

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

ISSN 2504-1916

VOL. 16/1 (2017), 81–93

‘Money and a Room of One’s Own?!’

A Feminist Deconstruction of the Situation of Female Jazz Musicians,
1960–1980

Katharina Schmidt

‘A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.’¹

1 Introduction

What does it take for a woman to be able to write a novel?, Virginia Woolf asks in her 1929 essay *A Room of One’s Own*. The answer is surprisingly mundane: She needs money and a room of her own. Although Woolf writes at length about passion, talent and inspiration, she concludes that material preconditions are actually more crucial. Accordingly, it is not a matter of some inherent inferiority of women’s talent or motivation, but a lack of opportunities, partly circumstantial and partly financial, that has prevented women from creating art, and in some cases continues to do so.²

Taking my cue from Woolf, I have conducted semi-structured interviews³ with the British singer Norma Winstone, the Norwegian singer Sidsel Endresen, the free-jazz pianist Aki Takase and the Berlin-based singer Uschi Brüning, in an attempt to answer the question: ‘What did it take for a woman to become a jazz musician in the years 1960–1980?’⁴ Assuming that women⁵ were not less interested in jazz than men or were less talented, there must have been

I would like to thank Uschi Brüning, Sidsel Endresen, Aki Takase and Norma Winstone.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin, 1945), 6.

² Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 6 and *passim*.

³ All quotes from interviews are verbatim. Idiosyncrasies in spelling and punctuation will not be highlighted. Where necessary, explanations for abbreviations have been added the first time they occur.

⁴ This article was originally presented as a paper under the title ‘Money and a Room of One’s Own: What Did It Take for a Woman to Become a Jazz Musician 1960–1980?’ at the conference ‘Growing Up: Jazz in Europe 1960–1980’, Lucerne, 6–8 November 2014.

⁵ The debate oscillates between categories of social gender and biological sex: While the underrepresentation of women implies biological sex as a line of demarcation, it is important to point out that the concept of gender eventually allows for a much more differentiated debate in which, of course, the male perspective is crucial as well. For instance, Norma Winstone wrote to me in an e-mail of 20 May

something about their material and social circumstances that led to female musicians in European jazz being few and far between until quite recently.

This article endeavours to deconstruct some of the socio-cultural contexts and frameworks of music-making in a feminist way. To this end, the most crucial findings from the interviews will be presented and discussed. As there is very little pertinent research specifically on the situation of women artists in jazz, an interview-based approach seems suitable for laying a foundation for further discussion. However, the problem of relating such research to a theoretical backdrop arises. The biographies and alternative historiographies that already exist are mostly on women in American jazz,⁶ and while these are undoubtedly important, they largely leave unquestioned the complex gendered frameworks of cultural production. The same is true of artistic projects such as all-female bands and festivals.⁷ For this reason, in order to contextualise the interviews, I shall refer to Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of the academic and literary fields in *Homo academicus* and *The Rules of Art*.⁸ The importance of symbolic capital and social properties will be discussed mainly in relation to the institutionalisation of jazz. Furthermore, questions of canonicity, performativity and corporeality will be discussed, tying in with research surrounding these issues in other musical styles.⁹

2014: 'I was once playing with a male musician who said that it was good to have female energy in the group. I am not sure what he meant but it is obviously something he felt.'

⁶ Most notably Sally Placksin, *American Women in Jazz* (New York: Wideview, 1982) and Leslie Gourse, *Madame Jazz: Contemporary Women Instrumentalists* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995). Interestingly, both these books unquestioningly speak about jazz as a male domain, women musicians being subject to more or less open harassment and certain instruments having traditionally been considered 'inappropriate' for women. While these books are formidable achievements in writing the female history of American jazz and in giving contemporary women artists a platform to discuss their work, it would be desirable to follow up these studies with critical analyses of such presuppositions.

⁷ However, one could criticise many of these as examples of a simple inversion of a hierarchical binarism and an actual continuation of practices of inclusion and exclusion based on biological sex, and therefore unfit to effect change. When discussing the question as to why many women artists do not wish to be associated with feminism, one possible answer might be the aesthetic and programmatic lack of all-female-projects that group artists together with nothing in common apart from being women. Cf. Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 14 and Tara Rodgers, 'Toward a Feminist Historiography of Electronic Music', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), 475–490, here 479. Another reason may be the intense feeling of competition within the jazz scene and its accompanying winner-takes-all-mentality. Gourse quotes Jill McManus as saying: 'You feel bad complaining because it's tough for almost everybody in jazz, but, yes, being a woman has made a difference.' Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 25.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992 [1984]); Pierre Bourdieu, *Die Regeln der Kunst* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001 [1992]). For an outline of methodological principles for a sociology of cultural production based on a sustained critique of Bourdieu, cf. Georgina Born, 'The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production', *Cultural Sociology* 4, no. 2 (2010), 171–208.

