Opposed to the pension reform and to the French law on research programming (LPPR), the editorial team of the journal Epistrophy would like to declare its solidarity with the ongoing protests of the Revues en lutte collective.

Call for papers
Epistrophy, the jazz journal - n°6

Jazz and gender issues

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Numerous works have shown how jazz constitutes a field that is mostly polarized around a certain construction of the "masculine", whether in terms of gender roles distribution or rules of socialization, or the way critical and academic discourses have emerged. Practical and aesthetic standards have been established in specific ways, operating in particular through a factual or discursive sidelining of the women, cause and consequence of an implicitly or explicitly negative perception of what is regarded as "feminine". These phenomena of marginalization have led to specific subversive approaches by female instrumentalists and vocalists in jazz, both in terms of practice organization, of transmission, and socialization as much as on the musical content.

Beyond the question of male hegemony and the place of women in jazz, arises the question of what this polarization reveals, what these categories of "feminine" and "masculine" in jazz discourse and practice contain, what is at stake in these gendered constructions, and how they relate to other levels of individual and collective, personal and political identity, in the different cultural and temporal spaces in which jazz unfolds and has unfolded for more than a century.
In other words, one has to question the role that these gendered categories play within jazz and how the accentuation of their opposition can be considered as specific to this music. Indeed, a comparison between jazz and other musical styles shows that the latter is particularly struck by the question of genre. Moreover, this gendered construction has been combined with a strong gender normativity linked to an exacerbated heteronormativity. It therefore seems important to question the notion of gender identity within jazz, on queer, transgender and non-binary identities in jazzistic practices and narratives.

Epistrophy intends to explore these different questions through four non-exhaustive themes:

**Gender and jazz discourses**

While academic and journalistic discourses on jazz differ in many ways, particularly in the terminology used, their analyses remain in both cases, mostly established by men, which "reinforces the idea that jazz is a male space, reiterating binary constructions and irrefutably recreating what Judith Butler calls the 'heterosexual male matrix'."

Beyond exclusion of the women from the jazz canon and their media and historiographical invisibility, we should study the way jazzwomen and their music are evoked when they are, as well as the way in which gendered constructions impact on critics journalistic or academic writings. What conceptions of gender do discourses on jazz reveal? How do these conceptions of gender influence the construction of the jazz canon? What spaces of exposure are accorded in jazz discourses to identities that fall outside the normative framework of gender and heterosexuality?

**Negotiating the identity and "authenticity" of jazz**

If the development of the jazz canon has been polarized around the masculine, it also implies a strong tension between gender and "authenticity" in jazz. Christopher Wells, for example, looking at the case of Ella Fitzgerald's debuts reception, showed that the feminine and the vocal had been associated with the popular and the commercial, considering that female artists and audiences were unable to grasp the essence of instrumental jazz considered "authentic".

The logics at work behind this process are numerous and reflect a complex interweaving of race, gender, class relations and authenticity of jazz. Therefore, this tension between gender and authenticity of jazz must be understood in the light of the relationship between gender and other aspects of identity, especially regarding the racial issue. The notion of intersectionality could be particularly useful to apprehend these intertwined phenomena, and to question the power relationships and gendered identity constructs at stake in the debates on the "authenticity" of jazz.

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1 See Cugny, 2014.
2 Willis, 2008, p. 294 : « The language used in these two jazz spaces reinforce the idea of jazz as a masculine space, reiterating binary constructions and positively recreating what Judith Butler refers to as the "heterosexual masculine matrix".
Jazz performance: representation, normativity and gender subversion

One may wonder how gendered categories are negotiated, represented and contested in musical practice and jazz performances. The case of vocalists is particularly significant, as the exacerbated presence of the body in singing implies a direct relationship of the performer to his or her gender identity. Yet the body can also be what, in the context of the performance, will allow singers, through vocal interpretation, to establish strategies for subverting these gendered assignments. Where, in order not to be marginalized, instrumentalists will tend to adopt behaviors identified as male, to play like men, to "talk like men"4 in the context of improvised musical discussion between musicians, vocalists will develop specific strategies, sometimes in the order of what could be called a feminist signifyin' lodged in sound stylization5. If the case of vocal performances is specific, one should also be able to question instrumental performances, or even dance.

What are the representations of gender in jazz performances? How do these representations connect with the norms conveyed by the canons of jazz? What forms of subversion of gendered assignments, gender normativity and/or heteronormativity are to be seen and heard in jazz performances?

Gender identity and gender expression in jazz.

Finally, the issue of gender identity needs to be considered upon more specifically in the light of issues related to transgender, non-binary and queer identities. The hegemony of masculine has been coupled with a diffuse heteronormativity, which Sherrie Tucker questions in an original way when she asks herself when jazz became "straight"6. This approach allows us to examine the perspective from which jazz studies address questions of gender and sexuality.

This question of the identity of gender could just as well concern the aesthetic contents as the social practices of jazz, which are articulated around these issues. Which mode(s) of representation(s) of queer, transgender and non-binary identity(ies) in jazz performances? What place for these different identities in jazz discourses? What does the historiography of jazz studies reveal about gender identity? What are the spaces of diffusion for these musicians?

The perspectives outlined here appeal to all disciplinary fields.

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4 Willis, 2008.


Submission guidelines

The issue "Jazz and Gender Issues" will be the subject of a symposium to be held in early 2021 in Nantes, and then published in the journal Epistrophy in the fall of 2021.

Deadline for submission of communications proposals is set for September 1, 2020. They must be sent to epistrophy@epistrophy.fr. The editorial team of the journal will shortlist the proposals and inform the applicants by September 30, 2020 at the latest.

Proposals must include:
- a title;
- an abstract of approximately 3000 characters;
- a brief bibliography;
- a short bio-bibliography of the author;

Recommended Bibliography


T. Royster, Francesca, « Queering the Jazz Aesthetic: An Interview with Sharon Bridgforth and Omi Osun Joni Jones », *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, p. 537-552.


