (a small pick-up microphone), but through Berghain's massive loudspeaker system. That performance reminded me a lot of *Ghil* in the respect that it was the PA system that extended the cello. Of course Lee's playing allows there to be an extension of her sound through loudspeakers, the way she plays is full of different textures. As read above, her bow technique

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<sup>80</sup>Marc Masters. "Okkyung Lee. Ghil". In: *Pitchfork* (2013). (Last accessed 11-06-18).

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Joseph Burnett. "Okkyung Lee. Ghil." In: *The Quietus* (2013).

can be described as ‘grinding’ and here she uses a hard bow pressure. Her playing looks physically exhausting. It is her playing, as well as the projection through the loudspeakers that allows different sonic textures to arise.

The extension of the instrument with cheap or lo-fi technology is something that intrigued me a lot. I started playing through found guitar amps and used £6.99 guitar distortion pedals that I won on eBay. When I play louder, faster and then also use extended techniques that require different lip pressures and breathing then the technology helps (the amps or microphones) to create even more volume. This is something I first encountered when listening to *Ghil*. However as shown in the Manifesto of this thesis and ideas about refusal of work, there is another interesting aspect why I really liked playing with low-fi extensions of the saxophone. When I turn the gain controls of my microphone to full and do the same with the guitar amp, whilst having the distortion pedal somewhere in the middle then I now know that when I press all keys of the instrument down and just slightly blow into it there will be feedback, there will be noise and it’ll be loud without me actually having to exhaust myself. As described in the story *Performance Outfit* those minuscule sounds can be carried through these uses of technology without me having to sweat too much. The use of that set-up has its limits and gets boring (at least for me, but also my co-players). And also why do I feel like sounding this particular way? As said already it was through this research and seeing other performers that I wanted to prepare the instrument more while keeping this basic set-up with mixer and microphones.

Andrea Neumann is also interested in the preparation of her instrument, the piano. Neumann developed her *Inside Piano* as her own DIY instrument, which she designed out of a hearing process to oppose predetermined ideals of what an instrument should sound like.<sup>83</sup> The *Inside Piano* is:

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<sup>83</sup>Andrea Neumann. “Playing Inside Piano”. In: *Echtzeitmusik Berlin. Selbstbestimmung einer Szene*. Ed. by Burkhard Beins et al. Wolke, 2011, pp. 202.

Stripped of its wooden housing, mechanical action, and keys, and amplified with the help of a mixer and several pickups. The strings are prepared with bamboo sticks, forks, screws, and metal clips and strips (...) played with objects such as mallets, snare brushes, metal pipes, propellers, steel wool, and piano hammers. The pickups, attached to the instrument in various positions, serve, due to their differing characteristics with regard to sensitivity, not only to amplify the otherwise very quiet instrument, but also to broaden its spectrum of potential sounds.<sup>84</sup>

Her piano becomes an individual field of exploration, trying to avoid the predetermined playing techniques and sounds often associated with the piano in free improvisation. Preparing the instrument with found objects, but also amplification reminds us of Rasmussen's comment on her own preparation of the saxophone, where she describes an inside and outside preparation. Obviously, the saxophone can be stuffed with objects into the bell; these can range from plastic bottles, or tin foil to massage balls. Outside the instrument, the bell can be muted with flat objects such as CDs, foil, wood. Keys can be taped, but also microphones can be used to amplify sounds that otherwise remain unheard. Through the work of Artur Vidal, Sabine Vogel and Yoni Silver I learned how to use tin foil and CDs as objects to change the sounds of the instrument.<sup>85</sup> Vidal and Vogel sometimes use tin foil to stuff their saxophone (Vidal) or put their flute into the tin foil and play (Vogel), the tin foil created resonating and noisy sounds when played into or with. It was Silver's use of a CD on the bell of his bass clarinet that made the sounds emerging sound distorted.

In that regard it is interesting to take a look at Ashley Paul, who I have seen perform several times. She often gets described as a multi-instrumentalist, although the saxophone is the instrument she 'officially' studied.<sup>86</sup> Different to Rasmussen or

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>85</sup>I am recalling live performances here.

<sup>86</sup>Nick Southgate. "Ashley Paul". In: *The Wire* April.350 (2013), pp. 34–36, p. 35.

Neumann, she extends the instrument's sound with other instruments or objects, and lately also with her voice and songs. She often creates these different layers whilst blowing through the instrument and then might be ringing some small bells, bowing on crotales, looping the sound of the saxophone with loop pedals and starts singing (and which point she will have to take the sax out of her mouth). Paul's approaches are also somehow similar to that of Matana Roberts, who is also a sax player and also uses the voice as a story telling instrument on her *Coin Coin* project. This project deals with the notions of race, gender and class in American society.<sup>87</sup> It is this layering of stories and text with their 'main' instrument that challenged me to include my writing into performances.<sup>88</sup> This thesis has constantly engaged with socio-political spaces and it was especially Roberts, but also AGF's work that wanted me to deal with political messages in these text pieces, but also in this research in general.

Perhaps many women feel they are voiceless, their stories go unheard; they feel they have no representation. I imagine it as if their bodies were full of compressed words. I just saw the incredible, forceful poet and electronic artist Moor Mother play live, and her words *must come out!* Nobody has told that story in our spaces. The same goes for queer voices, black voices, minorities. There are a lot of untold stories.<sup>89</sup>

AGF talks about the need for voices to speak and be heard, she herself uses text or voice a lot in her own works. *DISSIDENTOVA*, a more recent project of AGF uses exclusively female poetry that becomes part of electronic compositions.<sup>90</sup> On this album she credits the poets as contributing artists, showing respect for their work and also emphasising that this is a collaboration, even though most of the cited

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<sup>87</sup>Daniel Spicer. "Matana Roberts - Chains of the Heart". In: *The Wire* 356 (2013), pp. 34–41.

<sup>88</sup>Especially my piece *Pardon, I have Tentacles* that was premiered at Tectonics Festival 2018.

<sup>89</sup>Susanne AKA Electric Indigo Kirchmayr and Antye AKA AGF Greie. "...No, I don't \*\*\*\*\* Sing."". In: *Grounds For Possible Music. On Gender, Voice, Language, and Identity*. Ed. by Julia Eckhardt. Errant Bodies Press, 2018, p. 111.

<sup>90</sup>DISSIDENTOVA by AGF was produced by herself and released June 2018.

poets are dead. The poets are mainly talking about revolution and political rights. As shown in the above quote, for AGF it is part of her music to tell ‘untold stories’ and give voice to minorities. *DISSIDENTOVA* is a sonic, feminist revolution.

Through listening and seeing these performers I started to explore different preparations. As mentioned above my basic set-up is a very small mixer, one bell microphone, one or two DIY radio microphones and one or two distortion pedals. I also have my saxophone, three massage balls, tons of Blu-Tack, metal rings or lids and two old CDs. In the Introduction I already explained that using an entangled, technofeminist method narrates the materialisation of my practice.

For clarity, above we read that Rasmussen talks about an inside/outside preparation of the saxophone. I do the same, maybe different, because for me spit - as we will read below - is something that kneads inside and outside together through the use of microphones and amplification.<sup>91</sup> The inside space of the saxophone is a space of exploration, but I need to let my spit and breath explore that space. I occasionally try to stuff my face (which is not possible) through the bell, but I only manage to get my chin and tongue to play around on the ‘wrong’ end of the instrument.<sup>92</sup> I always have a microphone stuck deep into the saxophone’s bell (I hardly ever play acoustically these days) so that my vocal sounds while grinding along the inside of the bell, licking or sucking are made audible. I was given a battery-operated small Marshall amp that I can carry with me to places that might not have a PA or any amps available. Similar to Paul or Neumann, my instrument now is this extended saxophone with the use of very simple and cheap preparation. This amplification of spit and inside/outside sounds is a practice that comforts me and I enjoy exploring these sounds.

The text *Amateurism* (section 3.8) gives a lot of voice to these inside/outside spaces and exploration. It allows me not having to carry or hold the saxophone in standard

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<sup>91</sup>Full description of the use of spit as method is in the story *Amateurism* below.

<sup>92</sup>See the last story *Chewing Sucking*.

ways. Instead, I put it on my lap to play around with massage balls on the saxophone's body, or if I try to play through its bell then I will also put the instrument on my lap. I also dismantle parts of it, so I take the mouthpiece off (described in *Performance Outfit*) where I just play through the mouthpiece, but on top of the bell, where the microphone is. The ability to change the instrument, use different ways of playing on it, but also changing the shape of the instrument is something that is still intriguing and I would have never thought about smell and saxophones if I wouldn't have put my nose into its bell.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.7 Wetness - Liquidity - Spit

Having talked about preparation of the instruments then I want to use the last pages to explain what a technofeminist approach to instruments might mean, to consider them as openers to see instruments and bodies as 'fluid', and entangled entities. For this I will go back into a more theoretical space.

Feminist improvisation can only be fruitful if we resist established and patriarchal structures. Capitalism needs individuals and groups to adhere to mediated forms of identification and cultural practices to continue working. Feminist improvisation rather follows Audre Lorde and her margarine.<sup>94</sup> During WWII she coloured her white margarine yellow. The margarine was sitting outside to soften, but the white colour was not appealing, because it should remind people of creamy butter. So Lorde and her sisters kneaded food colouring into the softened margarine. The enjoyment they felt when kneading the soft and fatty substance into yellow.<sup>95</sup> This erotic experience allows us to share enjoyment with each other inside a structured space through touch and kneading. What Lorde calls the Erotic allows us to resist binary processes of existence and allows us to look critically at our history and

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<sup>93</sup>See the text *Chewing*.

<sup>94</sup>Especially her text "The Erotic as Power." Lorde, 1984, pp. 70.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 70.

practices.

The body is quickened as the soil is quickened, by turning it over, by folding it into itself, with the addition of air. When air is folded into pastry, time is folded in too: the time of growth, of the swelling of the soufflé, the breathed-in dish. In one sense, the skin is the antagonist of a kneaded world, for the skin is what holds individual lives separate and aloof; it is integument which guarantees the integrity of shape, and signifies the suspension of decomposition that is all life. But skin, which Serres always represents topologically, also holds the dream of the kneaded body, the dough-body, the cogito pisseur.<sup>96</sup>

Kneading becomes a metaphor for exploring the instrumentarium, folding the sonic body of the saxophone inside out. Microphones help by amplifying, through breath and spit, the inside to the outside. The Erotic is tuned to kneading the skins and boundaries of humans and nonhumans into a different arrangement. It is a resistance to systemic control, a feminist improvisation of Bachelard's 'cogito of kneading'.<sup>97</sup>

The action of kneading is a process that turns slack mud, mire or waste into a dough or paste that is taut with potential.<sup>98</sup>

This potential is the instrumentarium, the collective body of improvisation. Participants in improvisation turn into a connected paste through kneading, the "consciousness of activity."<sup>99</sup>

I consider the Erotic a touch, a touch that materialises two individual bodies into a bounded multitude. Momentarily, the touch creates a connection to other materials.

