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The Therapeutic Effects of Vocal Improvisation

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the various therapeutic effects of vocal improvisation. Vocal improvisation is defined as free vocalization within a context of self-awareness. This study draws from the personal experience of voicework practitioners, participants of an improvisation workshop given by the author and music students at Carleton university. From their comments, voicework was found to be therapeutic since it seems to enable the voice to resonate within the body and to engage the intuitive mind which guides the expression of the inner-landscape in the singing. The main effects of improvisation were observed to be of a relational nature. A sense of connectedness with the inner-self, with other singers and with what is referred to as spirit appears to be central to the experience. Drawing from Christopher Small's Musicking, it seems that well-being could be facilitated by experiencing such relationships through improvisation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Improvisation is and has always been a widespread musical activity. It has been the basis for music in many different cultures and continues to form a large part of the music of the world. The voice also is an important medium in music making. This research looks at both voice and improvisation. Yet, instead of considering their musical aspects, it addresses their therapeutic applications.

In a therapeutic context, the improvising voice becomes an instrument of authentic self-expression. The vocalization is not restricted by strict idiomatic boundaries. Rather, singers can express their inner-landscape through any sounds that comes intuitively. Thus, therapeutic improvisation can result in music per se, but can also bring out various sound forms, growls or yawns. The singers' presence, authenticity and awareness are what appear to enable the therapeutic process.

This research explores people's experience of this type of therapeutic improvisation. It aims to give a broad overview of the effects that vocal improvisation can have. It questions what occurs on a physical, emotional and spiritual level as well as what leads to these effects. In addition, it assesses vocal improvisation's potential to create therapeutic change. Thus, the research question contains three main areas of inquiry:

- 1 - What is therapeutic about vocal improvisation?
- 2 - Which contexts lead to a therapeutic experience through vocal improvisation?
- 3 - What are the effects of vocal improvisation on different levels of the self?

The thesis will examine each of these points in a separate chapter. Chapter 3 will look at the significance of vocal improvisation itself as a therapeutic medium as well as discuss the blocks that can occur when using the voice. Chapter 4 will look at the importance of the environment and the context where the improvisation takes place: the setting, the singing exercises, the group process. Lastly, chapter 5 will discuss the observed effects this type of singing can have on the different levels of the self: body, emotions, mind and spirit.

Although the different aspects of the question have been separated for the purpose of discussion, it is important to remember that in practice, they operate simultaneously. Following Christopher Small, vocal improvisation can be seen as a “gestural language” - a language of body, voice and sound, all nonverbal - a language that occurs in the here-and-now and that can articulate many meanings at once:

In complex and contradictory creatures like human beings, these gestures can deal with a number of complex and even contradictory relationships, all at once. Gestures from me may indicate to you at one and the same time that I love, and hate and fear, and am dominated by you, that I should like

to strike you but intend to nurture you. ... [This gestural language] has no vocabulary, no units of meaning. It is seamless, without gaps and depends . . . on shapes, forms and textures . . . (Small 57-59)

Consider the contrast with verbal language: “Unlike the gestural language of biological communication, words deal with matters in sequential order and only one at a time” (Small 58).

Thus, although various elements of improvisation such as the singing, the environment and the effects on the self will be discussed separately, they nonetheless are in constant interaction with each other. It is therefore useful to retain this overall view as separating the elements for the purpose of analysis cannot do justice to the experience if understood independently.

Verbal language also contains other limitations in this context. In order to describe different aspects of the experience, the participants in this study, which include voicework practitioners and members of an improvisation workshop given by the author, use a specific vocabulary that may seem subjective, vague and imprecise. However, this type of approximate vocabulary is also used in other academic disciplines which describe subjective and sometimes mystical activities, such as theology for example. In this case, the vocabulary is borrowed from both psychotherapy and wholistic movements. Thus, terms such as ‘healing’, ‘inner-self’, ‘inner-child,’ ‘self-connection’ and ‘authentic

expression' recur in the thesis. For the participants of in this study, the meaning of these terms is self-evident, whereas this is not the case in the mainstream. For this reason, it may eventually be necessary to develop a more precise vocabulary in order to discuss this activity. Nonetheless, the language used in this study does allow a certain understanding of the subjective experience of vocal improvisation, at least through the eyes of those who have direct experience with it. Consequently, no attempt has been made to alter the vocabulary specific to this group. On the contrary, the voices of the practitioners and workshop participants were allowed to speak for themselves. It is through their experience that the meaning of this activity is sought.

