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Vermittlungen - musically speaking

Zum Improvisationsunterricht im Musiktherapiestudium

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Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Eckhard Weymann

Introduction

During the last decades, musical improvisation as a method in music therapy has acquired a central significance, both regarding its method and theory. Within various concepts of therapeutic treatment, improvised playing (in the form of playing together of therapist and patient, of the patient playing in the therapist's presence, of the therapist playing for the patient) is considered important, although with differing reasons and in different contexts of actions and treatment. The importance of improvisation in music therapy, especially within active music therapy, is also reflected in the curricula of music therapy educations in which the subject of "improvisation" is represented everywhere. However, in professional circles there has till now only been a little discussion of what lies behind this in each single case, which goals of learning and which theoretical concepts as well as those of method and didactics are pursued, which psychological and practise-oriented concepts, which concept of music and which philosophical and aesthetic reflections form the background of improvisation teaching.

In September 1998 in the rooms of the Musikhochschule, a symposium took place in Hamburg which was for the first time devoted to the theme of improvisation teaching within music therapy training. The program committee was: CARL BERGSTRØM-NIELSEN, HANS-HELMUT DECKER-VOIGT, FRITZ HEGI, ECKHARD WEYMANN. Following an invitation from the Institute for Music Therapy at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater and from the Institute for Music Therapy and Morphology, 45 colleagues from eleven European countries met (teachers, researchers, directors of study) in order to exchange thoughts on this theme for the first time. The results of this congress are documented here. The present articles have mostly arisen from the lecture manuscripts written for the symposium, supplemented by thoughts which were born out of the dialogues during the symposium and after.

Fitzthum:

On one hand, the student is supposed to be able to translate everything (images, landscapes, emotions, stories...) into music. On the other hand, it is repeatedly said to her that "solely" the therapeutic relationship is the healing factor.

Unfortunately, what cannot be adequately rendered in the text version of a congress is the way it is alive to participants. Concerts with improvised music contributed also especially to that and should at least be mentioned. As a prelude, GRUPPE TONFALL (BARBARA DEHM-GAUWERKY, JUTTA HOPPE, ALMUT KOCHAN, SUSANNE METZNER) played a concert under the heading "to re=peat the difference" [untranslatable play of words, meaning also "to re-cover" in German]. This heading is programmatic because it is contradictory and ambiguous. On the second day, the group ILLUSTRIO (FRITZ HEGI, PIT GUTMANN, TOMI

*Metzner:
Improvisation instruction...
must be tailored to the
respective music
therapeutic model on which
training is based. This
applies...also to the
underlying definition of
music. In slightly
exaggerated terms,
instruction in improvisation
that is based upon a
psychoanalytic concept
cannot be limited to rhythm
exercises or the
improvisation of a blues
theme. Rather, the trainee
must learn to deal with
emerging
material...Accepting the
repulsive, the broken, the
never-ending, or the
extreme is a part of it.*

*Keemss+Buchhaupt:
The division of the training
programme into two main
areas, improvisation seen
from its musical aspect and
therapeutic improvisation,
strongly presupposes that
one knows about both
areas and about the details
of the programme. This
allows for concentration
during teaching on one of
the main aspects, on the
other hand it refers music
to its possibility of acquiring
a therapeutic function
within the therapeutic
relationship as well as also
therapy is referred to the
phenomenological depth
dimension of music.*

*Vieth-Fleischhauer:
To connect the "art of
improvisation" with
therapeutic know-how as
practise demands it from
us, seems to me an easier
task when those who are to
become music therapists
during their education*

HIRT) did an "improvised dialogue lecture + concert" with the title "Improvisation between art and therapy". Five "triagrammes" which were presented on overheads served as starting-points for the trio to discuss and circumscribe them in both musically-scenic and verbal-conceptual ways. THOMAS KEEMS gave a stimulating concert performance under the heading "Time - Spirit - Rhythm" with verbal introductions to the pieces.