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<sup>96</sup>Steven Connor. *Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought*. <http://stevenconnor.com/topologies/>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019). 2002.

<sup>97</sup>Gaston Bachelard. *Earth And Reveries Of Will. An Essay On the Imagination of Matter*. The Dallas Institute Publications, (1947) 2002, pp. 59.

<sup>98</sup>Connor, 2002.

<sup>99</sup>Bachelard, (1947) 2002, p. 61.

Lorde's margarine, the fatty substance, like (my) spit will be used to create a feminist understanding of wetness in free improvisation. Concentrating on those other noises and voices that occupy the performance space, namely the sounding mechanisms of the instrument, spit or breath travelling through, microphones helping to listen to sounds that otherwise remain unheard. Those liquid, gooey, sticky and fatty substances are images that contribute to a feminist understanding of non/human performances. In fact, these 'wet' performance techniques are what I consider feminist improvisation. Listening to Luce Irigaray in Patricia MacCormack then the vulva is an image, a body,

The lips, always touching, are always and already in a condition of pleasure: they need nothing other than themselves. Man's need for woman as a tool places onus on the tool as a signifier, not of something that is, but something that is to be used. Phallic methodology cannot touch itself and thus it is object and objective. It is neither manifold/many fold nor in reflective relation to itself - its smoothness is mono-directional and perceived as casual.<sup>100</sup>

The vulva is a space of pleasure. With Lorde's margarine, we soften the phallogocentric and forceful language of man, we oppose his idea that an instrument always needs to function.<sup>101</sup> Wetness, liquidity are companions to considering the saxophone as vulva, because "historically fluids are associated to the feminine."<sup>102</sup>

Blood, but also milk, sperm, lymph, saliva, spit, tears, humors, gas, waves, airs, fire... light. All threaten to deform, propagate, evaporate, consume him, to flow out of him and into another who cannot be easily held on to.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Patricia MacCormack. "Mucosal Coseying". In: *Cosey Complex*. Ed. by Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett. Koenig Books, 2012, pp. 123–128, p. 125.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 116.

<sup>103</sup>Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Women*. Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 210.

Fluids are unstable, they are in opposition to an idea of hard, bordered (male) objects. Having discussed the saxophone's historic and political space in Chapter 2, we can now move into a space of resisting these given 'hard' borders.

The female body is a muted body, it was never given its own agency. Its own politics. It was controlled and made always by those in power, which was rarely in the hands of other females. More, the female body is a ventriloquised body. A body spoken through by others. Can I create a space where feminist improvisation is in tune "with the vibrations of bod[ies]"<sup>104</sup> I am arguing that the vibrations of bodies - those vibrations can be multiple - shape the performative free improvisation voice. Simply all this means is that through touch, through exchange of materials (spit, breath, metal), the human and nonhuman are inside a close space of touch. Getting out of phallic hegemony in free improvisation requires rethinking tools as made things to be mastered.

Not as with the instrument, which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength, and whose handling therefore depends on his virtuosity. Rather, it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes (...).<sup>105</sup>

Tools are social things, nonhuman prosthetics of the human skin, and therefore the actual exchange of touching each other will constitute a momentary situated bodily presence. The touch materialises into a bounded presence, the performance or the sonic voice. Free improvisation therefore is a symbiotic, a prosthetic, bodily presence of humans and nonhumans. This view will challenge anthropocentric practices and thoughts.

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<sup>104</sup>Brackets added by me. Smith, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup>Karl Marx. "Fragment on Machines". In: *Accelerate. The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Urbanomic, 2014, p. 53.

## 3.8 Touch

I would like to spend a bit more time on the idea of touch, how touch materialises bodies into connected entities, for example how the nonhuman and the human become a fixed and momentary entity in a free improvisation performance; how touch is that which liquifies the borders of bodies. In this section I will propose a different reading of touch/contact during free improvisation.

The skin can be seen as continuous loop. The ectoderm (during early stages of the foetus) forms skin and brain and folds back into the inside. This process is called invagination, the stage when the embryo looks like a pocket formed of ectoderm and endoderm.<sup>106</sup> The skin is our biggest sensory organ and directly in touch with the inside. “Inter-sensoriality connects the brain and the skin,”<sup>107</sup> our biggest sensory organ, our outside brain. We saw that the vulva is a fold, sensory tissue folding into the inside again. Our bodies are in constant touch with and in each other. As Barad and Haraway have noted, the human body is in a constant intra-active process, always re-establishing its boundaries, either through internal processes or through outside ones.<sup>108</sup> “Every touch is double: it involves both an active and a passive experience. I feel myself feeling and felt.”<sup>109</sup>

Sense is multitude. The tool’s skin or boundary is the thing I like to take apart or investigate when performing. The saxophone as a small drum, with different pads, holes, keys. Playing an instrumentarium allows me to feel a different contact through touch with the tools we use. Experiencing this double touch when performing, “we are fazed by the otherness of the objects. We need - and fear - the object that is not flesh.”<sup>110</sup> The tool’s hardness is in opposition to the soft and vulnerable human skin. This body feeling so different to the human body is something that needs to

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<sup>106</sup>Anzieu, (1995) 2016, p. 21.

<sup>107</sup>Segal, 2009, p. 48.

<sup>108</sup>See Haraway, 1991 and Barad, 2007.

<sup>109</sup>Naomi Segal. *Consensuality. Didier Anzieu, Gender and the Sense of Touch*. Rodopi, 2009, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

be explored. The instrument's inside is what the performer is after. It is a venture of exploration and sexiness that can be "irritating to some, gratifying to others, that has to do with the 'insideness' of the sense of body they convey."<sup>111</sup> I know that the saxophone has an inside, yet I cannot fully enter it with my entire body.

Touch, for a physicist, is but an electromagnetic interaction. A common explanation for the physics of touching is that one thing it does not involve is (...) well, touching. That is, there is no actual contact involved.<sup>112</sup>

It is therefore not only my skin that can touch, but I can let my voice, breath and spit travel through the saxophone. Minuscule microphones in the inside can explore these 'hidden' spaces further, allowing them to be amplified, making a sonic body from the inside. A skin, a membrane, surrounding a body is a place often occupied by libido, narcissism and sex.<sup>113</sup> There seems to be something that the skin hides or protects that is intriguing, but cannot be touched. We are seeking the strangers' touch. Barad explains that bodies are engaged in a constant touching of themselves:

And touch engages us in a felt sense of *causality*, whether we generally acknowledge that or not, and whatever it is we may think of this charged and highly important term. Touch moves and affects what it effects.<sup>114</sup>

In *Amateurism* below we will encounter the loose, liquid and spitty performances that have become my main practical approaches when improvising. It is through this story and the last one ending this thesis where my method of entanglement (in writing and practice) finds its full expression. This chapter gave voice to FIG, one of the first groups on the UK improvisation scene to challenge patriarchal playing

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>112</sup>Karen Barad. "On Touching - The Inhuman That Therefore I Am". In: *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23.3 (2012), pp. 206–223, p. 209.

<sup>113</sup>Anzieu, (1995) 2016, pp. 101.

<sup>114</sup>Barad, 2012, p. 208.

strategies with their household objects and outfits. It was especially ideas around smell (chopping onions) that made me concentrate on spit in my stories and playing. Through the work of contemporary artists I investigated feminist resistance in creative environments, either through preparations of the instruments or extensions through technology. It is touch that gives space, or is in fact the materialisation of space.<sup>115</sup> This technofeminist thinking, and especially Haraway's companion species can be related to space, where the touch gets us in immediate contact to other non/humans. Like Barad above, touch moves the effect, the space of maybe a free improvisation performance. The touch is a starting point of a performance, it continuously engages with the performance, and changes it. This prosthetic relationship of the saxophone to the performer should be considered through the thinking of Lambros Malfouris:

Prostheses refers not to a mere extension of the human body, but to an essential characteristic that co-constitutes the world inhabited by humans.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Haraway, 2008, pp. 36.

<sup>116</sup>Lambros Malfouris. *How Things Shape the Mind. A theory of Material Engagment.* MIT Press, 2013, p. 154.

## Amateurism

[Listen to: Auto-Erotic - Track 1 & 2]

Feminist improvisation is solidarity with spit, the mechanism of the instrument, the smells, the tastes, the unwanted noises. The nonhuman is the centre of attention. Her body offers enactive playing, her assembled body touches my senses. Allowing to learn sounds through touch, listen through exploration of the instrument. This feminist improvisation approach puts the human and nonhuman bodies into a unit. Neither is idealised or mastered by the other. The practice and learning of performance methods happens in the process of touch and a deliberate refusal of reproducing existing idiomatic approaches of free improvisation. Feminist improvisation is doing, an active engagement. A conscious avoidance of rigorous practice routines. Spit is what pleases me and her. The abject of free improvisation playing.

First, I need to assemble a pond of spit into my mouth, pushing it just behind my lips. We need a lot of spit to create noisy and distorted sounds. The tongue moves the spit into the tiny gap between reed and mouthpiece. At the same time I try to produce more spit and move it to the front of my mouth for the tongue to deliver it to Saxophone. Her mouthpiece slowly fills up with my spit. The microphones inside her body are turned to a very high gain.

The inside of Saxophone becomes a space of exploration. Her occupants inside are improvising. Something hidden can be kneaded to the aural, *only as they squeeze, only while kneading, only while in action.*<sup>117</sup> The kneading is done with the touch of very small microphones. I started using DPA microphones that my institution had in their tech storage, but soon realised that those rather expensive little magnifiers can be easily replaced with £10 radio, lavalier microphones. The fact that those microphones don't have the same capacity of catching sounds, make them quite unpredictable. Often they

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<sup>117</sup>Gaston Bachelard. *Earth And Reveries Of Will. An Essay On the Imagination of Matter.* The Dallas Institute Publications, (1947) 2002, p. 89.

distort the signal a lot and that makes them even more interesting for me to explore and expand Saxophone.

Slowly I start to move my lips in front of her mouthpiece while pushing more spit into her. Occasionally I breathe a little bit to push the spit further into her body. Vibrating the air between her reed and mouthpiece. Crackly, noisy and distorted sounds leave the loudspeakers and her holes. Salivary glands are working hard to fill Saxophone with enough spit. Giving material to her body.