⁹ Many of my interviewees indeed showed a remarkable detachment from the term 'jazz'. They see themselves as musicians first and foremost.

1.1 Why and what feminism?

As research on gender is still met with scepticism, it seems necessary to further define the framework and preconditions of this article. Jazz continues to define itself through values like equality, diversity, individuality and non-conformity. Nonetheless, discussing aspects of gender still seems to be advisable. Recent figures from the German Music Council (*Deutscher Musikrat*), for instance, show that there are less women active in music than in the other arts, and that this inequality is even more pronounced in jazz and rock than in classical music.¹⁰ All the same, despite the obvious underrepresentation of women in some artistic fields—and especially in certain music scenes—the refrain in discussions about gender and the arts is that anybody who is passionate and works hard will succeed regardless of their gender. As Aki Takase puts it:

‘This description [UNESCO’s definition of jazz as standing for the eradication of discrimination] is meant well, but has more to do with politics than with music. In this sense, the issue of women is also overrated. A good female musician will always prevail! [...] The problem lies with the “political correctness” which is prescribed by a social consensus. Sometimes, what really counts in music is forgotten.’¹¹

Some women also have the impression that they would not have anything to say in relation to gender if they do not have any negative experiences to relate.¹² Moreover, one valid approach to dealing with being a woman in a male-dominated field is to decide actively to be oblivious to sexism and unimpressed by it.¹³ On the other hand, there are still quite a lot of women who are aware of having experienced exclusion based on their sex. Since music is an essentially collaborative art form, it seems valid here to consider social and relational dynamics besides aesthetics.¹⁴ And while there is always the problem in gender research of speaking about differences and

¹⁰ Gabriele Schulz, Olaf Zimmermann and Rainer Hufnagel, *Arbeitsmarkt Kultur 2013: Zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Kulturberufen* (Berlin: Deutscher Kulturrat, 2013), 282.

¹¹ E-mail to the author, 29 June 2014. ‘Diese Beschreibung ist gut gemeint, hat aber mehr mit Politik als mit Musik zu tun. In diesem Sinne wird auch die Frauengeschichte überbewertet. Eine gute Musikerin wird sich immer durchsetzen! [...] Das Problem liegt bei der, im gesellschaftlichen Konsens verordneten ‘Political Correctness’. Da wird manchmal vergessen, worauf es in der Musik wirklich ankommt.’

¹² Norma Winstone wrote in an initial e-mail to me on 16 May 2014: ‘I will answer your questions but I think that you might be a little disappointed with my answers. I have very few complaints about my treatment by the male musicians I have worked with.’

¹³ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 14.

¹⁴ Cf. Kirsten Reese, ‘Geschlechtslose elektronische Musik? PerformerInnen am Laptop’, in *Performativität und Performance. Geschlecht in Musik, Theater und MedienKunst*, ed. Waltraud Ernst, Marion Gerards, and Martina Oster. (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2008), 99–109, here 108. Questions about the legitimacy of asking sociological questions in relation to music are as old as the field of music sociology itself. However, in support of a sociological approach to issues of gender, rather than an aesthetic one, all my interviewees agreed that there was and is no aesthetic difference between men and women artists. Female musicians neither sound nor interact differently, and certainly not along the stereotypical lines of women playing more lyrically or with a softer approach.

prejudices without re-stating them and thus solidifying them,¹⁵ a consciousness about a subject first needs to be raised in order to allow for a deconstruction of social and artistic discourses.¹⁶ It is important to point out, however, that all these different positions have to be regarded as equally valid if one is to overcome the stereotypes by which feminism is itself limited.¹⁷ The kind of polarised debate to which much scepticism refers, implies and actually perpetuates on both sides a need for women to play certain roles and fulfil expectations imposed on them. A truly feminist, truly relevant debate would need to stop talking about women and begin to let women speak for themselves. Furthermore, as feminist and gender theory are part of a larger process of questioning, re-negotiating and eventually even overcoming binary oppositions such as nature/culture, mind/body and even organism/machine,¹⁸ these debates not only have to accept contradictions, but also embrace them as an essential and inherent part of their dynamic.¹⁹ For this reason, throughout this article, I will always present different perspectives alongside each other.

