

SPIT SAXOPHONE SPIT

Tina Krekels

This is a performative essay focusing predominantly on spit as feminist noise. Spit is part of my practice around the saxophone, spit noises the body and sounds of Saxophone, a character in this performative essay. Spit challenges noise masculinity by loosening, melting and kneading the hard contour of the instrument into entangled, fluid bodies.

As part of my sound practice I play the saxophone; I play around its mouthpiece, lick around its bell and use an assemblage of microphones to make audible all these wet, spitty and noisy sounds. These experiences as a performer have given me ideas and research material to develop a writing method that presents Saxophone as a character in performative essays. In these texts I explore spit as an agent of Saxophone, something that is a feminist noise against established ideas of masculine playing techniques on the saxophone. Through this performative essay approach, I write fictitious stories that are grounded in actual experiences and wider socio-political research. Spit becomes an explorative tool that travels through the instrument's body, changes the hard metal body, 'noises' the stereotypical ideas of masculine noise and focuses on a sensuous, but humorous approach to noise making.

This essay will concentrate around free improvisation practices. Here I want to use spit – or fluidity in general – as a deliberate tool to critique ideas of ‘controlled’ or technically-advanced free improvisation playing techniques. Spit (liquidity) will be used as an oppositional method to hardness, and will find its full form in the latter part of this essay. Fluidity allows an entangled practice: it gets stuck, it is a nuisance, it tickles, it dribbles, it is sticky and thus creates connections. It enters spaces, softens the materials and allows a different noise to occur when using as part of a performance practice. Moreover, spit becomes hands, it is the material that touches the instruments, microphones and thus turns me and the instrument into an entangled noise. Quite simply, it is a low-labour effort of performing, it doesn’t require the stereotypical full-blown loud saxophone noises. This spitty practice tries to make audible hidden spaces.

Since the masculine world is the systemic power in which we participate, background objects, including saxophones but also other instruments or tools used to make music, remain within a male ontology. The same goes for free improvisation practices, although arguably more ‘experimental’ and noisier in their sound, some players still hold an attitude where the instrument is the desired object that can be mastered through exercise and certain sounds or playing techniques. In a simplified way the instrument remains within binary structures of patriarchal control: it is not entangled – as I’ll explore further below – to the human, but rather an instrument is detached from the body and viewed as a separate entity.

The saxophone requires a physical, muscular control over its body, playing this instrument therefore 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.[1]

[1] 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.

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.[2]

The preparation of the instrument can be an opener to consider instruments and bodies as 'fluid', and entangled entities. 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. I want to follow Audre Lorde and her margarine.[3] During the Second World War Lorde, a black feminist activist, coloured her white margarine yellow.[4] 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.[5] The enjoyment they felt when kneading the soft and fatty substance into yellow is an image to use when thinking about instruments and their hard bodies.

[2] Richard Dyer, *White*, Routledge, 1997, p. 82.

[3] Especially her text "The Erotic as Power", in *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984. Lorde, 1984, pp. 70.

[4] In her essay „Uses of the Erotic“, Lorde discusses how the Erotic needs to be reclaimed by women as a form of power, taking the Erotic away from the pronographic view of man. It is especially her example with the margarine I find interesting in relation to my saxophone playing. The touching of different substances/bodies, the feeling when things start melting or moving; all of this is an erotic or desirable experience.

[5] *Ibid.* pp. 70.

Instead we could allow us to think that instruments' bodies can be loosened or changed with the way we touch them (play them) and engage with them. Preparation of an instrument here could mean that the inside sounds that are often considered undesirable become the ground for noisy exploration. When I amplify my spit going through the saxophone, when I further use a distortion pedal then my spit loosens the expected sounds of the saxophone into a noise assemblage. This experience - where the saxophone sounds different, where those human liquids in a small, bended tube - allows us to share enjoyment with each other inside a structured space through touch and kneading. Lorde calls this experience the Erotic; it allows us to resist binary processes of existence and allows us to look critically at our history and 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.[6]

Kneading becomes a metaphor for exploring the instrument, 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 spit loosening the hard borders of masculinity. Now, let us listen:

[6] Steven Connor. *Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought*. <http://stevenconnor.com/topologies/>. (Last accessed 10-06-2018). 2002.