*Spit is low in the hierarchy of disgust, it's negligible, it's invisible, not even there, formless, when you kiss, lick, bite, the tongue and teeth take the front stage, kiss, lick, bite, though, without saliva, they would be saharas. spit kiss, lick spit, spit bite.*<sup>118</sup> We make spit audible. Her body caressing it with her cold, metal skin. Containing my liquid fluids inside her for her own pleasure. Our fused bodies leave sonic spit in the room. Listeners of spit. Microphone and my bodily fluids replace filters, noise gates and digital processing. Sophisticated wet muscle work. Noise *helps reduce the belief that machines are mere means to higher musical or conceptual goals.*<sup>119</sup>

Spit is noise: a nuisance for some. Spit occupies Saxophone's space, we both love sharing the same fluids. My DNA entering her constructed, laboured body. Spit is decay, the beginning of digestion. Spit is strength, breaking down food for the metabolism. Saxophone takes decay and strength. Resisting the reproduction of practice and creating a music performance through spit. *Where are the spit institutions? The spit discourses? The spit paradigms? The spit theories? We are all saliva-philes.*<sup>120</sup>

The image of two beings in a single body. Eyes, hands, flesh, circulatory system, breath, hairs, spit, mucous, tongue, lips, warmth.

metal

hard

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<sup>118</sup>Christof Migone. "Spit". In: *Women Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 11.1 (2008), pp. 17–19, p. 19.

<sup>119</sup>Paul Hegarty. *Noise Music: A History*. Bloomsbury, 2007, p. 27.

<sup>120</sup>Migone, 2008, p. 19.

holes  
keys  
cold  
wires  
screws  
giant cane  
felt pad

Fused into a single body, speaking from the same mouth. One fusion of a practico-sensory totality. Touching each other *turns the skin into a generalized thumb*.<sup>121</sup> Something feeling the other. Without touching there are no bodies, there are no borders. Touch *has the virtue of closing and outlining an interior*.<sup>122</sup> Metal skin with orifices, covering the circulatory air tube. Human spit hanging between reed and mouthpiece, stuck in neck.

An analysis of fluid moves to a point of outlet. *A post-orgasmic state, the endpoint of masculine*.<sup>123</sup> Desire is about a release of fluids that are the answer to any tension. The man ejaculating puts him back into a balance of steady fluids. The male ego is a 'reservoir' for libido, a container for the manly fluids. Saxophone, the hard, metal body is the objectification of man. The container of male's libido. Spit stuck at the bottom of bell. No release. Spit needs to leave. More saliva flows down inside. The insertion of the mouthpiece *into the mucous membrane of the lips, tongue and palate, followed by a warm, moist flow of spit*.<sup>124</sup>

Skin-to-skin, exciting metal, a deep fold of metal epidermis, 'invagination.' Her warm fluids flowing inside, rubbing against cold, hard and dry metal membranes. Reservoir body for her pleasures. Releasing tensions. She can't come. Containing noises. Aggregate of desires. There is no release for these sonic bodies. *An audio-phonetic skin holding*

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<sup>121</sup>Serres, (1985) 2016, p. 26.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>123</sup>Naomi Segal. *Consensuality. Didier Anzieu, Gender and the Sense of Touch*. Rodopi, 2009, p. 191.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

*the touching. Only the spasm of wet mucous membranes and the spurt of organic liquids, the contraction of muscles, shameful excitement, and unmentionable discharge.*<sup>125</sup> Microphones discharge inside into outside. She can't come. Releasing her desires. Taking her tension into their control. She can't come.

Pushing, blowing, spitting. More into Saxophone's body. As much spit as possible, filling her up. Giving weight. Controlling our unionised skin. Tongue exercises. Somewhere I read about thing-power: *an actant's affect on other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power.*<sup>126</sup> Is Saxophone playing a twisted game with me now? Trying to show me who really is in control?

Warm metal covered in fleshy skin. Human sputum flowing inside. Controlling her release. Keeping her tensions. Power over her. Human desires. Inside space hidden. Enclosed by hard, manufactured metal. Inside a container for human desire. Keeping her fluids. Rhythmically pushing them through tube. Sophisticated musicking of audio-  
phonic metal skin.

Our boundaries, our human and nonhuman skins are provisional and fundamentally insecure. We are one sonic body when exchanging fluids, materials with each other. Our extended sonic skin occupies space, *what space means, in short, is very largely a function of the perceived powers of the body to occupy and extend itself through its environment.*<sup>127</sup> Our intra-active interferences work on us, melt our skins. Spit becomes glue.

Minuscule microphones, the size of a fingernail, find cavities to explore the inside, making audible what is oral. One of these microphones gets blu-tacked onto the mouthpiece, close to the wet lips and tongues. If I push the mouthpiece very far in, deep down into my mouth, pushing it against the inside of one cheek then my tongue will touch the microphone. It will be enclosed by a wet wall, what is usually not audible turns into a

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<sup>125</sup>Berardi, 2017, p. 79.

<sup>126</sup>Bennett, 2010, p. 21.

<sup>127</sup>Steven Connor. *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 12.

whole range of organic vocal sounds. The liquidity of the saliva, the hissings, and tiny shudders of the breath, the licking of the tongue and teeth, and popping of the lips. The other microphone is moved around a lot, but tends to sit at the bottom part of Saxophone, inside or outside. It makes audible the residues of the spit that has found its way to the bottom. It amplifies the key sounds. Turns Saxophone into a drum. Blu-tacked onto the outside of the bottom keys it will make audible the minimal sounds of two spiky massage balls rubbing over Saxophone's keys. All these sounds promise the odour, textures, and warmth of another body.

Inside space hidden. Enclosed by hard, manufactured metal. The hidden turning outside. A sonic voice for humans. Long wiry, minuscule transducer turning sounds into signals. Moving inside into speaker. Transducer thing moving inside, slowly moving to the bell. Dragged out. Inside is hidden again. Keys amplified. Kneading of spiky, colourful massage balls over keys. Rubber touching metal. Touching rubber. Massaging old, rusty keys. Melting metal into soft tissue. Inside, spit tickles *in kneading, one repeatedly folds the outer skin of the substance inwards, until it is as it were crammed with surface tension, full of its outside.*<sup>128</sup> Massaging Saxophone with massage balls. Closed microphones, amplifying the rubbery, dense material massaging over her metal body. Amplified by minuscule microphones. We are touched by our sounds. Kneading saxophone techniques from male to female, mixing, queering them. Her body gives surface for my massage.

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<sup>128</sup>Connor, 2002.



# Chapter 4

## Conclusion

### Instrument As Companion

To explore the importance of the medium's materiality, let us consider the book. Like the human body, the book is a form of information transmission and storage, and like the human body, the book incorporates its encodings in a durable material substrate.<sup>1</sup>

Here I will try to show how this research has embodied itself in my writing and my improvisation practice. It is here where I listen to Hayle's quote on the "medium's materiality" and other technofeminist thinkers, who show how encounters of touch and a discovery of materialities fully explore the potential inherent in practice-led research.

As established above, feminist improvisation does not cut the 'individual' non/humans, but considers them as entangled materials. The same goes for the scholarly research tied to my practice. It is a feminist activism to re-write the established scholarly canons, as well as to confound the reproduction of the cultural norms of predominately male improvisers. One aim was to show that we can re-write stories and

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<sup>1</sup>Katherine Hayles. *How We Became Post-Human*. The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 28.

give voice to people and politics that often feel left out of the academic canon, especially when these female musicians are/were so vital to creative developments in free improvisation practices. Black female groups coming out of the AACM are good examples to discuss ‘safe spaces’ and the need for female support. Something also FIG and other all-female groups of this time embody. I have shown how these all-female spaces are important historic contributors to start loosening the patriarchy.

A canon shapes one’s orientation for artistry, within the general history which is told. It comes along with musical training, role models and blueprints for the setting up of a career, and postulates cultural values inherent to artistic languages. It defines spaces. A canon is never a neutral account of what has been made, but an active tool in shaping the very definition of the term ‘making’.<sup>2</sup>

I leave this topic with Eckhardt who summarises it so well, a canon is an active thing we can shape and change, I have discussed how technofeminist thinking can help to create complex, entangled analyses of those socio-political spaces and show how power structures function, also in free improvisation.

Through this method of entanglement I managed to create a direct connection between my practice and this text in front of you, namely that my practice materialises in writing. It is in this method where you can see the full exploration of technofeminist entanglement. More so, it gave me space to contextualise my practical approaches that are in response to the case-study essays. Having listened to Roberts or AGF in section 3.6, then we need to give voice to marginalised, unheard voices, it certainly helps to de-colonise academic canons.

The previous Chapter, section 3.8, investigated both touch with other bodies as well as the exploration of the instrument as a tool of surfaces (Andrea Neumann’s *Inside Piano*). This investigation offers us a different view on relationships within free improvisation practices, which I consider a feminist practice of various entangle-

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<sup>2</sup>Eckhardt, 2018, p. 12.

ments in different socio-political aspects and specific performance spaces. I want to use this Conclusion to explore this entanglement fully, to give space to the method used throughout this research, but also to give an overarching concept to the topics explored. Therefore this Conclusion offers a temporary end, where an entanglement of liquid, and spitty feminist practice methods will allow us to view the relationship between instrument and performer as part of a more horizontal and feminist practice.

As discussed from a number of viewpoints throughout this thesis, feminist improvisation is seen as a skin-to-skin connection of humans and nonhumans, allowing experiences through touch. I explored the nonhuman instrumentaria (as seen through Neumann's *Inside Piano*, or Paul and Rasmussen's saxophone preparation, section 3.6) and their multitudes as openers of spaces. Instruments have a voice, vocalic and sonic properties that can be explored during improvisation performances. As discussed in Chapter 3, especially in the section on touch (3.8), the instrument's body speaks back to (me) the performer and the space;<sup>3</sup> whether that is through preparation of the instrument using restrictive methods like stuffing the bell or blocking keys, or whether to expand the instrument's sonic space through technological expansion with microphones. I refuse to reproduce the masculine playing techniques of dominance over the instrument (as discussed in Chapter 2), but rather allow myself to listen to the materialisations of the instrument. I have shown how I do this with the preparation of the instrument and my spitty playing techniques above, as well as in the stories of this thesis. It is the development of my practice (in text and performances) that embody the technofeminist view on entangled relationships.

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<sup>3</sup>As outlined in the Introduction, the saxophone is a gendered female voice in the stories, she was therefore given some sort of agency to 'speak back'. However, she doesn't have the ability to speak with pronouns; one reason for that is that I wanted to make clear that she is some other body (nonhuman), and the other reason was to give her a voice of her own.