2 The economy of recognition and the question of canonicity

One is faced with considerable difficulties in trying to find interview partners for this kind of research project.²⁰ The fact that this article is based on a very small sample of four interviewees, which is not statistically representative, in itself speaks to the underrepresentation of women in jazz. This may in part be due to the historical perspective of my research, as the invisibility of women may be amplified and even exaggerated through time by the selective nature of music historiography. What the electronic music composer and researcher Tara Rodgers points out in relation to electronic music is pertinent for other styles as well: “The question of who is counted in electronic music historiography is inevitably informed by the politics of social and professional networks, and by limited definitions and standards of achievement.”²¹ Reproducing

¹⁵ Hannah Bosma, ‘Playing Loudspeakers, Unsettling Concerts: Gender and Performance in Interdisciplinary Electroacoustic Music’ (paper presented at the Electroacoustic Music Studies Network Conference 2014, Berlin, Germany, 10–14 June 2014.)

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century’, in *The Cybertures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 291–324, here 291.

¹⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 5.

¹⁸ Haraway, ‘Cyborg’, 293–294.

¹⁹ This dynamic is not to be confused with a dialectic that will eventually—and comfortably—yield an all-encompassing synthesis or simply reproduce the polarity in an inverted state.

²⁰ The German Jazz Musicians’ Union (UDJ) refused to disseminate a call for participation.

²¹ Rodgers, ‘Feminist Historiography’, 482. Musicology and research in general are themselves part of a gendered power structure: Cornelia Szabò-Knotik, ‘Neuer Blick auf “alte Meister”? Musikwissenschaft als Feld der Reproduktion sozialen Geschlechts’, in *Screenings: Wissen und Geschlecht in Musik, Theater, Film*, ed. Andrea Ellmeier Doris Ingrisch, and Claudia Walkensteinger-Preschl (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 17–34, here 29. Writings on feminism should therefore question the ideals and frameworks of research as well as one’s own entanglement with the object of research as researchers/artists/women/men etc.

traditional gendered notions of public/private domains and active/passive roles, women may often be found in roles that are less visible, or, conversely, typically ‘female’ roles may have been marginalised in the dominating narratives of music historiography.²² It was only during the 1980s that more women entered the jazz scene and became more visible, both in America and Europe.²³ Apart from the resultant implications for research, this may arguably be significant for women musicians: Given the importance of relating to tradition and ‘paying dues’ in jazz,²⁴ the influence of ‘pioneer women’ who have acted as trailblazers and role models for a younger generation²⁵ has to be stressed to counterpoint the patrilineality prevalent in jazz historiography. For a long time, only for singers ‘had [there] been an Empress, a Queen, a Divinity’ for every ‘Count, King, and Duke’.²⁶ Underscoring this point, Sidsel Endresen explicitly relates gender to the question of canonicity and, moreover, to the economy of recognition within the scene:

‘I think that the classical Jazz-world is still very male-oriented and male-defined – f[or].i[nstance]. re[garding]. inherent and automatic power of definition of what is “valid” – and what is considered not valid. (Like in our society in general!) I don’t think that Jazz as an artform is anywhere near fostering gender equality p[e]r. today!’²⁷

Uschi Brüning points in a similar direction by acknowledging: ‘I openly admit that I, too, have had prejudices against my fellow women [musicians], which I have discarded based on many good experiences.’²⁸ This shows that sex indeed seems to be a category used to evaluate fellow musicians and that certain values and ideals within the jazz scene also seem to be connoted as rather ‘male’ without this connotation actually being merited by the professional behaviour or skills of individuals, male or female. These gender-related social inequalities within the music scene are not only deeply ingrained (‘inherent and automatic’), but are inadvertently reproduced by women as much as by men. The music sociologist Rosa Reitsamer in her article on women DJs points out that such gendered ideals produce a social framework for artistic production that

²² Szabò-Knotik, ‘Musikwissenschaft’, 29, Rodgers, ‘Feminist Historiography’, 479, 481. Also, Placksin points out that many of her interviewees for *American Women in Jazz* had never been recorded, obscuring the fact that the legacy of female jazz instrumentalists went back ‘to Congo Square’. Placksin, *American Women in Jazz*, xiv.

²³ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 7.

²⁴ Cf. Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 13–14; and Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1994), 51 ff.

²⁵ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 22. One of the topics that was intensely discussed at my presentation at the ‘Growing Up’ Conference was the importance of music in shaping and asserting identity and individuality during one’s youth, and the importance of music for biographical memory. Indeed, all the musical influences named by my interviewees were men, except for one. On the role music plays in shaping identities, cf. Georgina Born, ‘Music and the materialization of identities’, in *Journal of Material Culture* 16, no. 4 (December 2011), 376–388.

