



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?

Performance-wise, the juxtaposition 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.

Also, the concept of non-idiomaticity itself might be redefined in a more inclusive approach that aims towards giving more authentic active freedom to performers.

Literature-wise, 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

The first phase of the project entails a comparative historical research about improvisation techniques and practices from 1960 onwards to delineate a complete perspective on the state of the art of contemporary improvisation. Particular space will be given to the Italian improvisation scene and to groups and individuals tied to interdisciplinary practices.

The results of this survey will serve as baseline and groundwork for the subsequent practical experimental phases. This will be achieved via interviews, surveys on documentation, audio and video materials from foundations and collections.



Second phase: musical experimentation

The second phase of research will be practical in the shape of improvisation workshops. These sessions will be used to put a number of improvisation methods and techniques (e.g. free improvisation, improvisation on graphical scores, use of templates or extra-musical indications, conduction) in practice and to determine their optimal usage depending on the context. This phase will be exclusively musical to avoid the premature introduction of theatrical elements.

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

At the same time a study will be conducted on the broader scope of the performing arts to identify 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!