One example of a term that may be problematic is the word "healing", which the author has also used frequently. In this context, it will not be restricted to refer only to the healing of the body, but will be considered a wholistic term, similar to "therapeutic," to refer to a process which contributes to a state of well-being, which could be emotional, spiritual or physical. However, healing will be considered more specific than therapeutic, as healing implies that a state of resolution can be brought about, where the release of a block, of whatever nature, can take place. Thus, a therapeutic process can lead to healing. When dealing with the body alone, the term "physical healing" will be used.

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND

Many of the author's personal experiences have led her to investigate this question. In the past seven years, she has been involved in music and healing, both in

Ottawa and in Montreal. She became interested in it through studying music and music therapy and participating in workshops which use the voice in a therapeutic manner, given by such persons as Lisa Sokolov, Lise Roy, Barclay McMillan and Dominique Bertrand.

Her work experience has also led her to work with the voice in different settings. In 2002-2003, her coursework within the Canadian Studies program included a practicum placement with Barclay McMillan, a voiceworker active in Ottawa. Through this practicum, she had the opportunity to take part in *LifeSong*, a ten-week course led by Mr. McMillan, in which participants write and sing songs based on their life story. Within this placement, she also took part in a *Chant Workshop*, where chants from different spiritual traditions were sung in a meditative context of silence and of body awareness.

Through her teaching assistantship at Carleton University (2002-2004), she worked with first and second year music students in an ear-training class where they were required to sing various scale-type exercises and to sight-sing melodies, that is to sing an unknown melody from the musical notation alone. Her class consisted of a small group of students who had sung very little before. Some had difficulty simply matching pitches. Having to sing at sight on their own was very difficult for them, on both a practical level and what appeared to be an emotional one as well.

In 2001-2002, she worked with post-psychiatric patients. She led a weekly three-hour workshop which included instrumental lessons, music therapy exercises and a choir

session. Most participants enjoyed singing in the choir as it was not too intimidating. However, vocal improvisation was very difficult for most of them.

Through these experiences, the author has been struck by the potential of the voice to bring one to a place within. In the workshops she attended, she experienced personally the healing aspects of the voice and of vocal improvisation in particular, especially on an emotional level. Experiencing emotional expression and release through the voice gave her a medium to work with which engaged both her music background and her own self-development. In the experiences that followed, she continued to perceive in herself and in others this transformative aspect that the voice carries. Seeing this so clearly has led her to investigate the voice's healing potential through improvisation.

CONTEXT AND BENEFITS OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research has importance for a western modern society such as Canada, as a part of the Canadian sub-culture takes part in various types of healing vocal improvisation. In the Ottawa and Montreal regions, for example, many activities take place that involve the voice, ranging from simple chanting groups to various types of workshops (i.e. on voice production, vocal improvisation and voice and emotion). These activities appear to take place mostly within the consciousness-raising community although they can occur in music therapy contexts as well.

However, the music therapy contexts are mostly institutionalized. As it stands, music therapy can only be referred to as such when it is given by an accredited music therapist. Consider the following definition, taken from the Canadian Association of Music Therapy's website:

Music therapy is the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has nonverbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development.

Thus, although music therapy uses vocal improvisation extensively, it does so within its own clinical contexts, dealing with specific client populations. Music therapists are active in hospitals and institutions, working with disabled adults, elders with Alzheimer's disease or autistic children, for example. Music therapy is only occasionally available in non-clinical settings. This situation segregates music therapists from others who work with music and healing.

Consequently, although our topic is ultimately a music therapy topic, dealing with well-being through improvised music, it is not part of the institutionalized music therapy community and takes place outside the institutions. It is referred to not as music therapy

but as sound healing, chanting, sonology or voicework. Many of the practitioners of voicework are not institutionalized and operate on a personal basis, offering a variety of workshops through their own companies. There are many of these individuals throughout the western world. In Ottawa alone, there are at least four people offering these types of workshops. Our research deals with this group of people: people in the community, outside the medical and health organization, who are offering or participating in workshops which include vocal improvisation as a means to heal and grow.