## 4.1 Do Bodies End At The Skin?

### Sonic Bodies' Voices

Voices are produced by bodies: but can also themselves produce bodies. The vocalic body is the idea - which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine, or hallucination - of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice.<sup>4</sup>

Touching the saxophone, touching any other body, puts the one touching/being touched (after all this is a mutual process) into an enactive state. "Enaction sees the active engagement of an organism with the environment,"<sup>5</sup> instead of considering pre-materialised meanings of an object. Enactivism considers movement to be the key driver of materialisation of meaning.<sup>6</sup> Thus enactivism means an open ended and transformative process in constant movement. Listening/touching the voices in play (the movements of a free improvisation) thus give meaning or sonic voice to a performance space, it is these constant exchanges of movement that eventually turn into a materialised performance. Sensory-motor patterns of the body can engage with the voices projecting from an instrument (or space, audience, other performers and so on), it is that loop of sensory feedback that establishes a connection between human and nonhuman. Bodies only enact through a composite of a specific "place, time, physiology, and culture."<sup>7</sup> For this reason, enactivism allows us to think of these links - between the nervous system, the sensory surfaces and motor abilities - as a connection of a body (or bodies) to its (their) environment(s).<sup>8</sup> These technofeminist thoughts about bodies and materials we hold, offer performers different

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<sup>4</sup>Steven Connor. *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>Hayles, 1999, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>See: *ibid.*, pp. 155.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 156.

possibilities of playing and listening to the instrument. Whilst at the same time they have allowed me to explore a writing method that shows this close connection between human and saxophone in my stories. This enactive approach allows a wider and more entangled understanding of free improvisation, including other performers and spaces. It is these entanglements - in playing and writing - that open the body's skin into a constant state of listening and reacting, because "enaction sees the organism's active engagement with its surroundings as more open-ended and transformative."<sup>9</sup> If we consider material or the instrument as part of an enactive engagement, and not as a representation (as we have seen in Chapter 1 and 2), then we can possibly allow the human and nonhuman relationships to exist in an entanglement, rather than as dichotomous entities.<sup>10</sup> Instruments, in fact the relationship between human and nonhuman should be seen as: "Tools, I suggest, are enactive cognitive prostheses."<sup>11</sup> It is this prosthetic understanding of my practice - and the preparation of the instrument's representation in the musical canon I participate in - that I consider to be the most important understand of this research.

In Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*<sup>12</sup> she already analysed the connection between humans and nonhumans, an enactive thinking between the machinic/material world and the human. In her later works she continued these ideas, and situated the body as part of a woven network of nonhumans, where "other organisms as well as built objects" are entangled to the human body, because "there are all kinds of nonhumans with whom we are woven together."<sup>13</sup> This connectedness is something I explore fully in the story below ending this thesis (see *Chewing*, section 4.2.1). Seeing bodies as entangled materialisations of co-living can allow for a more balanced, and equal practical approach to free improvisation, where patriarchal power structures

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>10</sup>Malfouris, 2013, pp. 163.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>12</sup>Haraway, 1991, pp. 149.

<sup>13</sup>Donna J. Haraway. "More than Metaphor". In: *Visual Culture and Gender. Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Volume IV.* Ed. by Annette Burfoot. Routledge, 2015, pp. 225–229, p. 225.

of dichotomies can be dismantled. Throughout I have critiqued these dichotomous - male - structures, an entangled understanding of human and nonhuman allowed my practice to concentrate on liquids and preparation of the instrument. Seeing a performance space as a prosthetic relationship, enacted by touch allowed me to write stories in more complex relationships. Feminist methods further allowed us to understand musical and social resistances (like that of the AACM or FIG) as different voices in the free improvisation spaces (performance and academic). I have explained how both (but also Brötzmann) are not part of the wider academic canon, but how they have all contributed to different playing approaches and therefore gave me frameworks to develop the writing and playing methods presented here. It is this prosthetic extension through performances into the socio-political space that follows Haraway's cyborg. A body (performers, group of performers, instruments) are a situated and entangled representation of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, sounding bodies are in contact with each other, they melt into entangled relationships. It is key to remember that bodies have boundaries; as shown throughout (especially Chapter 1 and 2), we always act under and within patriarchal power structures. However, the boundaries between bodies might also just present in an 'intra-active' moment of touch. It is again here where the technofeminist thinking helps to show how my research really is one of intra-action. Barad's concept allows boundaries to become determinate in a process where specific embodied concepts become meaningful.<sup>15</sup> As Barad argues, specific practices make objects and subjects, practices determine the perception and materialisation of objects; I would push this a bit further: The mutual touching of the instrument and performer are the phenomena of performance. This particular moment of touch between sounds, instruments, performers, space and audience is an intra-active materialisation of the performance.

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<sup>14</sup>Haraway, 1991, pp. 149.

<sup>15</sup>Karen Barad. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter". In: *Signs* 28.3 (2003), pp. 801–831, p. 815.

I started this thesis quoting Massey's definition of space, where space is a constant plurality reminding us of past events, she further states:

If space is the sphere of multiplicity, the product of social relations, and those relations are real material practices, and always ongoing, then space can never be closed, there will always be loose ends, always relations with the beyond, always potential elements of chance.<sup>16</sup>

Although I agree with this, I think that it is the moment of touch - whether it is with our bodies, hands, tongues or spit - when we materialise into a fused body of our performance spaces. The skin, "rather than an entity whose organic wholeness can be assumed,"<sup>17</sup> is then no longer the end of one body, but an assemblage or de-assemblage ready to fuse with other bodies.

The saxophone's body is a "container that can allow a reading of cultural history, including human figures, in terms of linguistically perceived spatial image that embodies their particular style, manner or significance."<sup>18</sup> Similar to Hayles' book, and Massey's concept of space, the idea of a container implies that the instrument is predetermined, coming already with its own socio-political and historic symbols (as discussed in Chapter 2). Instead we have seen how the members of the AACM and other free jazz musicians repurposed the saxophone, how FIG, but also other female improvisers have questioned patriarchal structures. Thus it might be more interesting to consider instruments as openers only revealing its content in the moment of touch (as stated in section above). In order to dismantle patriarchal structures we need to consider instruments and performances in process of touch. The instrument, although having specific social and historic symbols, can allow a different space of exploration. The instrument can become a specific political resistance instrument - as shown in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 - where different aspects of contained instruments or performance spaces were critiqued. For example, FIG entered the masculine free

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<sup>16</sup>Massey, 2005, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup>Hayles, 1999, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup>Segal, 2009, p. 31.

improvisation spaces with toasters, mops and onions, thus disrupting the ‘contained’ idea of a specific improvisation space.

Listening to Barad again, she proposes a connective node between Haraway and Anzieu, her agential realism and the process of intra-action.<sup>19</sup> Instead of thinking about the saxophone as a container, we could examine its actual possibilities emerging in a moment of touch. Allowing ourselves to shift focus, from human ‘as maker’ to an entanglement of human and nonhuman will allow us to think of feminist improvisation as a “phenomena of intra-active” performances. The performance creates the boundaries of the entangled bodies participating. The performance materialises into a boundary of all entangled or participating actors. Instead of trying to ‘open’ the instrument and finding connections that might already be in there. Loosening, softening, spitting grants a shift of dominance (i.e. performer over tool), where the body of the instrument and that of the human co-exist (co-play) in a very specific performance space (see *Chewing*, section 4.2.1).

Enactivism and intra-activism challenge the boundaries of the mind by bringing the world of things, artefacts, objects, materials, and material signs, into the cognitive fold.<sup>20</sup> Malfouris picks up Bateson’s allegory of the blind man’s stick:

First, I believe it [Bateson’s allegory] provides a refreshing analogy for the profound plasticity of the human mind. Using a stick, the blind man turns touch into sight. This "unnatural" rerouting of tactile processing to occipital visual cortex speaks of the reconfigurable "nature" of mind. In the context of archaeological thinking, this analogy serves to remind us that what we often see as a fixed human nature is more a flexible process of ongoing human becoming - a process still in progress and largely unfinished.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See: Barad, 2007, pp. 142.

<sup>20</sup>Malfouris, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Bracket added by me. *ibid.*, p. 5.

As I have shown through my practice (sound and writing), we should think about the instrument as a prosthetic of the human skin into sound. Further, Barad, Haraway and Malfouris allow us to think about the tactility of bodies. When we touch other bodies with our bodies, then we immediately extend our body boundaries into another. The other's epidermis (or boundary of any other material) becomes our boundary, skin. Really it is sound that "takes up space, in two senses. It inhabits and occupies space; and it also actively procures space for itself. The voice takes place in space, because the voice is space."<sup>22</sup> Connor's voice can be related to Barad's agential realism:

Bodies do not simply take their place in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather, "environments" and "bodies" are intra-actively co-constituted.<sup>23</sup>

The saxophone's entire surface can be touched. The saxophone's boundary does not end with the metal skin, but can be considered as a 'pathway'.<sup>24</sup> The metal skin is a pathway opening its 'contained' symbols, but also other possibilities that can be explored in a sonic entanglement. The interactions of bodies through touch happening in improvisation performances are processes that place bodies outside of their boundaries. Touch connects bodies. Our boundaries extend into the outside, not just anywhere, but really to the point of touch. I think that the moment of connection, touch, is that which creates new, momentary body boundaries. The saxophone or any other instrument could become a:

Dynamic (re)configuring of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted. Apparatuses have no inherent 'outside' boundary. This indeterminacy of the 'outside' boundary represents the impossibility of closure - the ongoing intra-activity in the iterative reconfiguring of the apparatus

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<sup>22</sup>Connor, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Barad, 2007, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup>See: Malfouris, 2013, pp. 6 and Bateson, 2000, pp. 318.

of bodily production. Apparatuses are open-ended practices.<sup>25</sup>

Haraway's cyborg and companion species have brought together the human and nonhuman, and she argues that boundaries are unstable and the divide between nature and humans is obsolete.<sup>26</sup> Instead, she discusses a feminist approach, which sees a connection between all of the intra-active components of reality.<sup>27</sup> In fact, humans "are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm."<sup>28</sup> This reminds me of the saxophone, occupied and filled with all these creatures and beings.<sup>29</sup> My spit leaving its biological data onto/into its metal body/skin.

Now, what happens to the saxophone when it is played? The hard, muted, and patriarchal tool gets filled with wet human substances. The voice (breath, spit) of the human travels through this metal-skinned body. Touching bodies are "a particular relevance to the exploration of the materiality of sound, the body as fluid substance, and the implications of the inseparability of sound and the corporeal."<sup>30</sup> Fluidity. We read that enactivism might mean that the mind is considered always in flow with the material world. In feminist improvisation, we are bodies materialising as part of specific touching, and liquid substances kneading their way into the materials of the instruments.

Listening closer to technofeminism, the nonhuman body is also fluid, similar to "the literary corpus [that] is at once a physical object and a space of representation, a body and a message."<sup>31</sup> The human body extends into the nonhuman body and vice versa, thus allowing a process of material enactivism. Allowing this fusion of bodies, sound and touch can then envelope separate bodies into a momentary (prosthetic)

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<sup>25</sup>Barad, 2003, p. 816.

<sup>26</sup>See: Haraway, 1991, pp. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Haraway, 2008, pp. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>29</sup>See Chewing 4.2.1 in this thesis.

<sup>30</sup>Smith, 2001, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>Bracket added by me. Hayles, 1999, p. 29.

unit as part of a performance space.

