Playin’ Outside.
New melodic and harmonic strategies in jazz improvisation after John Coltrane

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Miles Davis and John Coltrane at 90: Retrospect and Prospect
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Overview

1. Playing outside in post-bop improvisation
2. *Distant reading*: Comparing John Coltrane, David Liebman and Michael Brecker
3. Case study 1: side-stepping / side-slipping
4. Case study 2: constant structure
5. Case study 3: Superimposed chord changes
6. Case study 4: symmetric scales
7. Conclusion and outlook
Approach

**Mixed Methodology**

- musical analysis by listening experience and close reading of transcriptions
- computational analysis of digital solo transcriptions → „distant reading“ (Franco Moretti)
  - explorative: looking for interesting patterns within a larger repertoire / corpus of solos
  - evaluative: comparing results of close reading with a larger repertoire / corpus of solos

see  *Jazzomat research project: jazzomat.hfm-weimar.de*
Playing outside in post-bop improvisation

- *melodic*
  Chromaticism in the melody

- *harmonic*
  reharmonisation and substitution of the underlying chord progression
Contemporary strategies of playing outside

Concrete concepts

- tonal displacement: side-stepping / side-slipping
- reharmonisation (Coltrane-changes, directional units)
- constant structure
- ‘outside scales‘: chromatic scales, symmetric scales
Distant reading
Outside playing in solos by Coltrane, Liebman, and Brecker
Side-stepping, side-slipping I: David Liebman

David Liebman, „Softly As In A Morning Sunrise“, Quest/Standards (1988)
Side-stepping, side-slipping II: Michael Brecker

„Delta City Blues“, Two Blocks From the Edge (1998)
MICHAEL BRECKER
Constant structure

„Cabin Fever“ (Michael Brecker, Tales From The Hudson, 1996)
MICHAEL BRECKER

Constant structures

„Nothing Personal“, Michael Brecker (1987)
MICHAEL BRECKER
Constant structures

„Nothing Personal“, Michael Brecker (1987)
MICHAEL BRECKER

Constant structures as inside and outside

„Delta City Blues“, Two Blocks From the Edge (1998)

„Nothing Personal“, Michael Brecker (1987)
Michael Brecker
Superimposed chord changes: Coltrane-Changes

Ari Poutiainen, *Brecker and Patterns. An Analysis of Michael Brecker’s Melodic and instrumental Devices*, 1999, p. 27f
Michael Brecker, „Peep“, Now You See it... Now You Don’t (1990)

Superimposed chord changes
Symmetric scales: Whole tone scale

David Liebman, „Softly As In A Morning Sunrise“, Quest/Standards (1988)
Symmetric scales: dominant diminished scale

John Coltrane, solo on „Moment’s Notice“, end of 2nd chorus, bars 34-35
C-dominant diminished

Michael Brecker, solo on „Peep“, 3rd chorus, bar 8
C-dominant diminished
Symmetric scales

Michael Brecker, „Naked Soul“, 
*Tales Form The Hudson* (1996)
Conclusion

- strategies of playing outside prominently established by John Coltrane became standard devices of post-bop improvisation
  - Tonal displacement: side-stepping/side-slipping, intervallic denial
  - Reharmonisation: Coltrane-changes, superimposed chord changes
  - Constant structure
  - ‘outside scales’: chromatic scale, symmetric scales

- connecting several strategies in one phrase became an important tool to create drama and express creativity
Outlook

- further analysis of post-bop and contemporary saxophonists with close and distant reading

- question of context:
  ◦ rhythmic precision, metric and formal placement of outside strategies
  ◦ Context of the band: interplay and harmonic freedom

- constant structures – motivic improvisation - interplay of melody and rhythm: superimposed harmony and rhythm
Thank you for your attention!

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Freydy, David Rawlings: Brecker’s Blues. Transcription and theoretical analysis of six selected improvised blues over solos, 2003