By bringing these activities to the fore, this research can have various benefits for different groups of people. Therapeutic vocal improvisation begins from the premise that a voice is everyone's birthright and that everyone is innately musical. It thus breaks down the barrier between professional and amateur and promotes participation from everyone according to their abilities. By doing so, it introduces the concept of non-hierarchical universality of music within our culture. It also challenges the way music is taught in the current system which favors performance and technical ability at the expense of personal expression. Consequently, this research can yield an alternative understanding of music and of the human voice's potential in a diverse society such as Canada. It can contribute to widening the awareness and use of music and singing in the community. It could also open the door to music therapy being used more widely. Lastly, it provides data that shows that voicework can be beneficial and thus substantiates its value. In contributing to the development of a stronger theoretical basis for voicework, it could encourage voicework to be used more widely as part of western medicine's growing interest in

complementary holistic treatments.

SITUATING THE QUESTION IN THE LITERATURE

The present study can situate itself among various academic and non-academic disciplines such as sound healing, music therapy, musical improvisation, music psychology, linguistics, group psychology, consciousness studies and theology / spirituality. Studies on the effects of sound and music on the brain and body are also applicable. This study takes an interdisciplinary approach and brings these different streams together as it seeks to understand the overall experience of improvisation and to give it a theoretical base. It makes a contribution to the existing literature by merging these different disciplines, by looking at the effects of improvisation specifically (whereas much of the literature deals with sound or voice in general) and by holding a broad focus which includes different parameters such as emotions, body, mind and spirit.

The voicework and sound healing literature, dealing specifically with the use of sound - including that of the human voice - in order to create healing, is written mostly by practitioners who have developed methods of working with this medium. This literature is mostly anecdotal, is usually centered around the author's personal experience, and occasionally refers to research. Most of these texts outline methods of working with sound, which sometimes include improvisation. The support for these methods comes from the practitioner's own experience and that which they have observed in their clients. For instance, in *Sounds of Healing* (1999), oncologist Dr. Mitchell Gaynor describes his

method of working with meditation and crystal singing bowls (as in Tibetan tradition), to create well-being or healing in his patients. Naturopath John Beaulieu, in *Music and Sound in the Healing Arts* (1987), perceives the elements of fire, water, air and earth in the voices of his patients and uses this diagnosis to bring about therapeutic change. Sound healer Jonathan Goldman, in *Healing Sounds* (1996), describes methods of working with vocal harmonics to enable healing. He includes descriptions of ancient practices and suggests exercises to use sound to affect different energy centers. Other such practitioners include vibrational therapist Joy Gardner-Gordon (1993), voiceworker James D'Angelo (2000) and author of *The Mozart Effect* Don Campbell (1989, 1997). As a result, a variety of individual methods are proposed, but very few links are made among the different methods. Also, there is little theoretical reflection on why these methods are efficient or appropriate. Nevertheless, although non-academic, these practitioners have extensive direct experience of the voice's potential and their writings are quite valid in the context of this research, which seeks to bring an academic base to this type of work with the voice.

Of these methods, a few are quite elaborate and were drawn from in this study. Paul Newham's methodology, entitled *Voice Movement Therapy*, which he has developed and discussed in great detail in various books such as *Therapeutic Voicework* (1999), is based on Jungian principles and uses the voice and the body to entice therapeutic change in his clients. The methodology includes teaching the clients about the voice itself based on ten parameters that were developed for this purpose (i.e. pitch, volume, air present in

voice). His description of the mechanics of voice production is quite complete and helpful. Also, he has elaborated a number of exercises, often combining movement and voice, which include various types of improvisation. Some of these were used in this study. *Therapeutic Voicework* also extensively reviews the literature and the various activities taking place which involve the voice, ranging from voice pedagogy, to theaters, sound healing and song circles.

Kristin Linklater's voice method *Freeing the Natural Voice* was also significant in this context. As developing awareness is part of vocal improvisation, her exercises, which aim to help the students gain awareness of their body and voice were directly applicable. Although her focus is on teaching voice to actors, her method has an implicit understanding of the voice's potential and of its link to emotions as she recognizes that "blocked emotions are the fundamental obstacle to a free voice" (16).

However, it is the research done in the field of music therapy which provides an academic base for our research. For music therapists, improvisation is a therapeutic tool, as described on the Canadian Association of Music Therapy's website:

Improvising offers a creative, nonverbal means of expressing feelings. It helps the therapist to establish a bond of trust with a person and serves as a useful assessment technique. Through vocal, instrumental, and movement improvisation a person interacts with another and explores feelings which

are difficult to express verbally. Improvising offers an opportunity to make choices and deal with structure in a creative way.

