



Use of methodologies and techniques from non-idiomatic musical improvisation in multimodal performances

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Object of research

Is it possible to perform contemporary musical improvisation with coherently integrated multimodal elements borrowed from other performing arts, especially contemporary music theatre?

If so, how?



Key concepts

Non-Idiomatic improvisation: form of musical improvisation that starts emerging in the Sixties that explicitly does not refer to rules or structures of well established musical languages or styles. It stems from the avant-garde mentality of the period in the name of a new and authentic form of musical artistic expression mostly through the refusal of established musical rules.

Multimodality: coexistence of multiple literacies, or “modes”, that synergically contribute to deliver the content of a particular media (e.g. cinema/television, opera).



Why focusing on musical theatre?

Theatre is intrinsically a multimodal environment, where contents of a play are delivered via aural and visual stimulation (e.g. speech, direction, scenography).

Also, it offers ample space for interdisciplinary performances (e.g. opera, music theatre, multimediality as a whole) and is an art form that has close relationship, both historical and contemporary, to improvisation.



Why?

- The combination of non-idiomatic improvisation with the more semantically polarising efficacy of language (speech, text) and visual-related acts (movement, scene) provides a number of challenges that may compromise the communication between performers and audience, and therefore need to be investigated.
- The concept of non-idiomaticity itself might be redefined in a more inclusive approach that aims towards giving more authentic active freedom to performers.
- The extensive historical documentation regarding the emergence of contemporary improvisation is fragmented and sparse, especially in regards to interdisciplinary projects. Performance documentation, other than audio recordings, is small, mostly due to high costs and low budgets.



Expected results

- Presentation of interdisciplinary group performances where musical improvisation, scenography, direction integrate coherently and organically.
- Formalisation of a comprehensive pool of techniques for musical improvisation that are open to the inclusion of interdisciplinary elements that is highly applicable and accessible for performers that desire to pursue this approach to contemporary performing arts.



First phase: historical research

- Analysis of documentation and audio video materials, both publicly available and from foundations and collections, from 1960 onwards
- Interviews with artists with a key role in improvisation practice development
- Focus on Italy and projects with interdisciplinary focus without neglecting an international approach
- Definition of an in-depth knowledge on the state of the art of contemporary improvisation as solid groundwork for the following practical phases.



Second phase: musical experimentation

Improvisation workshops on an exclusively musical level.

- Free improvisation
- Graphical scores/templates
- Text and other extra-musical indications
- Conduction

The results will be showcased in a public performance of improvised music.

Survey on the broader scope of the performing arts, on techniques currently in use in contemporary music theatre, their intrinsically multimodal aspects and the role of improvisation in this context.



Third phase: multimodality and methodology

The practical workshops will continue during the third phase, where the experiences matured during the musical experimentation will be integrated with elements from music theatre. Particular attention will be given to the relationship and balance between music and text/speech.

The product of this research will be presented in an improvised musical theatre performance, where music, scenography and direction are organically integrated.

Thank you!