²⁶ Placksin, *American Women in Jazz*, xiii. As Gourse points out, the reasons for marginalising women in American jazz used to be more about habit than about misogyny. Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 12.

²⁷ E-mail to the author, 27 June 2014.

²⁸ E-mail to the author, 15 September 2014. ‘Ich gebe offen zu, dass auch ich Vorurteile gegenüber meinen Geschlechtsgenossinnen hatte, die ich auf Grund vieler guter Erfahrungen abgelegt habe.’

is biased towards male success and is therefore coherent with the ideal of successful masculinity in mainstream society.²⁹

While Brüning emphasises the fact that bias can and will be overcome, a later e-mail from Endresen elaborated on her initial statement by asking: ‘So how did women artists achieve that kind of self-confidence and stubbornness and will to continue their work – in a time and world where they were at all times evaluated/included or excluded by men/male structures/male camaraderie etc.’³⁰ When Endresen refers to the often informal power structures within the music scene, she puts ideals such as will, passion and self-reliance, which were strongly emphasised by all my interviewees, into a social context in which certain practitioners and networks act as gatekeepers within a scene by distributing symbolic capital like recognition, networking contacts and gigs.³¹ As Bourdieu points out, the worth of the work of art is not constituted solely by the artist but by all the players within a particular cultural field.³² Despite the emphasis that jazz places on self-responsibility,³³ jazz musicians, like all artists, depend on legitimation, not only from their peers but from a variety of authorities. Among the most powerful of those are the educational institutions that ‘produce the producers’, defining standards of professionalism and granting artists their initial access to the field.³⁴ Professional networks and educational institutions are obvious examples of the social aspects of artistic practice that question purely aesthetic evaluations of relevance and achievement. In this light, it seems valid to investigate the role that gender plays as a social property in determining access to those structures and success in them.

3 Access to education and the importance of institutionalisation

One of Woolf’s central arguments for needing money and a room of one’s own is neither specifically aesthetic nor feminist. Until well into the 20th century, access to higher education depended on money.³⁵ It still seems justified to ask questions about financial and social circumstances in relation to education, and especially to music education, as it has to be paid for on a largely private basis. In this manner, individual social and financial circumstances come into play. Aki Takase writes: ‘Luckily, I started playing piano at the age of three. My family likes music, especially German classical music.’³⁶ Sidsel Endresen comments on the same topic as follows:

²⁹ Rosa Reitsamer, ‘Anerkennung und Geschlecht im Kulturellen Feld. Zur Unterrepräsentanz von DJ-Frauen in elektronischen Musikszenen’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 36 (2011), 39–48, here 39. The stereotypical notion that manliness should mean success, power and wealth is one that victimises women and men alike. Cf. Ngozi Adichie, *Feminists*, 19.

³⁰ E-mail to the author, 1 July 2014.

³¹ Cf. Reitsamer, ‘Anerkennung’, 43; and Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 12.

³² Bourdieu, *Die Regeln*, 362.

³³ Berliner, *Thinking*, 59.

³⁴ Bourdieu, *Die Regeln*, 362.

³⁵ Woolf, *A Room*, 105–106.

³⁶ E-mail to author, 29 June 2014. ‘Glücklicherweise habe ich angefangen, Klavier zu spielen, als ich 3 Jahre alt war. Meine Familiäre mag Musik, besonders Deutsche Klassik Musik.’

‘From my knowledge re. background of colleagues – and my own: not necessarily a linear connection here. Although obviously helpful with family background where there have been many resources (books/music/general positive attitude towards the arts etc.), I also know many great musicians who come from backgrounds with none of the above.’³⁷

On the other hand, Norma Winstone concedes that:

‘In my case my family were working class and had very little money but my parents loved music of many kinds, including Jazz. They were very happy that I wanted to learn the piano. I managed to get a junior scholarship to Trinity College of Music in London otherwise I doubt that they could have continued to pay for lessons.’³⁸

While financial circumstances can play a part, the key to accessing the opportunities necessary to become a musician seems to have been a culturally and socially open-minded family. This is in line with many of the experiences of early exposure to jazz, blues and gospel music as related by the ethnomusicologist Paul F. Berliner in his extensive interview-based study of American jazz, *Thinking in Jazz*.³⁹ Emerging from these narratives is a certain type of capital that seems to be a crucial precondition for a career in the arts: Instead of social status and financial independence, access and exposure to certain types of cultural knowledge and practice facilitate the pursuit of an artistic career. The importance of this cultural capital seems to outweigh that of economic capital, which it is nevertheless complemented by.