Throughout this thesis a criticism of specific playing techniques has shaped my argument. Rather than thinking about instrument and performer as binary poles of performance, it is worthwhile to consider bodies as pluralities where “the subject becomes a system to be assembled and disassembled rather than an entity whose organic wholeness can be assumed.”<sup>32</sup>

In the search for sonic material that is less burdened by tradition, one process that is applicable to different elements of the instrumental equipment (the ‘instrumentarium’) consistently reappears: the single parts of an instrument that are necessary for sound production are studied separately and individually and are themselves examined with regard to their sonic potential.<sup>33</sup>

The instrument is explored in its entirety and transparency; each component can become a different opener to explore the instrument. Even the spit that I leave will leave its mark on the saxophone’s body, as my spit triggers an oxidation of its brass body. These explorative performances can take the instrument out of its pre-idealised space or material. The saxophone is not one, but many. Related to what we hear Neumann say about her piano and close to Barad’s agential realism, the tool offers itself in its plurality. In fact a tool is a complex, networked, and enactive materialised body. What I have called a feminist improvisation approach is in fact an entangled method of the above thoughts that have made me concentrate on spit as my main playing technique. Whilst it allowed my writing on/about (my) performances to be with the saxophone. As described above and the previous Chapter, section 3.7, loosening the relationship between human and nonhuman offers possibilities of story telling. It can give more space of actors involved and at the same time can also allow more traditional academic research to be diversified.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>33</sup>Beins et al., 2011, p. 205.

## 4.2 Let's Have Some Fun - Closing Thoughts

This research focuses a lot on loose and entangled relationships of non/humans, I still - as said in the Introduction - consider another important part of this thesis to be an attempt of activism against structured, capitalist, racist and sexist systems. Through the work of the AACM, black female musicians, FIG and other performers, I have shown how and where these oppressive systems exist. I feel that it is not enough to only consider free improvisation performance as an intra-active materialisation of entangled bodies. Although the technofeminist account (in the above section 4.1) allows us to see the instrument as our companion in the moment of touch, really we need also to view our companionship as enjoyment. Fun. Listening to Lorde then we can consider improvisation (and her margarine) as fun, as something that is ours.<sup>34</sup> A performance, relationship in the moment.

I think it is fruitful to also state that free improvisation has to do with feeling, touching, enjoying friends, spaces, and noises. I want to emphasise that the act of meeting people and playing together is very similar to *Last Exit* (see Chapter 2, section 2.4), where playing and hanging out were more important for the musicians, and where the social aesthetics of free improvisation is:

(...) that our aesthetic pronouncements and embodied experiences are saturated with social meaning, are routinely enrolled to serve multiple social and cultural purposes, and are as much about the subjects of aesthetic experience as they are about aesthetic objects.<sup>35</sup>

Smells and tastes feature throughout the stories in this thesis as well,<sup>36</sup> these close and direct encounters create an immediate connection between bodies.

Smell and taste give, as it were, unsublimated pleasure *per se*(...). They

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<sup>34</sup>Lorde, 1984, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup>Georgina Born, George E Lewis, and Will Straw, eds. *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*. Duke University Press, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Especially in *Amateurism* and *Chewing* 4.2.1.

relate (and separate) individuals immediately (...). Such immediacy is incompatible with the effectiveness of organized *domination* (...).<sup>37</sup>

Smell and taste are certainly part of playing music; the instrument's smell, the smell of the other performers (beer, garlic etc.) all link our bodies, they make us aware of each other. This immediate reaction is part of our performance, when remembering Barad then this intra-active materialisation of spaces and bodies is what Marcuse labels an "immediate perception of smell and taste" so opposed to the political clear-cut power structures inherent in accepted and mastered attitudes, techniques and materials. Smells and tastes "would eroticize the organism to such an extent that it would counteract the desexualization of the organism by its social utilization as an instrument of labor."<sup>38</sup>

Considering Berardi and reminding us of Lorde's margarine, then the enjoyment of free improvisation might partly lie in the materials of the instrument, or their extensions through technology or preparation. Lorde enjoyed kneading the fatty margarine and it is the same for me when I hear my spit in saxophone through the loudspeakers (either because I can see that the audience is totally bewildered on how I play or 'all' I am doing is literally spitting - a very sophisticated spitting - that gets amplified through the loudspeakers). This enjoyment following Lorde allows us to engage and touch the instruments in different ways; the instrument can be valued outside of its 'dominated' space, in an entanglement with friends, audience and other performers. Lorde reclaims the *Erotic as Power*,<sup>39</sup> as a form of political resistance. In this thesis we have listened to female musicians who are in close contact with their instruments, their socio-political space, and with other women; each of them has shown us that their specific situation gave them room to explore their own creativity. A feminist improvisation is in enjoyment with itself and the sounds it materialises through touch.

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<sup>37</sup>Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilisation*. Abacus, (1969) 1973, p. 44.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>39</sup>Lorde, 1984, pp. 53.

### 4.2.1 Reflections

This thesis is a plurality of voices. Practice and research don't happen in empty spaces, they happen in existence with others. Feminist improvisation signals "ways in which differing conceptions of the voice and its powers are linked historically to different conceptions of the body's form."<sup>40</sup> This thesis is/was a process, through more academic research I became/become more aware of what my socio-political space was/is when I play in free improvisation spaces. It was through that learning process that I listened more carefully to marginalised voices and it made me use feminist activism in my practice and research.

Through personal sexist experiences in performances, but also academic spaces I had to learn how to find resistance and not just enter spaces of free improvisation and continue to reproduce the power structures so inherent in there. It is here where we can go back to the beginning of this thesis, where I said that Ahmed's voice is the one that carries and weaves frustration throughout this project:

The killjoy appears again here: the one who gets in the way of the happiness of others by the way she appears. We learn then: bodies need to get in the way to open up a world to others.<sup>41</sup>

Not just human bodies, but also nonhuman ones have to push themselves in the way - I know that I have to carry the saxophone and play on it deliberately different to established performance ideals, but if we think about intra-actions and connections between us and instruments and how we can loosen their bodies to help create more complex stories then Barad's words might find more resonance:

All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the Other is touching all Others, including the 'self', and touching the 'self' entails touching the strangers within. Even the smallest bits of matter are an

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<sup>40</sup>Connor, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>Ahmed, 2017, p. 184.

unfathomable multitude.<sup>42</sup>

In the previous Chapter, section 3.6, I talked about my development with the saxophone, from trying to blend in with the guys' use of technology to a deliberate use of spit and 'lazy' playing. Of course, since I have been doing this no one has ever called me Brötzmann again. People tend to laugh more, but who can blame them when spit dribbles down my chin and leaves stains on a green jumper? Or when I make love to Saxophone kissing and licking her through her bell? I am grateful that I can explore these spaces with friends.

Really, what I want to engage with in this Conclusion is that feminist improvisation (my practice in playing and writing) is in solidarity with spit, and liquids that affect the body of the saxophone, the microphones and my playing techniques. This developed method allowed a different way of practice-led story telling; one that is always situated in complex relationships. Saxophone only speaks when I am with her; I closely listen to her when I use preparation - following other practitioners - to find new spaces I can creatively explore.

Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.<sup>43</sup>

I have said it above, the smells, textures, people, spaces... everything that makes free improvisation fun is what I like. Having had the opportunity to research this in more academic context and being able to present this thesis did help me to feel more comfortable in playing with spit as well. For Ahmed books and other people are her (and my) survival kit.<sup>44</sup> Listening to other people helped me to understand my space and that "feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*."<sup>45</sup> This thesis will end with a final story, one that entangles the full scope of this research.

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<sup>42</sup>Barad, 2012, p. 214.

<sup>43</sup>Lorde, 1984, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Ahmed, 2017, pp. 235.

<sup>45</sup>Haraway, 1988, p. 581.

I am not willing to be included if inclusion means being included in a system that is unjust, violent, and unequal.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ahmed, 2017, p. 263.

## Chewing, Sucking, Eating Bodies

[Listen to: Tindegger & Usurper - 2\_Chewing]

In theory, it is such a beautiful idea to think about co-habitation. My microbes inside her body made her change her colours, our skins are fused. Her skin breathes and her body reacts to environmental changes. Sound waves are elastic waves, they trigger a deformation on her reed causing the points close to her reed to start moving. My breath starts a chain reaction of energetic motion. Like my colon, her body is moving through energetic changes in her material. Muscular vibratory motions, making her sound and me shit. I am taking the spiky massage balls out of her bell. They are slightly damp. Taking one of the small microphones, sticking it on the outside of her body now, massaging her keys. My index finger is coated in sticky wetness and a light, fuzzy and turquoise surface.

I am too full from that falafel we just had before we went on stage. I can't concentrate listening to the others. They seem to be able to play and move around. I continue with the massage balls up and down her body. Making sure that each of her mechanic sounds are audible enough, occasionally having to move the microphone into place. The Blu-Tack is constantly stuck on the smoothest surface of her bell. I take some Blu-Tack and stick the small microphone further down, just before the dip in her curvaceous body. The lower, big keys resonate most when pushed closed and released to open. Down there is a closely connected assemblage of tubes, wires, pads and loose keys. Pressing the massage balls down, they release a mechanical, metal and rhythmic pattern. The sounds of the spiky rubbery texture of the massage balls is mixed into the mechanic, metal sounding rhythms of keys. Eating stimulates metabolic functions, it activates the small intestines, the pancreas, gallbladder, kidneys and the stomach. It stimulates pleasure through a chemical release in the cerebral cortex. The gastrointestinal body is working through muscular motions, activating the network of metabolic processes. Secretion, hormones, acids, muscular movements. In reaction to proteins and fat, the falafel, the body is creating stimulants. Cholecystokinin is making me feel happy and

satisfied. I am currently feeling like *Imam Bayildi*, I think it translates as: the Imam fainted. A Turkish aubergine dish. I am a fat sultan and too lazy to play.

Mechanism of mouth, gnawing of teeth, jaw joints, lips, tongue, saliva, oesophagus, swallowing, sucking, chewing, licking, food stuck in teeth. I am back at her mouthpiece, moving my tongue, trying to tickle her. I can taste onions, cumin, salt, garlic. The reminiscent textures of the falafel are all filling my gastrointestinal tract with work, while playing, food and smells come back up, like a cow I start chewing again. Trying to spit back into Saxophone at the same time. Spit with food residues. My stomach is pumping and working very hard, I am disturbing its work while moving my diaphragm actively around. I can feel my stomach gurgling the food inside, pushing air into her mouthpiece, rhythmic breaths out, irritating the metabolic functions. There is a reason why I shouldn't eat before I play. I burp.

The exploration of pleasure through oral touch, textures and taste. I am trying to cover her in these fatty, smelly juices. My onion breath is inhabiting her body. My garlic breath adding layers of strong smells inside her vocalic body and escaping through her holes. The others ate garlic too, so they won't notice. How far does smelly breath travel? The audience looks disgusted. They don't know how good the falafel was, its varied textures and tastes, a complex mixture, sour pickles through crunchy carrot cabbage slithers, embedded in creamy hummus, with occasionally crispy and oily herb falafels, a sharp reminder of chillies' heat, and all wrapped in a fresh, soft and elastic wrap.