It is Kenneth Bruscia who has documented the various models of improvisation used in music therapy. In *Improvisational Models of Music Therapy* (1987), he describes in detail the development and theoretical bases of more than thirty models of improvisational music therapy. However, as music therapy is mostly used to treat special needs clienteles, these models are focused on the particular needs of these client groups and are not adapted to non-clinical settings. However, there are some exceptions, such as Lisa Sokolov's *Vocal Improvisation Therapy*, in which free vocalization and awareness is the basis for therapeutic change. Sokolov works with the general public as well as with various clienteles. Various effects of this work have been reported on her website:

After a five-day session individuals can expect to be more grounded in their bodies and be able to improvise and sing more freely and expressively. They will be more fluent in the language of music. Their listening skills will be awakened both internally and externally. They will have come into a new relationship with their own process and expressiveness. This work can open individuals to a powerful experience of emotional, energetic and expressive aliveness.

Some of these effects were also found in our study. However, Sokolov has not published these results, although her method is included in Bruscia's models.

The present research also has bases in musical improvisation, as, depending on the context, therapeutic vocal improvisation can result in music per se. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl has reviewed this literature in his introduction to the anthology *In the Course of Performance* (1998), which he has also edited. Nettl's anthology is an addition to the scholarship on improvisation and includes an article by Jeff Pressing, who has proposed a computational theory of musical improvisation (1984, 1988). However, Nettl finds that "even now, the synthetic literature on improvisation - in contrast to studies of individual musics - remains modest" (2). It is this type of synthesis of improvisation that this study proposes, although centered on its therapeutic rather than its musical aspects.

Included in Nettl's review is Derek Bailey's *Improvisation* (1980), whose methodology and purpose is similar to that of the present study. Not only is the work partly based on interviews (for radio, held in 1974), but it also describes the improviser's views of improvisation. Many idioms are discussed, including Indian Music, Flamenco, Baroque and Jazz. Also included is a section on free improvisation, which is similar to what is done in therapeutic improvisation. Bailey suggests an overall context for improvisation in general: "improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practiced of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood" (1). This statement may explain the disparity of synthetic literature on the

topic.

Therapeutic vocal improvisation can also be understood in terms of the theory developed by Christopher Small in *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (1998). In this work, Small uses the verb musicking to refer to any activity that involves music since “music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do”(2). Thus, musicking includes singing in the shower, listening to a walkman, going to a concert, practicing the piano and, in our case, improvising with the voice. Small’s theory is that musicking is ultimately about relationships and that it brings into being what the people taking part consider to be ideal relationships. Although his book describes the event of a symphony concert taking place in the western world, the theoretical discussions, which extend past this specific event, are largely applicable in our context and provide a strong base for the present study.

The literature in linguistics, and particularly on how children acquire language can also shed light on some aspects of vocal improvisation, especially in terms of understanding the sounds that occur in an adult’s vocalization. As Lois Bloom has shown in *The Transition from Infancy to Language* (1993), children learn language not only as a result of their cognitive developments, but also through affect, as they seek to express things they have emotions about. She has also shown how these expressions are mediated by the social and cultural environment. Thus, it seems possible that the sounds uttered by an adult in vocal improvisation might be influenced by their own language-learning

process in childhood.

This research can also place itself within a psychology framework, as there are indications that therapeutic improvisation has an effect on emotions and well-being. For instance, gestalt therapy's emphasis on awareness and on being in the moment could have a parallel in improvisation. Polster and Polster's work *Gestalt Therapy Integrated* (1973) describes these elements in its overview of gestalt therapy.

As improvisation often takes place in group contexts, the psychology and social work literature on group process can also have an application. Group process in general has been researched extensively. Two references are retained here. First, in terms of gestalt, Polster and Polster include a discussion of group process in psychotherapy, which is applicable in terms of vocal improvisation groups. Also, Barbara Posthuma's textbook *Small Groups in Counseling and Therapy* (1996), in addition to reviewing the various theories on group process, discusses various elements such as environment and leadership, that could have an impact in improvisation.

In addition, some interesting work has been done on intuition in consciousness studies. This is significant since much of the process of therapeutic improvisation stems from an intuitive base, where the singer sings what comes intuitively. The Academy of Consciousness Studies at Princeton University has put out the collaborative anthology *Intuition: The Inside Story - Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (1997) which provides

theoretical bases for intuition. Many perspectives are included, from Bateson's "patterns that connect," to the Aboriginal conception of intuition as rooted in the land, to "intuition as authoritative knowledge in midwifery and homebirth" (145). This anthology provides a base for the recognition of intuition as a form of intelligence. The experiences of the participants in this study tend to support this idea.

