

Book Review of Jazz and Psychotherapy by Simeon Alev

Xin Wang*

School of Music, Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou, China

*Corresponding author: xw04@zzu.edu.cn

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Abstract: The book *Jazz and Psychotherapy* written by Simeon Alev integrates all the ideas and information from the psychologists and musicians. The author pushes the idea of uncertainty; no one fully understands what is going to happen next. As a result, the book adores all the intrinsic nature of predictability making all the transformative changes possible. The author has also incorporated all the practices and theoretical frameworks explaining the relationship between jazz and psychotherapy. The psychologists and the musicians explain how improvisation transforms the lives of people, and also the challenges that humans face. The book necessitates the importance of understanding the improvisation structures. One most common improvised art is Jazz. Initially, jazz music was considered to be racially inclined dance music featuring both the solo and collective improvisation. Having got its establishment from New Orleans, the music soon became highly popular in the entire country, making it famous in the 1920s. The popularity is highly linked to the migration and movement of musicians from the south in search of better social and economic opportunities in different regions within the country. After reading the book, one is more likely to gain complex and revolutionary approaches of defining human development.

1. Book Review

In the book *Jazz and Psychotherapy*, Simeon Alev blends the insights of musicians, such as Ornette Coleman and Wayne Shorter, and those of psychologists and social scientists, such as D.W. Winnicott and Gregory Bateson. By doing so, Alev introduces new ideas about improvisation, effectively revealing how it can transform people's experiences and the challenges they face. The main idea brought out by the author is that all people share with psychotherapists and jazz musicians the reality of not knowing what will happen next. Instead of avoiding this reality, both psychotherapists and jazz musicians have learned to adore the unpredictability of the future that is inherent to the human condition, which makes transformative change possible. These professionals fully incorporated unpredictability in the practices and theories that make up their disciplines. Through *Jazz and Psychotherapy*, readers can gain an accessible but detailed overview of the complex revolutionary approaches to creative expression and human development that permeated the two similar cultural traditions found in psychotherapy and jazz in the twentieth century. People interested in contemporary theories, social psychology, psychotherapy, and music will find *Jazz and Psychotherapy* useful and appealing. The book presents a synthesis of multidimensional scope and explores multiple perspectives, which make it an important contribution to people's understanding of improvisation in life and music.

The book starts by acknowledging that, despite the significance of improvisation to human experience, its role in problem-solving and communication in a rational society remains largely unknown. During the eighteenth century, improvisation in music gained widespread popularity due to its prosperity in vocal music and instrumentation. However, the popularity of improvisation has declined majorly because of the increase in the notation of music after nineteenth century. The relationship between the performer and composer changed so that the composer started notating the cadenzas and embellishment that had been formerly improvised by the performer (Abiodun, 2018). Just as in music, improvisation can be applied in psychotherapy. Alev suggests that relational psychotherapy, which focuses the role of relationships in one's life, can provide significant

alternatives to the pathological state of people's ecological, cultural, social, and personal relationships. Notably, this is based on the fact the therapist's dialogue and spontaneous approach to solving problems rely on the underused capabilities of improvisation. Whereas these capabilities are mature expressions of the complex emotional, physical, and cognitive processes that people deal with and develop since childhood, every slight reflection makes people ascertain that human development is a paradoxical and strange form of fate (Balswick, Pamela, and Kevin, 2007). Alev also notes that, by adulthood, people face several unpredictable factors and events that intersect with their irreproducible and unique genetic endowment, and it becomes very difficult to differentiate between events and characteristics that are genetically "predestined" and those that are a product of chance. To become successful in doing so, people would need to maintain their organizational integrity by balancing their threshold of awareness. Although Alev tells readers that every organism focuses on regulating and organizing their own experience, he also states that organisms do not appear to have explicit control over this process (Wrangham, 2019). Life is indeed an improvisation, and through it, people engage with the often unacknowledged and sometimes unbearable urgency of the human condition.

