

The Subjunctive Room: Improvisation, Uncertainty, and the Emergence of Possibilities

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The aim of this study is to examine how musical improvisation can be understood as a practice of emerging possibilities, a kind of "subjunctive room", where musical, social, and various artistic processes interact. The work draws upon experiences from musical performance practice as a singer, improviser, singing actor, educator, and researcher, as well as on prior research regarding vocal warm-ups, embodied performance, and collective artistic work.

The concept of the "subjunctive room", grounded in Bruner's reasoning regarding narrative meaning-making, is used here to describe a form of musical improvisation in which diverse experiences, modes of expression, and participants converge without the relationships between them being fully predetermined. In this context, conditions for improvisation are created wherein uncertainty appears not primarily as an obstacle, but as a resource. This perspective draws upon Suzanne Osten's artistic practice, in which play, exploratory work, and collective processes were central prerequisites for artistic creation. Much like in Osten's rehearsal process, musical improvisation can be understood as an exploration of as-yet-unrealized possibilities, where body, voice, space, fellow performers, and artistic material interact in a continuous process of becoming.

The analysis draws on a transactional perspective uniting person and environment (Dewey & Bentley, 1949), phenomenological perspectives on bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and Wilcock's (1999) connection between doing, being, becoming, and belonging. The results indicate that improvisation evolves through an interplay of listening, responsiveness, and bodily presence. In solo work, possibilities emerge through the improvising musician's relationship with their own body, voice, and musical material. In collective music-making, possibilities also arise in the encounter between musicians, where every action influences and reshapes the shared artistic process.

The study shows that uncertainty constitutes a central component in the development of artistic possibilities. When fixed structures temporarily dissolve, a space for exploration opens up, making it possible to discover new musical paths, expressions, and meanings. The subjunctive room can thus be understood as a pedagogical and artistic zone where improvisation functions as a practice for learning, interaction, and the creation of the as-yet-unknown. The work contributes knowledge regarding how musical embodiment can be understood as a relational and bodily grounded process, in which the improviser's voice and artistic possibilities do not fully exist beforehand but rather emerge through action, presence, and shared exploration.

References

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