In this context, we must consider the change undergone by jazz education.⁴⁰ All my interviewees agree with the general consensus within the jazz scene and among scholars that the greater professionalisation and better opportunities for studying jazz in music schools and universities today are a sign of increased public recognition for the art form itself (and by extension of increased political and monetary support), and have led to more women pursuing careers in jazz.⁴¹ In fact, both Rosa Reitsamer and the composer Kirsten Reese suggest that the informal structures and networks of subcultures and the free scene are generally more prone to perpetuate subtle, ‘invisible and subconscious sex-specific in- and exclusion’ through ‘unwritten codes’, as they are less regularised than schools and colleges.⁴² Gourse sums this up by stating that ‘there is no affirmative action in Jazz’.⁴³ All the same, a more critical view of institutional-

³⁷ E-mail to the author, 27 June 2014.

³⁸ E-mail to the author, 20 May 2014.

³⁹ Berliner, *Thinking*, 22–24.

⁴⁰ Cf. the contribution to this volume by Monika Piecek and Angelika Güsewell, pp. 59–79.

⁴¹ Cf. Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 8, 22. Sidsel Endresen has insisted on taking this development with a pinch of salt, however: ‘Women are represented in far more aspects of the whole Jazz ‘industry’ today. As instrumentalists – composers – arrangers – producers – label-bosses – etc. So they are more visible and have more authority – and autonomy. But the Jazz-world is still lagging behind both the POP-world and the Classical world when it comes to female representation, versatility and power.’ E-mail to the author, 27 June 2014.

⁴² Reitsamer, ‘Anerkennung’, 44; and Reese, ‘Geschlechtslose Musik’, 108.

⁴³ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 17.

sation is also possible. Aki Takase has pointed out that jazz education used to be more informal and therefore less expensive than a classical music education, implicitly relating financial and artistic independence.⁴⁴ So a greater degree of formalisation brings jazz closer to classical music, also in terms of how expensive and élitist a culture it is. Norma Winstone writes of colleges literally replacing the more informal education of going to clubs and pubs to sit in on sessions and meet people, such as was essential for her in becoming a professional musician.⁴⁵ The essentially oral culture of independently learning from one's peers used to be prevalent in jazz, but has now been largely replaced by formal training.⁴⁶ In this sense, women in the 1960s and '70s may actually have had more figurative room of their own, as they had more independence in learning their art and developing their own artistic personality while becoming part of the jazz community and its discursive tradition. Sidsel Endresen stresses the importance of 'a mental/psychological "own" room where you don't let anyone else in (including all and every external evaluating and judging "voice").'⁴⁷ This may arguably be easier to attain without having to conform to the standards and frameworks of the academy.⁴⁸

In the twentieth century, women artists seem often to have been attracted to art forms that were emerging and/or experimental; furthermore, they have been highly influential in fields such as performance art, media, concept and sound art. These genres blurred the lines between practices and signified a move out of institutions like the theatre and the concert hall.⁴⁹ Bourdieu proposes that the more closed a field is—in other words, the more institutionalised it is—the easier it becomes to preserve and reproduce hegemonic power structures. Indeed, he describes the academic field as being marked by an accumulation of power and an assertion of hierarchy where social properties are at times more important than academic achievement, and where like attracts like.⁵⁰ This logic of inclusion and exclusion based on social properties is not specific to any particular discipline but general to the institution itself. So, while the academy initially seems to provide a relatively sheltered and controlled environment, it is important to remember that the power of consecration and the power over mechanisms of reproduction become even more

⁴⁴ E-mail to the author, 29 June 2014. 'In der Klassik spielen soziale Umstände sicher eine Rolle, Weil das Studium teuer und ohne finanzielle Unabhängigkeit [kaum] möglich ist. Beim Jazz ist das anders. Da arbeitet man selbständiger auch in seiner Lehrzeit.'

⁴⁵ E-mail to the author, 20 May 2014. 'What has changed for everyone is that there are opportunities now to study jazz as a serious subject. This includes women who want to be involved in the music. Colleges are now where young musicians find others of a like mind to play with which is just as well as the kind of places (mostly pubs), where I used to go to 'sit in' and meet other musicians don't seem to exist nowadays.'

⁴⁶ Berliner, *Thinking*, 36 ff. and 51–59.

⁴⁷ E-mail to the author, 27 June 2014.

⁴⁸ Historically, of course, a university education was reserved for men. For a gendering of the historical situation of music in an academic context, cf. Szabò-Knotik, 'Musikwissenschaft', 18 and *passim*.