A number of non-academic publications also emphasize the importance of intuition. Most of these see intuition as rooted in the body. This link between body and intuition could also be part of the experience of vocal improvisation. Thérèse Bertherat's ground breaking book *Le Corps a ses raisons* (1976) puts forth the idea of the wisdom of the body. She draws from Reich to support that physical tensions could have a psychological origin. She includes many case studies to show that the awareness of the body can help to liberate it and to give it a hold on life: "en prenant conscience de notre corps, nous lui donnons prise sur la vie" (100). This view is held by many other groups who work with the body, including the Authentic Movement Institute and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's *Body-Mind-Centering*, which includes the voice as one of its parameters.

Furthermore, since the spiritual aspects of improvisation were inquired about in this study, writings on spirituality and/or theology have a relevance. Theologian Matthew Fox has written extensively on what he refers to as "creation spirituality." Perhaps most applicable in our context is his work *Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet*

(2002). In this work, he proposes that when humans are creative, they are accessing their divine nature. Writer Julia Cameron holds a similar view, which she adapts in the form of workbooks to enable readers to access and develop their creativity. *The Artist's Way* (1992) and *The Vein of Gold* (1996) both contain various artistic and creative exercises which carry a spiritual dimension.

Lastly, as effects on the body can occur through singing and improvisation, studies dealing with body and sound are applicable. Hans Jenny's *Cymatics* (1973), the study of wave phenomena, showed the effect of sound on various substances and hypothesized about its potential effects on cells (this is further discussed in chapter 5). Also, ongoing studies are taking place to investigate the effects of sound on the body and the brain. In neuroacoustics, a number of studies were conducted, as through the Center for Neuroacoustic Research in California, led by Dr. Jeffrey Thompson. Phenomena such as sonic entrainment were studied, as well as clinical uses of sound and methods for stimulating brainwave function using sound. Also, at the Montreal Neurological Institute, the auditory processing laboratory, led by Dr. Robert Zatorre, is studying voice perception, imagery, emotion and music. All these studies tend to show that sound and music can have various effects on the physical body and the brain.

The present study builds on all of these bases. It draws from the literature on music therapy, musical improvisation, music psychology, linguistics, group psychology, consciousness studies, theology / spirituality and on studies on the effects of sound. It

takes an interdisciplinary approach which integrates these elements into a theoretical explanation of the overall experience of therapeutic vocal improvisation.

However, as little of the academic literature deals specifically with vocal improvisation, this study represents preliminary research in the area. Through field work, which included interviews with practitioners, an improvisation workshop given by the author and a voice questionnaire given to music students, this research begins to outline some trends that seem to be part of the experience of vocal improvisation. Any of these trends could be further explored and critiqued. The present thesis, in introducing this field into academia, aims to open the door to the study of this type of activity.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore vocal improvisation's potential, contexts and effects, the methodology included three main areas of research. First, six interviews were conducted with practitioners who lead workshops that are based on or include vocal improvisation. Second, the author led a workshop of six people who gave responses on their experience of improvisation. Third, a questionnaire was given to two classes of music students at Carleton University.

INTERVIEWS WITH PRACTITIONERS

Six interviews were conducted with practitioners. These practitioners all have a large amount of experience with vocal improvisation, both on a personal and professional level. As they are actively involved in the field, they have authoritative knowledge. Four of them have allowed me to use their names. They are: Barclay McMillan, Kaia Nightingale, Lise Roy and Jeremy Sills.

Barclay McMillan (BA, B.Mus, M.A.) is a voiceworker in Ottawa. For the past seven years, he has been offering various workshops on the use of the voice through his company *Voice Matters*. His most in depth work is done through his LifeSong series, a 10-week course where participants learn the basics of voice production and write songs based on their life stories. His major influence is the Englishman Paul Newham, the

founder of Voice Movement Therapy, with whom he has studied. He has also worked with well-known practitioners in the field such as Don Campbell (author of *The Mozart Effect*), Jonathan Goldman and Bobby McFerrin. He has attended international conferences on the subject of healing with sound. He is currently interested particularly in the spiritual effects of voicework and is writing a PhD dissertation on the subject for the University of Creation Spirituality (UCS) in Oakland.

