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## Vermittlungen - musically speaking

*Zum Improvisationsunterricht im Musiktherapiestudium*

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**FRANK G. GROOTAERS, LINZ**

## **Improvisation and Interpretation as a Unity in Teaching**

*Summary: The seminar argues for a working unity: Improvising and its verbal interpretation need each other, they are immanently interdependent. In order to produce this unity within the music therapy curriculum and to preserve it, an intermediate step of psychological interpretation is proposed, which makes possible the transition from the musical phenomena to a psychological interpretation which is adequate to it.*

*This intermediate step is moulded around the morphological concept of creating history and unfolds into four directions of interest. These are described and interpreted in relation to an example from therapy.*

The intention of the seminar I held at the First European Symposium in Hamburg called 'Improvisationsunterricht im Musiktherapiestudium 1998' was to propose the working unity of improvising and its verbal interpretation as a *unity* for the music therapy curriculum.

This suggestion is based on the following two ideas:

□ In my role as a music therapy supervisor and practice trainer I have been in constant exchange with almost all music therapy training institutions of this country for many years. All students state different problems when interpreting the musical productions of music therapy. The common question that arises from all these problems can be summarized as follows: 'How can I take the step from improvising to its verbal interpretation with respect to a therapy objective?'

□ The second source of ideas and experiences I have chosen my subject and proposal from is my daily work as a music therapist with psychosomatic patients in our hospital for psychotherapy. Together with our patients I have developed a technique which enables us to carefully go over from producing a joint improvisation to making a useful *psychological interpretation*.

During the seminar I held at the symposium I presented this intermediate step by means of a case study. The intermediate step is quite simple:

After the improvisation exercise I pose some questions to each patient one after another. I start by asking: '*Can you describe your impressions, how was the improvisation to you?*' By posing this question I want to find out what each patient *heart* and what *overall impression* has been gained. After the patients describe about what they heart and what their overall impression is, the questioning continues. The questioning pursues - more or less systematically - four directions of interest.

First interest: *Evaluation*

This interest criterion is focussing on *approval* or *disapproval*. In doing so, *assessment*, *criticism*, and the making of a *comparison* between the time before today and today are promoted. By this kind of questioning an image of what happened becomes more apparent.

Second interest: *Emotion*

This interest criterion is focussing on *irrational things*, that occur suddenly in the music or in our heads. We pay attention to moods in which we are *fascinated* by something, or feel an unknown *restlessness*, *excitement*, or *fear*. Also the urge to create harmony or to disturb are moments of full emotion. Talking about this criterion reinforces the musical phenomena *in* our feelings.

Third interest: *Commitment*

If we produce something (sounds), we inevitably *commit* ourselves to something while we are *ignoring* something else. One can also say that the playing itself develops its own conscience, i.e. a *conscience of production*. At this point the questioning tries to put into words what the patient does during the playing, what the playing does with the patient, and what the patient is *forced* to do. The playing asserts its own rights and standards.

Fourth interest: *Consequences*

*Consequences* are in the focus of this fourth criterion. Where do the things that have been initiated lead us to? The things that happen today also *set the agenda* for other productions. The things that happen are amounting to consequences, thereby creating *orders* of the whole. As a result, it all becomes a living history.

With these four directions of interest the things that happen during the improvisation become a *historical something* from which changes can be initiated. The creation of history can be seen as the basic of changes (SALBER 1965, 209-241).

The questioning of a female patient:

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Th.: *Can you describe your impressions; how was the improvisation to you?*

Pat.: *I guess it was loud and intense, with an enormous intensification.*

*(enormous intensification: evaluation)*

Th.: *A process!?* (appreciation as an evaluation)

Pat.: Yes.

Th.: *Intensification. An enormous intensification. Did this intensification fascinate you? (fascination: emotion)*

Pat.: Yes!

Th.: *(Therapist notices that the patient hesitates slightly) Anything else you would like to add?*

Pat.: *Yes, maybe I also fascinated the others by playing the rhythm instrument.*

*(to fascinate others: Commitment, to stand for something)*

Th.: *You contributed to the intensification. (affirmation)*

Pat.: *Yes, I think so.*

Th.: *Well, .....intensification. (time to think, searching, consequences)*

Pat.: *Later on, I thought, the three of us had found a rhythm. (evaluation by choice)*

*(Pat. smiles embarrassed). It was nice, actually. The situation reminded me of Indians on the war-path. (Consequences: A significant image)*

Th.: *Very good! (Emotion) Do you see any contradiction in it?*

Pat.: *No.*

Th.: *Me either. But what kind of war is it, that you enjoy so much?*

Pat.: *Well, there really might be a contradiction.*

Th.: *Yes... Do you really think so? (Further search for direction) If you think about the playing: What did you enjoy most? What caused the fun?*

Pat.: *(Pat. needs some time to find words) Yes, fascinating other people! (Creating history by naming, placing, categorizing)*

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I chose this example in order to demonstrate the psychological processes the patient experiences when being confronted with this kind of questioning. The intensification described by the patient refers to an image in which the patient together with the group reach another image: Intensifying something by themselves, fascinating others, moving something.

This method of questioning, used as an *intermediate step of psychological interpretation*, leads to a double effect: Firstly, the improvisation itself

experiences a *history creating deepening*, becoming something very valuable with which both, the patient and the group, feel united with. And secondly, as a result of this deepening, the person questioned as well as the listeners who are linked to her, experience an almost unnoticed emotion when playing: They feel that they want to intensify something, fascinate others, or move something. These two effects are an enormous result for one single intermediate step. When the group members notice and name these processes during the discussion they are led to certain narrations. But that would be a topic for a future symposium.

## **Conclusion:**

If improvising and its interpretation in the music therapy curriculum are considered as a *unity* from the outset, we will be able to deal better with the objectives and demands of music therapy training in future practice than leaving its interpretation to chance.

The same is true for music therapies where the therapist does not / cannot / should not talk to his patients.

This *intermediate step in four versions* (creating history) is also helpful for the therapist's understanding of his own experiencing in the situation with the patient (silent interpretation).

In the discussions that were made during the First Symposium in Hamburg, in 1998, I had the impression that the interpretation of the productions from the various practical fields often tend to drift off into general statements and basic interpretations. It also appeared to me that there are still many hidden inhibitions against interpretations. In some studies, I felt, there is a confusing variety, and an arbitrariness in dealing with interpretations that is cultivated in a strange manner.

In my seminar we agreed upon an easier access to the *things itself* by making small but distinct intermediate steps, like the ones I presented to you before. We think that these intermediate steps enable us to keep a connection and unity of production and interpretation. In my opinion, the keeping of this unity seems to be of major importance for the psychological benefits of the therapy.

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