⁴⁹ The most notable examples include artists such as Abramović, Ono, Oliveros and Knowles.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, 149 ff. He also describes how artists and academics are made to accept structures that deliberately infantilise them in a dependent position as 'students' (*ibid.*, 156–158). This is in stark contrast to the spirit of self-responsibility in learning that Berliner describes.

concentrated in institutions, and therefore more absolute, than is the case in informal networks. While Bourdieu mainly discusses these questions with regard to social background, he acknowledges gender as a factor.⁵¹ In this regard, the underrepresentation of women, especially in positions of power, to which Sidsel Endresen points, may arguably lead to women finding it initially more difficult to gain access to specialised education in jazz. For this reason, we must question the idealisation of both the music scene and the academy as meritocracies regarding the power structures they promote. This would allow for a more differentiated picture of the social contexts in which aesthetic judgments are formed, which in turn provide the basis for the inclusion and exclusion from professional networks.

4 Performativity and aspects of corporeality

While it has been emphasised that there are no inherent aesthetic differences between male and female musicians, music is a performative art. Judith Butler postulates that social gender (as opposed to biological sex) is a performative category that is constantly enacted and re-enacted and is therefore subject to change; this raises the question as to how artistic conceptions of performance are related to the performativity of gender.⁵² In some cases, artistic practice seems to be a privileged site for questioning and destabilising traditional or everyday performances of gender. In this way, art may provide both performers and audiences with experiences of corporeality and expressions of gender that are unusual or otherwise taboo. An often-quoted example is the way in which early disco and techno culture in the 1970s and '80s constituted an alternative to the hetero-normative machismo both of mainstream society and of much popular and dance music up to that point.⁵³ In this sense, it is not just that gender is always part of what you bring to the table as a performer, as Uschi Brüning points out. More than that, it is also one of the things that are potentially up for grabs in performance.⁵⁴ However, while the jazz scene champions values like subjectivity⁵⁵ and individuality⁵⁶, these seem to be largely aesthetic categories referring to a personal style, to be expressed in the interpretation of standards and in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Judith Butler, *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 22 and *passim*; and Bosma, 'Playing Loudspeakers'.

⁵³ Peter Wicke, 'Sound-Technologien und Körper-Metamorphosen. Das Populäre in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *Rock- und Popmusik (Handbuch der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 8), ed. Peter Wicke, (Laaber: Laaber, 2001), 13–60, here 57–59; and Reese, 'Geschlechtslose Musik', 104.

⁵⁴ 'Natürlich bringen wir alle das ein, was wir sind, also auch unser Geschlecht. Und so wie es äußerlich Unterschiede gibt merkt man sie auch beim Musizieren. Es ist doch eher eine Frage der jeweiligen Mentalität und auch das gilt für Männer'. E-mail to the author, 15 September 2014.

⁵⁵ Obviously, subjectivity is a concept from which women were historically excluded.

⁵⁶ For an example of how these topics are currently negotiated within the Jazz community, cf. Wynton Marsalis' 2011 Harvard lecture 'Music as Metaphor', which covers topics like 'The Journey to Individuality Under Pressure of Time' and 'Sound as Identity'. Wynton Marsalis 'Music as Metaphor', 28 April 2011, available on <http://wyntonmarsalis.org/videos/view/harvard-lecture-1-music-as-metaphor>, last accessed 17 November 2017.

improvisation.⁵⁷ The rather casual dress and informal behaviour that are emblematic of much jazz performance culture are not only a rejection of the perceived pretensions of classical music, but also expressions of an approach to music-making that deliberately neglects certain aspects of performance as superficial or external to ‘music itself’.⁵⁸ This approach obviously holds the liberating potential for artists to move beyond social identities coded in binary oppositions like male/female, as seems to be implied in many of the aforementioned quotes.

All the same, as Rodgers points out, ‘this may not be a universally desirable aesthetic for artists of historically marginalized groups who have suffered the effects of imposed forms of silencing and erasure. Indeed, feminists have often located empowerment within acts of breaking silences, by foregrounding aspects of identity.’⁵⁹ From this perspective, the assertion that ‘gender does not matter’ may actually serve to obscure critical differences of gender and cultural power, while musical styles that deny the importance of performativity and corporeality in favour of the ideal of ‘absolute music’ automatically marginalise and taboo discourses about gender.⁶⁰ While jazz has allowed for powerful articulations of ethnic and spiritual identity throughout its history, negotiations of gender or sexual identity are nowhere near as well-recognised. Tellingly, jazz offers very few examples of a playful approach to gender in performance. The most prominent one may be the Feminist Improvising Group with their extravagant costumes, as this group not only featured musicians as influential as Irène Schweizer, Maggie Nicols, and Georgie Born, but also had an explicitly lesbian-feminist stance. More recent examples are photos of Nils Wogram’s Root 70 jokingly wearing drag.

