

**An Experiment in Spectral Jazz
Investigating the inner workings of the jazz band through improvisation and
unfamiliar theoretical models**

Theory is part of the everyday life of a jazz performer. In jazz music, theory and practice are not only indissolubly intertwined, but theorizing is an integral part of jazz practice and practice is a form of theorizing.

As a jazz pianist navigating a hybrid soundscape of mixed acoustic and digital music, Piergiorgio Pirro is exploring the intersection of jazz improvisation with the constructs of the French spectral composers of the 1970s and 80s, and the ways that theoretical models derived from spectral music can serve as alternatives to predominant jazz theories, such as functional harmony and chord-scale theory.

This presentation, framed as a student-supervisor dialogue, focuses on a specific outcome of the project, where a jazz quartet engages with spectral abstractions in improvisation. The music from this experiment is captured in the album *Fold/Unfold/Refold*, set to release in December 2023 by the label AUT Records. The central question is how novel theoretical models for jazz improvisation can reveal the complex interactions that exist in a jazz ensemble between practice, theory, and intent.

We approach this by conceptualizing the jazz band as a network in the Latourian sense, where the human and non-human actants and their mutual relationships become visible when the network is being made or changed. We believe that if music is made while the network is open, the inner workings of the jazz ensemble will become visible through musical practice.

But how can we facilitate this? To do so, we leverage the idea of instrumental resistance discussed by artistic research scholar Marcel Cobussen. In this view, improvisation is the exploration of the resistance offered by the instrument towards the player, a resistance that improvisers often purposely augment by using non-standard instrumental interfaces and techniques. Our expansion of this theory notes that resistance also arises from the interaction between musicians and the theoretical models they use. In our experiment, the unfamiliar abstractions coming from spectralism allow the players to play with this resistance, thus becoming un-transparent, allowing the researchers to observe how they negotiate with performative ideals such as proficiency, internalization, and trust.

Links:

<https://autrecords.bandcamp.com/album/fold-unfold-refold>

<https://piergiorgiopirro.com>

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Parallel Session



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Piergiorgio Pirro is a Brussels based pianist, composer, educator, and music scholar. His musical interests gravitate around various forms of jazz, supported by a long-lasting love for classical music and an acquaintance with Brazilian music. In recent years he has been studying the connections between spectral music and jazz performance and enriching his instrumental palette with the use of electronics and tactile digital instruments. His recent recorded output includes the EP *apartogetherapart* with Elisabetta Maulo, *Four Carefully Crafted Courses of Action* with the electronic duo Horselover FAT and his forthcoming jazz album *Fold/Unfold/Refold* in which he uses abstractions coming from spectral music with an emphasis on improvisation. He is currently Assistant Researcher at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel and PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Brussel in jazz music.