Slowly I start moving 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.

Feminist improvisation is solidarity with spit, the mechanism of the instrument, the smells, the tastes, the unwanted noises. Saxophone is the centre of attention. Her body offers enactive playing, her assembled body touches my senses. Sounds through touching, exploration of the instrument through listening. Entangling the human and nonhuman bodies into a unit. Neither is idealised or mastered by the other. Our performance 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 us. 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*.^[7] 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

[7] Gaston Bachelard. *Earth And Reveries of Will. An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. The Dallas Institute Publications, (1947), p. 89

that those microphones don't have the same capacity of catching sounds, make them quite unpredictable. Often they distort the signal a lot and that makes them even more interesting for me to explore and expand Saxophone.

Little spits, grunts. Blowing through pipe neck. Turning up noise gate and spitting. 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 warmer. The sounds get warmer, rounder, livelier. It feels less mechanical. The keys are warmer, they are nicer to touch.

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.[8] 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.*[9]

[8] Christof Migone. "Spit". In: *Women Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 11.1 (2008), 17-19, p. 19.

[9] Paul Hegarty. *Noise Music: A History*. Bloomsbury 2007, p. 27

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 salivaphiles.[10]

The image of two beings in a single body. Eyes, hands, flesh, circulatory system, breath, hairs, spit, mucous, tongue, lips, warmth.

metal
hard
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.*[11] Something feeling the other. Without touching we are no bodies, no borders. Through touch, through exchange of materials (spit, breath, metal), Saxophone and I are inside a close space of touch. Our liquids against phallic hegemony in free improvisation. *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 (...).*[12]

[10] Migone, 2008, p. 19.

[11] Michel Serres. *The Five Senses. A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. Bloomsbury, (1985) 2016, p. 26.

[12] Karl Marx. "Fragment on Machines". In: *Accelerate. The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Urbanomic, 2014.

Metal skin with orifices, covering the circulatory air tube. Human spit hanging between reed and mouthpiece, stuck in neck. *Touch has the virtue of closing and outlining an interior.* [13] An analysis of fluid moves to a point of outlet. A post-orgasmic state, the endpoint of masculine.[14] 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, hard, metal body. You, the objectification of man. Saxophone, a 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.*[15]

Spit is wetness, is woman. Although we are *more subject than man to liquefying assaults upon body and mind, especially those of emotion*[16], this wetness offers a way to challenge patriarchy, rather than subordination. Wetness opens tools as entangled entities. Saxophone and I are liquid. She oxidates through my spit, her body explored and entered through my spit. There is a permanent process of touching, inside, outside. Different materials touch: brass, spit, felt, skin, reed. These bodies that *are constantly 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.*[17]

[13] Serres, (1985) 2016, p. 26.

[14] Naomi Segal. *Consensuality*. Didier Anzieu, *Gender and the Sense of Touch*. Rodopi, 2009, p. 191.

[15] Naomi Segal, 2009, p. 191

[16] 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, p. 138.

[17] Patricia MacCormack. "Mucosal Coseying". In: *Cosey Complex*. Ed. by Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett. Koenig Books, 2012, pp. 123-128, p. 125.

Saxophone is a space of pleasure, her wetness with my spit softens the phallogocentric and forceful language of man; instruments can be loosened into companions of fluidity. Fluids like *blood, but also milk, sperm, lymph, saliva, spit, tears, humours, 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.*[18] These liquids, my spit occupies the performance space, it creates connections to other materials and bodies. Spit travels through these bodies as noise, it entangles us.

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-phonic skin holing the touching. Only the spasm of wet mucous membranes and the spurt of organic liquids, the contraction of muscles, shameful excitement, and unmentionable discharge.*[19] 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.*[20] Is Saxophone playing a twisted game with me now? Trying to show me who really is in control?