Aspects of corporeality in jazz are mostly related to artists’ choice of instrument and how they interact with it.⁶¹ Sidsel Endresen explicitly ties the problem of gender to the under-representation of women on certain instruments: ‘Gender, for me: still a problem – (ref. as above). Has also to do with the fact that there are still, relatively speaking, very few woman instrumentalists who excel on other instruments than voice.’⁶² While much has been written about brass and reed instruments, and about those rhythm section instruments connoted with the most authority (i.e. drums and bass) having traditionally been considered ‘inappropriate’ for

⁵⁷ Berliner, *Thinking*, 120 ff., 268 ff. Indeed, all my interviewees wrote about epiphanic moments and influential people, mostly in relation to defining their own personal style.

⁵⁸ Berliner, *Thinking*, 460.

⁵⁹ Rodgers, ‘Feminist Historiography’, 478.

⁶⁰ Bosma ‘Playing Loudspeakers’, and Reese, ‘Geschlechtslose Musik’, 106. Judging from my interviews, it seems a successful strategy *not* to emphasise aspects of gendered identity.

⁶¹ Cf. Berliner, *Thinking*, 117, 189 ff. Instrumentality and corporeality are closely linked, as playing an instrument is intensely physical and can even be described as choreography. While Western classical music tends to make taboo the trace of the individual body—both of the instrument and of the performer—jazz exploits and exposes idiosyncrasies of both performers and instruments, as well as inviting instruments to *mis*behave by using extended techniques. However, the fact that Berliner calls jazz ‘ear music’ is tellingly reductionist. Berliner, *Thinking*, 92.

⁶² E-mail to the author, 27 June 2014.

women jazz musicians,⁶³ my interviewees were adamant that there is no inherent reason why, in the past, ‘parlour’ instruments such as the voice⁶⁴ and piano have been prevalent among female jazz musicians.⁶⁵ Uschi Brüning contends that: ‘A woman who loves the double bass will not want to play the flute just because it is easier to carry. Ideally, every musician becomes one with their instrument.’⁶⁶ Aki Takase, on the other hand, implicitly refers to biological sex more than to gender, just like Brüning, conceding that: ‘The piano may be easier to play for women than a bass saxophone.’⁶⁷ Both Uschi Brüning and Norma Winstone point to positive discrimination toward female singers, with Uschi Brüning explicitly saying:

‘It is difficult to describe. According to my observations, it is easier especially for [female] singers than for [female] musicians. They gain acceptance (often without wanting to) through their specific sexual characteristics. They add glamour and colour to an ensemble, and they also waken the chevalier in their male colleagues. Of course, she must also have talent and skill. A female musician might still encounter prejudices which she will very quickly invalidate however, if she is good. I have experienced this many times.’⁶⁸

Norma Winstone speaks about how it may be easier for female singers to show vulnerability,⁶⁹ thereby pointing to a framework for singing which privileges an aesthetic approach connoted with values that are gendered as female while also encouraging a specific enactment of femaleness.⁷⁰

⁶³ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 8. Regarding questions of ‘authority’ in bands, cf. Berliner, *Thinking*, 396.

⁶⁴ On the femininity of singing, cf. Suzanne G. Cusick, ‘On musical performances of gender and sex’, in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich: Carciofoli, 1999), 25–48; and Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). Indeed, the position of the singer in jazz bands is a difficult one, as Norma Winstone points out: ‘Of course as a singer there can be other problems in that some jazz musicians prefer not to play with singers and it does seem that the majority of jazz singers are women.’ E-mail to the author, 20 May 2014.

⁶⁵ My sample of interviewees is representative of this.

⁶⁶ E-mail to the author, 15 September 2014. ‘Eine Frau, die den Kontrabaß sehr liebt, wird doch nicht, weil sie leichter zu tragen ist, Querflöte spielen wollen. Im Idealfall verschmilzt doch jede Musikerin mit ihrem Instrument.’

⁶⁷ E-mail to the author, 29 June 2014. ‘Das Klavier ist möglicherweise leichter für Frauen zu spielen, als ein Bass Saxofon.’

⁶⁸ E-mail to the author, 15 September 2014. ‘Das ist schwierig zu beschreiben. Nach meinen Beobachtungen haben es insbesondere Sängerinnen leichter als Musikerinnen. Ihre Akzeptanz erwirken sie (oft auch ungewollt) durch ihre spezifischen Geschlechtsmerkmale. Sie bringen Glanz und Farbe in eine Formation, sie wecken schon auch den Ritter in den männlichen Kollegen. Natürlich muß sie auch Talent und Können haben. Eine Musikerin stößt zuweilen noch auf Vorurteile, die sie aber, wenn sie gut ist, sehr schnell zunichte macht. Das habe ich immer wieder erlebt.’