In several contributions, authors reflect on the specific context belonging to the improvisation teaching of a higher education, on its relation to other subjects regarding the curriculum and on the concept of therapy which is brought forward in each case, and the possibilities and difficulties of this context is presented. Especially, the precarious relation between musical-artistic and psychological contents of the curriculum are debated. These two kinds of content meet each other and overlap, although they sometimes also inhibit each other (see among other contributions those of WEYMANN, METZNER and FITZTHUM). Admittedly, those practical abilities and skills that are required when dealing with musical instruments represent an important side of playing ability. However, the psychic backgrounds are equally important in order to improvise, and here the realm of self-experience and learning therapy are touched upon - which for the student is usually connected to very individual and fundamental learning experiences.

For WEYMANN, improvisation teaching offers the possibility of training the ability of transfer which is so fundamental to therapeutic work, of translating and verbally reflecting mental circumstances such as they appear in musical figures in addition to the promotion of playing techniques and of creative-intuitive abilities (see also GROOTAERS). Two exercises he uses in this teaching, "Casual playing" and "Melody from a single note" are presented as examples. With these exercises, skills in letting go in terms of a freely floating attention as well as the concentration on one idea are trained - these have to do both with playing technique as also with a self-experience of the musician's personality. In addition, he discusses the relations between recent music history and improvisation practise such as it has come into being in music therapy.

Somewhat differently, SUSANNE METZNER seizes the same theme: the differentiation (and connection) between contents of the curriculum dealing with aspects of art and craft and those contents dealing with psychology, as she writes about the interaction between music therapeutic self experience and improvisational playing practise. Musical playing practise is affected and influenced by desires, anxieties and inner conflicts. In order to deal adequately with these processes she proposes some ethic rules of the game in order to secure a separation of improvisation training from music therapeutic self experience for the students. While the importance of self experience has long been known and the

experience these two cornerstones of their work not as two areas separate from each other, but as intimately connected to each other.

Deuter:

Problematic practises in the method of living (by avoiding, identifying or denial of opposite tendencies in question) have a parallel in the way in which the patient treats the musical material.

Therapeutic endeavour can (with this understanding of the concepts) be viewed as the attempt to arrive at polarity where there is opposition.

Weymann:

My thesis is this: cultural practice, as unconscious and unknown it may be to the individual patient, serves as a hotbed for that which might be expressed within the refuge of therapy... we could ask ourselves what it means for music therapy...when therapeutic playing practice is not covered any more by cultural forms? Do we then have to expect a gradual shifting of emphasis of the methodology of music therapy as well - for instance towards a more intensified application of receptive procedures?

Stige:

Picasso's art is not a unique example, and could not be understood through psychological and diagnostic concepts. The diverse art of the 20th century has made it extremely clear that art might be related to many

psychological basis of music therapy has been well worked out, she now argues that also standards of improvisation teaching should be discussed in more detail. She states some goals of her own improvisation teaching as paradigms.

The subject of therapeutic improvisation is also viewed by ELENA FITZTHUM as the central meeting-place in the music therapy curriculum, as the basis of professional identity which is to be developed by students. Music therapy techniques (here, especially improvisation techniques) as reflected on by FITZTHUM, should become a link between musical craft and therapeutic relation. Some established forms of improvisation in the training ("Tuning in" and "Musical dialogue") are presented in greater detail and discussed.

At this point we we have again touched upon the basic question about the music concept of music therapy, like several times before in this text. As what should we view improvisations in music therapy? This is where authors take different directions, even within "the" very discipline of music therapy. But ROSEMARIE TÜPKER is dealing with differences on a much larger scale between attitudes of music therapists and attitudes of academic musicology (applied to German language area). On the background of this difference it seems possible to distinguish an indigenous music concept within music therapy which transcends internal polemic attitudes (admittedly, it still has to be worked out) "which could also inspire other realms of music life and could give new impulses to musicology as well as to music education..." (p.#) (Cf. the thoughts of STIGE in this volume!)

It is often the case that authors within the professional music therapy context, in order to propose a marked standpoint in the discussion (which could be a psychological or an artistic-aesthetic one), are willing to accept being one-sided. MARTIN DEUTER shows a possibility to mediate between such standpoints in a model of polar tendencies of effect in the psycho-aesthetic "material" of improvisation. Differentiated possibilities of terminology and evaluation result which can be useful both in a didactic context and in music therapeutic practise.