2. Human Collaborative Social Behavior

Humans' collaborative social behavior is among the critical ideas of Alev. He proposes that collaborative social behavior is an evolutionary adaptation, originated thousands of years ago. This is true considering that humans' great ancestors were social beings who mostly lived competitive and individualistic lives that made their thinking processes directed to attaining personal goals (Tomasello, 2018). Nevertheless, due to ecological pressures, humans were forced into a more cooperative way of living. Humans became focused on how to coordinate their actions with those of others and achieve goals collectively, as a group. According to Henrich (Henrich, 2017), even though humans are the smartest of all animal species, this might not be the sole reason for their success. Humans have developed psychological abilities that enable them to learn from other people. Similarly, by making cooperation the cornerstone of their adaptation, humans have achieved spectacular evolutionary successes. One cannot deny that the benefits that can be achieved when everyone cooperates are uncountable. The author reinstates Borgo's idea (Borgo, 2007), according to which transformational learning is a process that entails being a different person, depending on the possibilities for coming into contact with different environments and different people (Alev, 2020). From this perspective, readers can understand creative improvisation as a way to help people to become more creative (Kimmel, Dayana and Kerstin, 2018) and, although it may sound illogical, to learn how to improvise better in his or her daily life. This only requires that a person practices improvisation.

Along with the relevance of adult creative production, the transitional phenomenon in infants is also emphasized. Alev states that infants first detach themselves from the psychophysical fusion with their mothers and generate symbols that represent the mother as an object independent of their control. An infant's drive to manipulate and develop symbols is embedded in their endeavors to part from the maternal matrix without having to completely cut the connection (Adamson, 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that an early formation of symbols pivots around issues of reliability and trust. Alev writes that autonomy and flexibility are essential for children's processes of mean-making to work efficiently. These processes of mean-making unfold through the interactive cycles of response, interpretation, and reception while the environment is supposed to support the emergence of autonomy and flexibility (Bornstein, Marc and Kessen, 2017).

Alev also discusses the jazz tradition and how it helps in facilitating personal growth and evolution. Reed wrote about the cultural impact of jazz music by noting how it has taught people about the dynamics in American culture and what was so original in this genre (Reed, 2019). Nevertheless, it is hard to dispute the fact that, in addition to revealing so much about people's culture and attitudes, jazz has not yet detached itself from past colonial patterns. Although many scholars describe the connection between history and jazz, only a few scholars have provided full accounts of the cultural role played by jazz during this time (Pedersen, Jarness and Flemmen 2018). Another distinguishing feature of the jazz tradition mentioned in the book is the twisting rediscovery and deconstruction of

psychological matrix. Jazz symbolizes the process of human development, as in the counterintuitive theory of D. W. Winnicott, in both jazz and human development, reality is developed after being discovered.

3. Jazz Improvisation

In Chapter ten, Alev notes how the benefits of jazz improvisation arise from how it embodies a series of complex experiences and ideas that cannot be found in individuals' conceptual monolithic societies. Indeed, the benefits of jazz improvisation can be observed in its implications on both the technique and musicianship of the performer (Boyd, 2017). Through improvisation, the performer delivers a valuable and unique technique that can be used for adequately understanding and examining the features of the musical style. Jazz improvisation entails a series of complex experiences and ideas because it requires a higher level of involvement and active listening from the musician. Additionally, it develops the musician's capacity to use knowledge creatively and in real-time. Nowadays, people live in a technologically globalized society. One cannot deny the fact that humans' position at the top of the evolutionary chain meets them with challenges and their rigid epistemology impedes them from managing these challenges with flexibility and wisdom. Throughout *Jazz and Psychotherapy*, the reader can easily understand that creative improvisation can give individuals effective strategies to interact with the environment they live in. Creative improvisers make use of efficient strategies to gain access to forms of cognitive engagement that make them have equilibrated thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This is evident in the way they process spontaneous self-expression that is simultaneously collective and individual and in the way they rely on improvisation to generate solutions that cannot be predicted (Talle, 2017).

It is also important that the reader considers the mechanized Western musical tradition, including the African-American musical universe. During the early twentieth century, jazz was renowned as a racially defined and regionally based dance music that featured collective and solo improvisation (Schuiling, 2018). Having originated in New Orleans, jazz soon became popular in the whole country, rising to fame during the 1920s. This can be highly attributed to the migration of musicians from the South to look for better social and economic opportunities in other areas within the country. Since jazz departed from its original role as a piece of regional music, controlled by African-Americans, it started playing a vital role during the 1920s, helping to define the generation torn between the culture of modernity and the Victorian society of the nineteenth century America (Saito, 2019). Jazz and its reputation represent the cultural tensions in modern America, and the reception of Jazz represented the degree to which Americans accepted or rejected traditional values.

4. Conclusion

Jazz and Psychotherapy is an interesting book that integrates ideas from psychologists and musicians to explain how improvisation can transform people's lives and the challenges that humans face as a species. To understand improvisation, individuals need to comprehend its structure. And by understanding improvisation's structure, individuals might be able to take it seriously, regardless of the time period, and give credit to the well-developed and well-structured art of improvisation.

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