⁶⁹ She wrote in an e-mail to me on 20 May 2014: ‘I wonder if it is because it is more acceptable for a female to appear vulnerable. I always admired the way Frank Sinatra was able to sound vulnerable without losing any of his masculinity.’ Reese suggests that vulnerability is a trait common to all live performance. Interestingly, statements from jazz musicians about the vulnerability of improvisation tie it to notions of challenge, adventurousness and taking chances. Reese, ‘Geschlechtslose Musik’, 107; and Berliner, *Thinking*, 210 f., 379–382.

⁷⁰ Gourse also describes how the pianist Joanne Brackeen’s fees rose after she started dressing more

While these considerations of corporeality remain in the somewhat murky area between aesthetic ideals and socio-cultural frameworks, there is one topic that unquestionably shows that the ability to pursue an artistic career is at times highly dependent on the social realities of gender: It is impossible to speak about sex and gender without touching upon the question of childbearing. This issue was repeatedly raised in the interviews I conducted, even though I had not specifically asked about it. Sidsel Endresen was the most explicit about the topic:

‘Women in the arts (and most certainly during the period from 1960–1980) have an added “problem”: they produced children! And as the whole idea of joint/inter-gender democratic sharing of the domestic and professional workload is a fairly recent one: women have often had to give up their careers in order to raise their children! (f.i.: Do you know (now or historically) of any male artists who have done the same!?:)’⁷¹

Norma Winstone comments on the same issue, stating: ‘I could not have continued my work once I had children without the absolute sharing of duties by my then husband John Taylor.’⁷² The reductionist definition of woman as womb,⁷³ which is also the foundation for socio-cultural associations of women with reproductive and passive roles,⁷⁴ appears as an antiquated and misogynist biologism in the light of contemporary gender theory. All the same, issues of bearing and raising children are still at the core of many popular and political debates about women’s emancipation, and these quotes show that they have been acutely real to artists. More importantly, however, my interviewees stressed the social and relational aspect of childcare much more than the biological one.

5 Conclusion

Summing up, this article may have raised more questions than it has answered, and should therefore be seen as an invitation for further discussion. Also, there are multiple points of departure for further research, and it would be important to investigate whether qualitative data from interviews such as is presented here can be backed up as statistically relevant, while at the same time adding to the still slender body of research on female jazz artists. Moreover, gender should not only be seen as a topic for research but also for reflection within the scene: As musicians’ collectives and unions have been working to raise awareness of the social conditions

flamboyantly (Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 16). Bourdieu reminds us that the bodies we apprehend are always social bodies: ‘Thus there is no doubt that the judgements which claim to apply to *the whole person* take into account not only physical appearance as such, which is always socially marked (through indices such as weight, complexion, facial features) but also the *socially processed body* (with clothes, jewellery, make-up and above all manners and behaviour) which is perceived through socially constituted taxonomies, and thus read as the *sign* of the quality and value of the person.’ Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988), 200–201.

⁷¹ E-mail to the author, 1 July 2014.

⁷² E-mail to the author, 16 May 2014.

⁷³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 1989), xix.

⁷⁴ Rodgers, ‘Feminist Historiography’, 479–480.

for artistic production, the debate about gender should no longer be marginalised, as it is important to realise that artistic practices are always embedded in socio-cultural frameworks that take part in shaping individual consciousness and behaviour. The frameworks and ideals encountered by musicians—both male and female—within the music scene should be further deconstructed along the lines of gender, as well as practices for constituting relevance, forming the canon and allocating power within both formal and informal structures. Also, female musicians have proven resourceful in developing strategies of negotiating their position within the scene.⁷⁵ It would be important to investigate and document these, also to strengthen a feminist discourse that is by no means about complaining, but about a constructive and empowering exchange of experiences. The present article has attempted to map and contextualise the debate in its complex, sometimes controversial and even paradoxical dynamic. Judging from the interviews I have conducted, there seems to be considerable friction between the gender-blindness of art itself, along with the democracy and emancipation lived within micro-structures like ensembles and by individuals who challenge or ignore stereotypical gender roles on the one hand, and art's de facto male-dominated macro-structures and institutions⁷⁶ on the other hand. A differentiated debate about gender in the arts would have to acknowledge and draw on this tension.

⁷⁵ Gourse, *Madame Jazz*, 9–12, 17.

⁷⁶ Both in terms of prevalent gendered ideals and of biological sex of people in positions of power: As of 2014, all jazz departments at German universities were headed by men.