The specific properties of the medium of music, its possibilities and determining factors and the search for suitable forms of students' personal relating to music is also discussed in the contributions from BERGSTRØM-NIELSEN, and KEEMSS / BUCHHAUPT.

When confronted with the variety of idioms as it is characteristic of contemporary music life, one might as a student think it would be impossible to acquire even an approximate musical equipment during the study. As a way out of this dilemma, BERGSTRØM-NIELSEN proposes a pluralistic "meta-stylistic view ... on the basis of experimental music aesthetics". In order to develop this view, he

and very different sets of values. Wholeness and completion could hardly be said to be universal or general values, many works of arts cultivate fragmentation, they are open-ended.

*Bergstrøm-Nielsen:
There is an important patchwork aspect to music just like to language which is always in the process of borrowing elements and processing them and passing them on again. ... And music aesthetics and collage works of composers like Charles Ives, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and others take this into account... Taking in the pluralistic aspect of experimental music aesthetics, I find it yields a credible solution to the problem of relativity.*

*Tüpker:
On the background of music therapy and improvisation as a direct form of musical communication, one could set up a concept which understands music as a means to self-cultivation and to the cultivation of our relations.*

*Grootaers:
All supervisees account of different problems connected to the interpretation of musical productions in music therapy. The common question in all these problems can be formulated thus: "how can I trans-late from musical occurrences into their verbally captured meaning in order to achieve a therapeutic goal".*

especially makes use of a concept of musical parameters drawing on compositional thinking and theories dealing with new and experimental music. In addition to presenting his Parameter-Exercises for improvisation training he states a clinical example.

In their contribution, KEEMSS and BUCHHAUPT present the contents of the curriculum at the Fachhochschule Heidelberg in an elaborate form serving as the background of improvisation teaching: although there is a division between an instrumentally orientated playing practise and music therapy practising, there are many interconnections, for example in the subjects of phenomenology and sociology of music, listening practise and musical analysis.

STIGE demonstrates the significance of aesthetic theories for music therapy. Starting from the statement of KEN AIGEN saying that music is a medium and not just a means he investigates the problem arising from transferring classical aesthetic values like "wholeness" and "good figure" to contemporary forms of expression and especially to the music of music therapy which clearly also has to do with fragmentation and ugliness. Philosophical concepts like "polyphonic dialogue" from BHAKTIN and "aesthetic practise" of the late WITTGENSTEIN can be useful here.

FRANK G. GROOTAERS focuses his contribution on the explicitly psychologically formulated issue about the meaning of improvised music, about its interpretation. He proposes a specific hermeneutic questioning technique for verbal interpretation and "translation" of improvisations in a form suitable both for working with students and with patients. He demonstrates the different lines of thinking (connected to a variation of perspective) pursued by this method through a case vignette from a music therapy.

Also the contribution by HANNAH VIETH-FLEISCHHAUER deals with the issues of what is brought forward in improvisations and what is the outcome of improvisation in therapeutic processes. Using an example from a training seminar she shows the steps and dimensions of a hermeneutic interpretation process in which the meaning of the playing when talking together afterwards is gradually revealed. She points out the multitude of possible connections and explains how she deals with them methodically.

We hope that through publishing of these articles the discussion which first took place among experts at the symposium can now be broadened and that new interested colleagues will take the opportunity of taking part in it. This can be made possible, practically, by taking contact to the authors in person, by letter or by e-mail.

And to conclude with, some words of thanks. The Andreas-Tobias-Kind Foundation in Hamburg made the editorial work

with this documentation possible through a generous contribution. The University of Aalborg contributed to cover production costs of this "European" edition. We would like to offer our warm thanks to both institutions! We are also very thankful to the chair of BVM, the German Association of Professional Music Therapists (especially SUSANNE METZNER) and the editors of "Einblicke" (HANNA SCHIRMER) for having the courage to take the publisher's risk for this collection of articles, which is indeed specialised - and even bilingual!

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