[18] Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Women*. Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 210.

[19] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. *Futurability. The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*. Verso, 2017, p. 79.

[20] Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010, p. 21.

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 skins become provisional and fundamentally insecure. We are one sonic body 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.*[21] 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 it turns it into a 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.

[21] Steven Connor. *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 12.

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.[22]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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[22] Connor, 2002.

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I play around with and on the saxophone and write. Recently I escaped Brexit with my German passport. I am interested in expanding the saxophone into a spitty, vocal and breathy instrument as part of my feminist practice, counteracting muscular masculinity in free jazz. When I write I like to entangle politics, pathology and science-fiction scenarios into non-linear meanings. I was recently commissioned by the BBC Scotland for their music festival Tectonics, where I performed with Adam Campbell. I also play with my friends Tristan Clutterbuck and Grant Smith. So far, they have refused to allow me to play some 80s saxophone power ballads with them, all I want to be these days is Candy Dulfer. @TKrekels

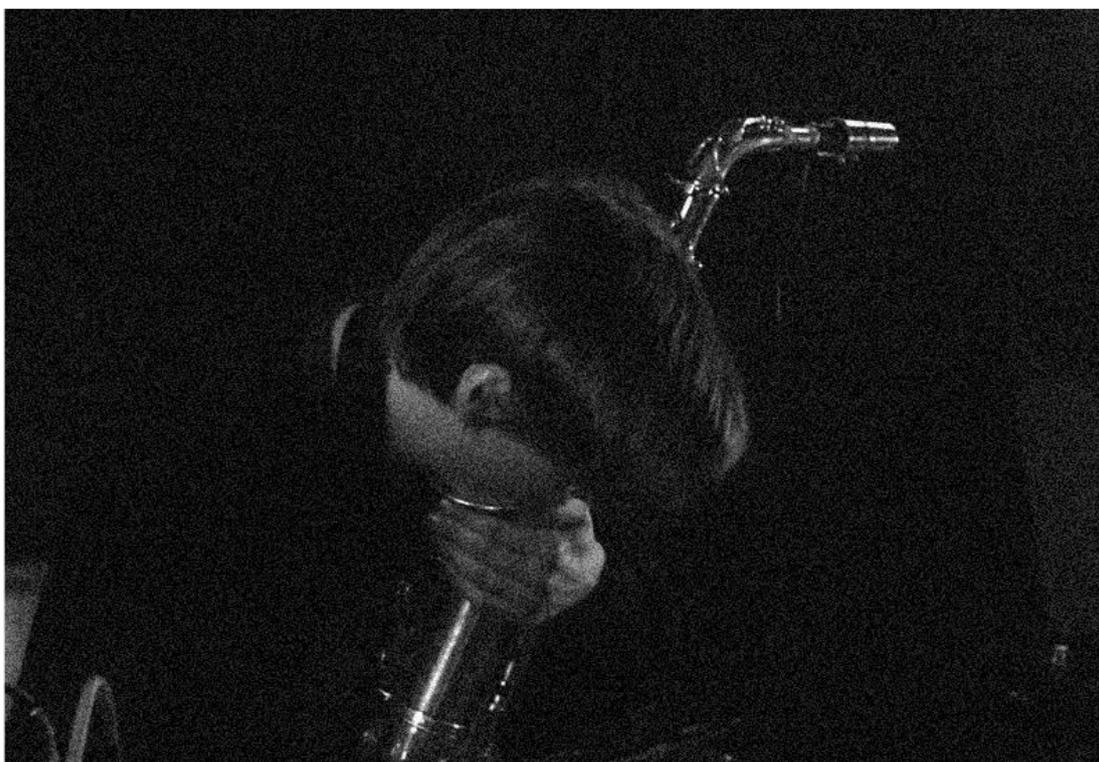


Image by Jamie Kane, Glasgow, 2018