My teeth are grinding up and down her mouthpiece, whilst my tongue licks around her reed, I have to swallow some spit and slurp along her neck. There are not many noises to make around here. I continue further down. Saxophone smells. Old crusty, dried spit layering the inside of her body. The smell of rust, fresh and airy metallic smells, wood. The smells I perceive as metal are really by-products of the metals reacting with skin or impurities in the metal itself. Then dampness hits my nose, a cry for more attentive cleaning. But dirt is really just *the foundation of property, that one's own dung smells*

*good*.<sup>47</sup> She's my property, like a dog I mark my territory. The waves of onion smell is overwhelming now. I take a step back, looking inside her, there is the small microphone lying at the bottom of her bell. A bit of moisture glistening, but then there is also a heavy coating of turquoise and brown colours mixed together on her inside. Debris giving her agency, the *stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects*.<sup>48</sup> Verdigris. Shades of cyan, pigments occupying her silver body. Her otherwise smooth inside looks like a rocky, sharp, uneven surface. Is it alive? I always refer to her as a metal body, but really she is brass, a mixture of metals from copper and zinc. Her body too is an assemblage of materialisms, sonic codes. Zinc makes my bones strong, it must be okay to stick my tongue in there?

Obstruction by oxidisation, a weathering of brass skin. When her breath and her bacterial spit enters, changing the surface of brass skin. A lack of cleaning and care over years, maybe decades, allows this formation to happen. Although not minding these visitors, giving comfort to otherwise decaying existence, they were not invited. Used to being poked with microphones, massage balls, hit by metal objects, the private inside mechanism amplified to humans' ear. She has gone too far. Her spit contains bits of foods entering body, smooching along sophisticated assemblages of precise instrumental mechanisms. Her oral ecology now everywhere. Humans colonialise for pleasure, *one feeds one another and gives nothing in return*.<sup>49</sup> Her saliva might keep her healthy, leaving nothing but destruction of brass.

I figure my face doesn't fully fit, trying to enter her through the bell with my mouth first, pushing the chin forward trying to reach her body. My lips are licking along her body, moving my head around, I manage to get more control over my lip muscles on her. Grinding along her inside I tighten my lips, making continuous squeaky noises. Increasing and lowering the tension of my lips as I please. There's a massive layer of

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<sup>47</sup>Michel Serres. *Parasite*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup>Bennett, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Serres, 2007, p. 182.

onion hanging in my mouth, it all feels sticky and cloggy. My body is still feeling a bit round and tired. This squeaking shouldn't take too much effort. A mixture of metal, dampness and onion are now mixing on my tongue. I wish I could just shout for a glass of water, but that's not going to happen. Sparks of turquoise occasionally finding my eyes, it looks much bigger now than before. I can't even recall the last time I cleaned her, that honking forest of oxidation is now creeping onto my face.

Years ago she used to be cleaned regularly, after every rehearsal or practice. Now, I have stopped giving her that care. She tends to get tucked straight back into her case as soon as I finish playing. There is no time to give her a thorough clean, other performers are waiting to go on stage. Always intending to clean her once I am home. I never do it, the case gets put into the corner of a room until next time. I really must make sure to make an effort, that debris really has to go, I am not looking after her very well. I assume that saliva's bacteria surely die once dried in air. There's nothing contagious, I can't recall the last time I had herpes. All that spit and now the falafel pieces though? Did I just jinx my luck?

There's no time to think, the performance is getting a bit livelier, on her mouthpiece, the familiar place, I push it far into the pockets of my left cheek, turning it to the side, I start licking on her right side of mouthpiece, spitting into the very small gap between mouthpiece and reed, continuing to assemble spit, a mouthwash bringing leftover food back and finding its way onto my taste buds. We are touching, tasting and smelling each other. Exchanges. Morphing them into sound. A closed, physical dancing. Pleasing each other. Her smell coming inside my nose. It is reminding me of iron and now the copper coil in my uterus. Blood. Saxophone is part copper, my fertility is stopped by the same materials that make her. How the fuck is that even possible? Why does no one ever talk about this? We are all so closely entangled that the idea of individuality seems more and more embarrassing.

My tongue, the inside of my oral cavity tasting the old reed; there is clearly coffee, then the onions, beer, dampness. I am re-tasting and eating all those smells and aromas

again, licking around it happily in mouth, the taste is memory. Old, heavy coffee taste mixed with bad breath on some wooden texture. I am adding another layer of myself onto it just now. It reminds me of my grandpa, the unwashed, sweaty old man. I push the mouthpiece deep into the pocket of my left cheek, I have her entire top inside my wet mouth. Through the side gap between reed and mouthpiece I spit into her. Moving along the smooth surface of the mouthpiece, lustfully tickling her with my tongue, eating all old leftovers. Spit starts drooling down my chin.

Food loses its body as soon as my teeth have chewed it down, swallowed it and the pancreas has added its juices for digestion. That falafel is no longer a solid form, broken down into useful lipids, minerals, calories, co-habituating my body, activating inside processes. Metabolised energy to my brain, nervous system and muscles. Gnawing on her reed, I pull one of the small microphones closer up her body and stick it with Blu-Tack onto her mouthpiece. Gnawing, accelerating into chewing muscular spasm. I drag the other microphone further up to make those sounds loud, distorted and totally overdriven. Eating her has turned into noise, the signals on the mixer are peaking into red, too loud.

Was there enough time for the verdigris to have crept up her neck? A combination of fluids, verdigris, and food crumbs covering her inside now. I am getting up trying to find my water bottle in my bag. I don't even care that the others are still playing. Washing my mouth, why is it that onions leave such a heavy coating on the teeth? Wiping my mouth, I'll use my hand to wipe hers, her mouthpiece is topped with stinking saliva. I wipe my hands on my jeans. White crust around the rubber cover on her mouthpiece, rubber stickers are stuck on mouthpiece to provide a grip for the teeth. I suspect that this old, dried spit has been sitting there for a few months now, occupying her. I have more water. Picking up the spiky massage balls from the ground I stuff them into her bell. Blocking her off.

Stopping her airflow creates a very tight, dense sonic environment, she sounds more like a percussion instrument. Using the correct lip pressure and tongue technique, I

make her sound like a small drum. The tongue needs to be released from the reed with muscular force. Amplified by the microphones hanging inside her body. I am expanding my distance to her, after each slap tongue I remove mouth immediately from her body. I believe it lets the percussive sounds resonate more.

Eco-system of sounds. Brass *polycrystalline in nature, that is, they consist of hosts of very tiny crystals packed together to fill space.*<sup>50</sup> Air tickles the reed, moving and pushing through. Passing open or closed holes, depending on where her fingers decided to stop. Air oscillating further through until leaving as sound. Making metal skin, and all its parts move. Spit doesn't resonate body, air does. Spit is nuisance to sophisticated instrument. It is a residue leading to silence. Reed is the source of oscillation, controlling the airflow to bell, the resonator. Clean body, cared for, gives voluminous and shaped sounds. Her lips on outside, her chin in bell, massage balls pressing, like verdigris are parasites. Parasite *is social technique and knows how to play at the mastery of men and their domestication.*<sup>51</sup> No musical sounds emerging, instead stuff with human materials of domination, smells and balls. Scratching along inside, smudging on outside. Humans are parasites.

I look inside her again. The turquoise, brown debris inside her reminds me of the colon, although pink and much larger, it is also occupied by billions of microbes. The microbiome is my community of microbes inside, vital for my body. Maybe Saxophone will sound different once I start sanding off the colours? What will happen when her microbes leave her? Her oxidised skin vibrates the verdigris, my spit and the accumulated strands of bacteria and DNA. The constant excessive load of moisture and lack of care made her sound different. Her keys, pads are loose and clunky, having an agency of their own. It's my own spit after all that made her sound so desirable to me. I close the zip on her case.

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<sup>50</sup>Bennett, 2010, p. 58.

<sup>51</sup>Serres, 2007, p. 64.

# Appendix A

## Practice-led Research Portfolio - List of Recordings and Performances

This section lists and describes the audio works and performances submitted as part of this thesis. It gives a short overview of the submitted works and the story they relate to. Each group is introduced with a short text that gives an account of what this group is and does. As stated at the beginning of this thesis (Introduction and the section on Methodology), some of these works are directly entangled within the main body of text, and appropriately referenced where necessary. Although my stories always reflect a live performance, unfortunately some of the live performances were not recorded. Therefore you will find studio improvisation performances of the same groups submitted here. In the Introduction I also explained that the stories are a practical aspect of this research, and can be read on their own, but are in entanglement with the actual performances and this research. However, I felt it necessary to include more recordings of my practice here to give more (sonic) context to my practice, and also to highlight that these performances always happen in collaboration with others. In my opinion, this is one of the key drivers in free improvisation.

You will find the music on the accompanying USB-stick in a folder called *PhD-*

*Practice-led-Portfolio*. There are seven subfolders: *FUA*, *Butter*, *Adam and Tina*, *Auto-Erotic*, *Tindegger&Usurper*, and *Pardon* and *Performance Essays*. Each of these folders contains individual tracks, clearly labelled below or in the main body of this thesis. Each of these albums comes with their own little story, description or text; I am not a big fan of programme notes or biographies and believe that these brief descriptions give an idea of what to expect when listening to the music.

## A.1 Musics Recordings

### FUA

Their mouths slurp around machines. Their hands touch keys, knobs and circuits of digital and analogue, hands mingle with a blown wind machine.

Tristan has a tongue.

Adam has a body.

Tina sits on a chair.

The tongue leaves, slurping along a wooden surface, the body buzzes through voltages triggering gates of white noises.

There is something stuck in our throats. The machine stutters along, it has a throat too.

An eyeball does not see as much as ears. That depends on perspective, you might think. Three people, sitting on chairs, on stage, with or behind sonic tools, a painting of beauty. It is their hair glistening in the sheen of stage lights. I have to tell you that illuminated hair has no ears. Pink is bright, but not necessarily sound. It might be though. Can hair and pink be ears?

#### 1. FUA live - Dublin

Folder: /1\_FUA - Dublin\_live (21:56)

- Performed at BarricadeInn, Squat in Dublin, June 2015

- Performers:  
Tristan Clutterbuck: Voice and computer  
Adam Campbell: Modular synths  
Tina Krekels: Saxophone and distortion
- Recording: Zoom recorder, no post-processing

## 2. FUA - Improvisation Studio Recording

Folder: /1\_FUA - Belfast - 1 (6:05)

Folder: /1\_FUA - Belfast - 2 (7:40)

- Recorded/improvised: SARC, Belfast, June 2015
- Performers:  
Tristan Clutterbuck: Voice and computer  
Adam Campbell: Modular synths  
Tina Krekels: Saxophone and distortion
- Mix: Tristan Clutterbuck Tina Krekels

# Butter

*We are actually functioning as functions of a machine, which functions as the function of a functionary, who in turn functions as the function of an apparatus, which functions as a function of itself.*<sup>1</sup> We tried to play with butter. Each of us had a small square of cold butter on a silver plate. We had three butter knives, and three whisks. Each plate was on top of a contact microphone, each contact microphone was connected to a guitar amp. There was a buzz in the room. One whisk got stuck in the butter, it was still too cold. The cat also used to like butter. Also hummus. A cat tongue is like sand paper, granulation helps it to cut through the cold butter. I am sticking the butter knife into the butter, take the microphone from underneath the plate and put on the butter. I start licking the butter. I am glad it is salty butter. His butter has fallen onto the floor, next to the amp, the cat is eating it. He is still trying to whisk the butter, but there is no bowl. Room temperature softens butter, we didn't think about that. I am done with licking butter, I don't mind a 2cm layer on my toast, but this is a bit much. I wonder what the cat likes about licking butter?

Butter really stinks once it gets rancid.

## 1. Butter - Improvisation Studio Recording

Folder: /2\_Butter - 1 (25:30)

- Recorded/improvised: Tenant Street Studios, Leith, 25th July, 2016.
- Performers:
  - Adam Campbell: Modular synth, guitar
  - Grant Smith: Guitar and objects
  - Tina Krekels: Saxophone and distortion
- Mix: Grant Smith Tina Krekels

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<sup>1</sup>Flusser, (1991) 2014, p. 14.

# Adam&Tina

What are we doing?

I dinnae ken, pal. I thought you had an idea.

I can't think right now, I am too busy to think about that now. Can you not bring some tapes, some synths, any of your cluttered shite? Like that thing, what's that?

Gie's this! Not your stuff, pal.

That's a crusty old underpants, you filthy bastard.

I like it quieter. Sophistication, pal. Concentrated silence. I don't play ramshackle, bang-it-all, shit-on-stuff, just-for-the-sake-of-it, tear-down LOUD. Do you not agree? There's too much of that loud nonsense out there already. We need to be special, stand out from the crowd. Be different.

*Different? Do they mean, an individual?*

Do you have nothing to say to this? Sophistication is the key to success, pal! That's what all the books say.

*Can we not just play... collectivity is a social space*

Your silence is passive aggressive, you know that, right? You know how to twist my ideas so that you get what you want! Fuck it. LOUD.

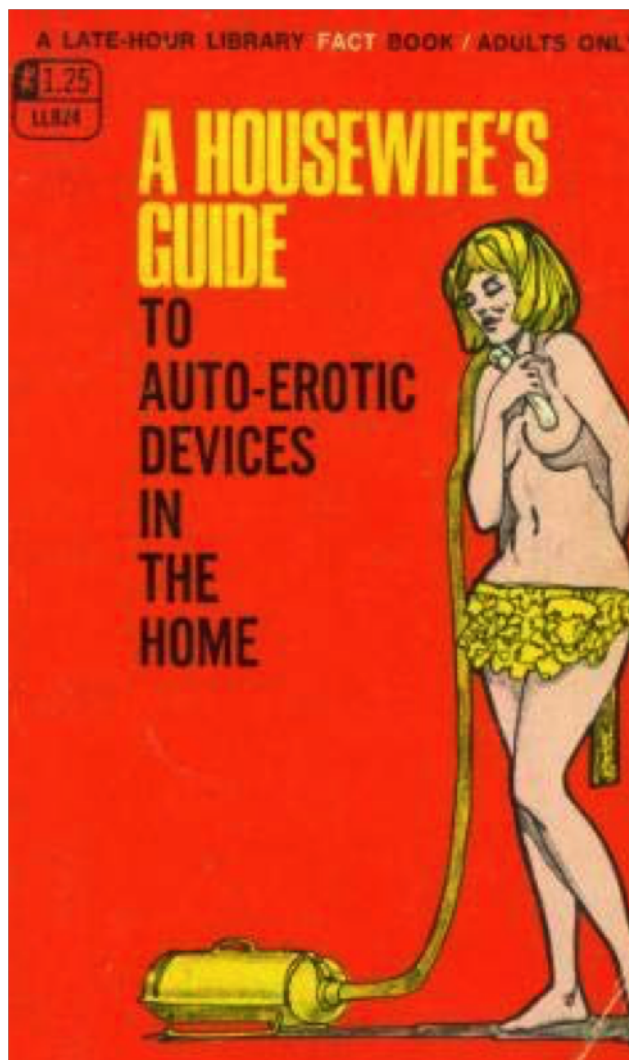
## 1. Adam and Tina - Improvisation Studio Recording

Folder: /3\_ Adam&Tina - 1 (22:26)

- Recorded/improvised: Studio 4, Alison House, 20th July, 2016.
- Performers:
  - Adam Campbell: Modular synths, guitar
  - Tina Krekels: Saxophone and distortion
- Recording: Zoom Recorder, no post-processing/editing
- Mix: Tina Krekels

## Auto-Erotic

This album was inspired by this picture:



For a while I wondered about the space between reed and Saxophone's mouthpiece. Not a scientific study of acoustics, more a question of spatial opening. I don't know how close you have ever examined a saxophone's mouthpiece, but I can assure you the gap between reed and mouthpiece isn't that big. I tried to stick my tongue into the side and front gaps, and it never worked. However, this filthy urge for my tongue to enter her body remained. I discovered the spit shovel technique: Have a bottle of water. Drink. Wet your mouth. Start assembling spit in your oral cavities. Roll the sides of your tongue inwards, like a shovel. Onto that lowered front tongue move the spit. You can do that by keeping the tongue rolled up, and moving it

back and forward. Until the spit is at the front of your tongue/mouth. Now, this is the tricky bit, and believe me when I tell you that often the spit managed to find its way down my chin onto my shirts... Anyhow, try shoveling the spit all into the mouthpiece and start blowing air. Apart from that, microphones are used to allow these spit sounds to be amplified on mixers and through distortion pedals. Massage balls caress Saxophone's outside. Irigaray reminds us that: *Man's auto-erotism presupposes an individualization of the subject, of the object, and of the instrument appropriate(d) to jouissance.*<sup>2</sup> Poor men, at least I find pleasure in a moment of spitty touchings.

### 1. **Auto-Erotic - Tina Krekels**

Folder: /4\_Auto-Erotic - 1\_Lips & Tongues (2:39)

Folder: /4\_Auto-Erotic - 2\_Massage (6:04)

Folder: /4\_Auto-Erotic - 3\_Nipples (4:37)

Folder: /4\_Auto-Erotic - 4\_Cum (4:08)

- Recorded/improvised: Studio 4, Alison House, Edinburgh, 15th May, 2016.
- Performers:  
Tina Krekels: Prepared saxophone and live electronics
- Recording: FireFace Soundcard, DAW: Logic Pro
- Mix: Tina Krekels

## Tindegger & Usurper

springs

He let's the springs bounce of the table. Repeatedly. The springs drop off the table. Sometimes he catches them. Another time the springs bounce on the ground. It is

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<sup>2</sup>Irigaray, 1985a, p. 210.

the same motion over and over again, he bends down, picks up the springs, comes up, puts them on the table and drops them down again.

marbles head-massager

I am watching this dirty old toothbrush brushing a big, horse-hair brush. Small brush rubbing, in very small, back and forth movements along on big brush.

plugs

He has put earplugs into his ears. The toothbrush sounds are not very loud.

pipe-tube-thing-around-neck

rubberbands

A rubberband stretches depending on its size, a very long way. When you put the very long, stretched rubber band on something - like nails - that holds it in that position, you can start plugging the rubber band like strings.

## 1. **Tindegger&Usurper - Improvisation Studio Recording**

Folder: /5 \_Tindegger&Usurper - 1 (26:58)

- 2\_Chewing (20:52)

- Recorded/improvised: Tenant Street Studios, Leith, 14th August, 2016.
- Performers:
  - Malcy Duff: Voice, contact mics and several small objects
  - Grant Smith: Guitar and objects
  - Ali Robertson: Voice, contact mics and several small objects
  - Tina Krekels: Saxophone and distortion
- Recording: 4-Track
- Mix: Grant Smith & Tina Krekels

## **Pardon, I have Tentacles**

Here is the full text/score.

Anything in these brackets [] should be spoken simultaneously.

[ You        You

and

I

You have

You

You

are

We

]

[ You

You

have

male

Female, I,

we

Having male

You

We

You

You

Having male]

[Female body-builders

Building bodies

More

female muscles

Fibrous engines

of

body borders

]

Let us listen

Scanning her body under ophthalmic surveillance

Eyes, seeing, surveillance, watching other bodies under male

A grey-brown glistening, rough, bumpy, slimy

Skin

Edgy, thorny, round lumps

Curious

Lumps of mass

Masses perfectly fused into her skin

Parasitic lumps of maleness

On HER skin

Male heroes have contoured, hard bodies

The maker's myth goes something like:

*Man believes to be the sun, the nucleus, the fulcrum, the unifying force, the glue that holds it all together. man is an individual apart from all the rest. and it is this very distinction that bestows on his the inheritance of distance, a place from which to reflect - on the world, his fellow man, and himself. a distinct individual, the unit of all measure, finitude made flesh, his separateness is the key.*<sup>3</sup>

White masculinity

- - - individual body

a separateness from the world, the viewer from the top. Master muscle of

Parasitism

Parasite

---

<sup>3</sup>Barad, 2007, p. 134.

Para is near

Sitos is food

A male parasite            always next to food

Colon

Strong, wet, moving, massive muscle

Digestive super-organ. An eco-system

A multitude of beings occupying space.

there are more E. coli cells in the gut of an individual human than there are humans,

On your fingertips there are others. Fanon says something like the other is an ideological construct designed to uphold and to consolidate imperialist definitions of selfhood.            On your fingertips are nonhumans.

Bacteria

Fungi

Yeast

Microbes interact under your fingernails.

Touch your neighbour and leave your nonhuman

Do

Cough

Spit

The curious lumpy mass on HER skin are testicles.

He is degenerating, his body eating itself...

Slowly his intestines foul

Eating him from the inside

His circulatory system almost extinct A few soft heartbeats, keeping enough blood  
pumping

a slowed down, fouling body

His body falls into particles and enters the oceanic stream?

The clitoris is in direct line to the matrix, the womb

A line to the networks

Exchanger of time

a feedback loop

an infinitive zoom

patterns repeating themselves, recursive arrangements,

spirals and whorls

patterns leading into the line

as if down through the crack

opening the boundary into worlds of its own.

Filled with signals

Noises

Messages

Parasites

Man is parasite

Takes

Eats

Not giving back

His body will die if he can't find her skin His crippled body only capable of smelling  
her skin The male cannot survive on his own his wee, transparent, jelly-like body

floats

One bite

One last tasteful bite

a moment of lust and connection

Into this thick rough, brown, shiny and big

Female skin

A final parasitic bite

His mouth stuck

She immediately attaches herself to his mouth

He starts digesting his own face

The eyeballs last

Offering himself

His digested face gives a surface for her skin to melt with his

Sexual parasitism

An end to male bites

His joyful moment a never ending degeneration of

His body

Eating,

eating each other, is a mutual transformation between

human and nonhuman materials.

A raw garlic clove loses its distinct taste, texture, smell once

Digestive processes

Chewing

Saliva

Breaking foods into pieces

Disintegration of distinction

Sliding through the muscular tube - - - Oesophagus

Mixing and grinding

Chop- - -ping

Acidifying

Melt- - -ing

Stretch- - - ing

In stomach

Enzymes and secrete acids

A liquid, gooey, sticky substance leaves

The breath still smells

Nonhuman materials, fats, carbs, proteins, minerals Colon

Microbiome, a collection of all microbes - all human inhabitants.

Species on human land

The human is a host to the microbiome We have more bacterial DNA than human  
carrier of microbes

You give land and life to others

you eat and destroy life and land of others.

Her cardiovascular system moves like tentacles into his decayed bits

His intestines gave up while eating his own eyes Her vessels leave nothing

an empty shell of a wee man

Her vessels spreading inside him,

entering the empty spaces

feeling around to find

the only bit that is left of him

His testicles

She caresses them with a nest of blood vessels

She will continue to guard and keep flooding his gonads with nourishments

She has his testicles attached to her body

Feeding them

She decides when to

Fertilize herself

The female anglerfish. Stories of digital, diffused bodies.

## 1. **Pardon, I have Tentacles**

Folder: /6\_Pardon - 1 (19:32)

- Live Recording, Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow, BBC Tectonics, 6th May, 2018
- Performers:
  - Adam Campbell: Modular synth and guitar
  - Tina Krekels: Prepared saxophone
  - Fiona - MacOS text-to-speech voice
- Recording/Mix: BBC - Tectonics
- Duration: 20 minutes

This performance and piece were the final stages of this thesis. It embodies the practice explored throughout this thesis. The text written for this commission is very much inspired by technofeminism, especially feminist sci-fi, but also blurring body boundaries. This piece was the second where I introduced voice as a player into the performance. It was the first time I did this live though. The text was pre-recorded in SuperCollider using the pre-installed 'Scottish' voice on Mac OS

systems. The voice gets statically played at the performance, one press of the space bar and it runs. Adam and I improvised with the text. Unlike otherwise we actually rehearsed the piece a few times, also because we had to do professional soundchecks with the BBC. It thus became more of a rehearsed piece than a freely improvised performance. As described elsewhere in the thesis, a great soundsystem can give so much pleasure. The Fruitmarket in Glasgow is also a beautiful, reverberant venue, so our sounds were nicely bouncing off the walls. You could hear people being disgusted by the text or you could hear them laughing. The fact that some of my male saxophone idols were at the festival as well made the entire experience that little bit more exciting.

# Appendix B

## Performances and Publications

In this section I also list all other additional performance releases, conference participations, events organised and publications. You will find the video essay *Muscular* and the performance reading *Sonic Cyberfeminism* on the USB stick in the folder *Performance Essays*.

### B.1 Music Releases

#### 1. Tindegger

Tindegger. *Eyes*. [CD]. Brighton: Chocolate Monk, 2018.

- Performers:  
Grant Smith: Modular Synth and Voice  
Tina Krekels: Saxophone, Voices and Distortion
- Mix: Grant Smith and Tina Krekels
- Duration: approximately 30 minutes

## 2. FUA - Tape

FUA. *FUA Tape*. [Casette]. Glasgow: Fancyyyyy, 6-05-2018. Available at: <http://www.fancyyyyy.com/>.

A digital version of this tape can be found on the USB stick.

/1\_FUA - Tape Fancyyyyy - A (50:00).

- Performers:

Tristan Clutterbuck: Voice and Computer

Adam Campbell: Modular Synth and Guitar

Tina Krekels: Saxophone and Distortion

- Mix: Tristan Clutterbuck and Adam Campbell

## 3. Street Beers - 'Seriously Hot'

Ali Robertson. *Street Beers - 'Seriously Hot'*. [CD]. Brighton: Chocolate Monk, 5-07-2018. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2zriQLp>

- Performers:

Ali Robertson

Karen Constance

Tina Krekels

Elkka Nyoukis

Dylan Nyoukis

Collette Robertson

- Duration: 25 minutes

## 4. Ijereja - Lauren Redhead

Lauren Redhead. *Ijereja*. [CD]. Chicago: Pan Y Rosas Discos, 22-06-2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2N5Wa5x>

- Performers:

Lauren Redhead: Voice and Organ

Tina Krekels: Saxophone  
Chales Céleste Hutchins: Tuba  
Adam Linson: Live Electronics  
Alistair Zaldua: Live Electronics

- Duration: 40 minutes

## 5. Diapason. Music for Organ and Electronics

Lauren Redhead & Alistair Zaldua. *Diapason. Music for Organ and Electronics*. [CD]. SFZ Music, 2015.

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2um1gCC>

- Compositions by:

Tina Krekels  
Alistair Zaldua  
Huw Morgan  
Adam Fergler  
Caroline Lucas  
Jesse Ronneau

- Duration: 40 minutes

## B.2 Publications and Conferences

### 1. SonicCyberfeminism- Sonic Reading

A recording can be found on the USB stick.

Under: /7\_Performance Essays - Sonic Cyberfeminisms (10:48)

- Performed at Sonic Cyberfeminisms Conference, 5th May, 2017. University of Lincoln.
- Performer: Tina Krekels: Saxophone, ringmodulation, voice, massage balls, distortion

- Mix: Tina Krekels

## 2. Muscular

A video version of a performative paper presentation. Available here: /7\_-  
Performance Essays - Muscular (8:26)

- Recorded and performed at the PhD Symposium, ECA, Edinburgh, June 2017.

With music and images by Mats Gustafsson,<sup>1</sup> Peter Brötzmann,<sup>2</sup> Mette Rasmussen,<sup>3</sup> Cheryl Donegan,<sup>4</sup> and Tina Krekels (using samples from *Auto-Erotic* for Donegan's video).

- Mixed/edited: Tina Krekels

## 3. Conference: Compositional Aesthetics and the Political at Goldsmiths

Performance and Paper Presentation, 20th - 22nd February 2015

- Paper: "Staging Improvisation: The loss of desire in improvisation practices."

- Performance with:

Adam Campbell: Modular synth

Tristan Clutterbuck: Voice and live electronics

Tina Krekels: Saxophone and preparation

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<sup>1</sup>Mats Gustafsson. *Mats Gustafsson Solo in Reykjavik 16 August 2013*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZm5oHaYb5c>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019). 2013.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Brötzmann. *The Peter Brötzmann Octet - Machine Gun*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwgA9L5TN5M>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019). 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Mette Rasmussen. *Mette Rasmussen Solo at Météo - Mulhouse Music Festival 2014*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3Cl\\_fWxMpA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3Cl_fWxMpA). (Last accessed 10-04-2019). 2014.

<sup>4</sup>Cheryl Donegan. *Head*. <https://vimeo.com/17888330>. (Last accessed 10-04-2019). (1993) 2010.

## Publications

### 1. ‘Popular’ Feminism

- Krekels, Tina. “ ‘Popular’ Feminism, Pharmacopornography and Media Strategies: Some Initial Thoughts.” In: MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture. Online. 1 (2018). [Last accessed 9-07-2018] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2N1ELLg>

### 2. Spit Saxophone Spit

- Krekels, Tina. “Spit Saxophone Spit.” In: Riffs: Ideas of Noise. Volume 3, Issue 1 (April 2019). [Last accessed 30-04-2019] Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yycobbh5>

## B.3 Events

### Summerhall: A Dank Hangout For U.F.O Enthusiasts

3-hour performance, scored by Fritz Welch. 26th June, 2018. Summerhall, Edinburgh.

Performers: Tina Krekels, Adam Campbell, Malcy Duff, Fritz Welch, Daniel Padden and Stasis.

### BBC Tectonics, Glasgow

A commission by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Directors: Ilan Volkov and Alasdair Campbell. 20 minute performance of *Pardon, I have Tentacles*,

on 6th May, 2018. Old Fruitmarket, City Halls, Glasgow. Full programme available at: <https://bit.ly/2KKdaBC>

- Performers:  
Tina Krekels: Prepared saxophone  
Adam Campbell: modular synth and guitar  
Fiona: MacOS Voice

## GenderThing

A day of workshops, seminars and a concert discussing gender issues in the institution.

### Programme:

- Workshops with:  
Ewa Justka <https://tinyurl.com/yd6d34o4>  
Linda O’Keefe <https://tinyurl.com/yauqzxno>  
Sohia Lycouris <https://tinyurl.com/y8df8cjo>  
Seminar:  
Led by Dr Jennifer O’Meara (St Andrews) in Alison House’s Common Room from 2pm - 4pm. We will be discussing gender politics and embodiment issues around women’s voices in memes and podcasts.
- Gig: air|sea, Linda O’Keeffe, Lucy Duncombe, Ewa Justka
- Organised by ECA’s GenderThing: Tina Krekels, Katerina Talianni, Jack Walker, Cormac O’Callanain and Daniela Lara Espinoza
- Date: May 9th, 2018. Alison House, Wee Red Bar, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh.

## BOAR Collective

A day of workshops and performances exploring free improvisation practices with different technologies and playing approaches.

- Programme:

Workshops with:

Ryoko Akama

Tom Mudd

Armin Sturm

Festival with performances by: Jude Browning, Dario Sanfillippo, Marcin Pietruszewski, Christian Ferlaino, Ceylan Haye, Ryoko Akama, Adam Campbell, Tristan Clutterbuck, Nikita Gaidakov, Tina Krekels, Tom Mudd, Mariam Rezai, Usurper, John Hails.

- Organised by Tina Krekels and Marcin Pietruszewski
- Date: 28th - 29th April 2017. Alison House, Wee Red Bar, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh.

## sIREN Conference - sIREN Conference 2017: Arts and Digital Practices

sIREN 'Art and Digital Practices Conference will explore digital practices and their social impact in contemporary artistic contexts. It seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform of communication among artistic practices, technologies, theory, artistic collaboration and digital media.

- 2 - day conference organised by sIREN Network at ECA.  
Arts and Digital Practices Conference team: Eleni-Ira Panourgia, Katerina Talianni, Dara Etefaghi, Tina Krekels, Jack Walker, Roxana Karam and Deirdre

Harnedy.

- 30 - 31 May 2017. Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh.

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