Kaia Nightingale (B.Sc., M.A.) has spent 12 years exploring meditation and spirituality in the Himalayas. She currently works in Ottawa, where she teaches weekly classes in meditation, meditative yoga, chi yoga and chanting. She is also writing a book on spiritual transformation. She sees sound as a way to shift consciousness and to connect to spirit. In her chant class, she explores vocal improvisation in the uplifting context of meditation. Thus, participants sing various sacred Sanskrit, Hindi or English chants as well as improvise freely on uplifting themes. The singing usually leads into a period of meditation.

Lise Roy (B. Mus, M.A.) is a teacher of improvisation in Montreal. Her weekly, weekend and week-long workshops are based solely on improvisation, often with the voice but also with various instruments, mostly percussion. She has been teaching these workshops for 17 years through her company *Musique et Croissance*. She has studied with cellist David Darling, founder of *Music for People*, and was part of the core team who put this program together. She has also studied music therapy and occasionally works

one on one with clients in a therapeutic context. The interview conducted with her was entirely in the French language. When she is cited in the text, her original response is given, followed by the author's English translation in square brackets.

Jeremy Sills (B. Mus) is a music teacher in Ottawa. He teaches weekend music therapy workshops which include vocal improvisation. His music background includes jazz vocal, piano, trumpet, recorder and organ. He has extensively studied and experimented with music in a healing context: toning, sounding, overtone. He has studied overtone with Bernard Dubreuil in Montreal and with Barclay McMillan in Ottawa. He has also worked with Joy Gardner in the United States.

Jim Anderson (pseudonym) is a seasonal worker who has spent 12 winters in a Mexican shamanic context where he has explored drumming and singing. Although he does not teach voice work per se, his experience is so extensive that he has been included with the practitioners. Singing and improvising is at the center of his life. He uses it constantly, whether at work or in a musical context.

Joanne Marchant (pseudonym) works one on one with clients in a therapeutic context. The base of her work is improvisation. She has studied improvisation extensively and has done energy work with Fabien Maman (Academy of Movement, Sound and Color) in Nice.

The research instrument is an interview questionnaire, included in Appendix 1. The first section of this questionnaire deals with the interviewee's personal background in music and improvisation as well as their relationship to their voice. The rest of the questionnaire is divided into four sections and deals with the effects of vocal improvisation on the body, the mind, the emotions and the spirit, respectively. It is qualitative and broad in scope. It is designed to give an overall view of the interviewee's personal experience of vocal improvisation.

WORKSHOP LED BY AUTHOR

In addition to these interviews, the author has organized and facilitated a seven-week workshop in vocal improvisation. It took place on Sunday afternoons from January 18 to March 8, 2004, with a week off on February 15, 2004. The sessions lasted two hours. The workshop was designed to give participants an experience of vocal improvisation in a healing context. Each session included a tape-recorded discussion where participants shared their experience of the exercise that had just taken place. Appendix 2 contains the details of each session. When relevant, some sessions are described in detail in the text and referenced with the appropriate week. In addition, the workshop participants also completed by hand the interview questionnaire that was given to the practitioners that is included in appendix 1.

There was a total of six participants in this workshop. This includes the author and Kaia Nightingale. The other participants were given anonymity. Let us refer to them

as Connie Kingsley, Annette Cameron, Joyce Fleming and Kimberley Grant. The author's experience as facilitator of this improvisation group will be considered data.

Also included in this group will be Maureen Littlefield (pseudonym) who was interviewed. Although she did not participate in this particular workshop, she has had similar experiences as a student of Barclay McMillan and Kaia Nightingale. Her comments are comparable to those of the workshop participants.

The comments of this group will be referenced as "workshop response" whether taken from their written questionnaire or from a discussion in the group context.

About half of the participants in this group are full-time office workers in various areas including accounting, government work and social work. Most members were familiar with improvisation, as they had done other workshops as well. Only one person had very little experience.

Furthermore, the workshop participants and practitioners, when considered together, have the following characteristics:

- The age range is between 27 -71 yrs, with 50% of people between 41-47.
- The level of education is quite high as 60% of the sample has a master's degree or higher.

- At least 80% of the sample was exposed to music as a child, either through lessons or through informal music in the family.
- 70% of the sample has received some kind of formal musical instruction.
- The cultural backgrounds represented are: American, British, Canadian, Québécois, Hungarian and Irish.
- Members of the sample have studied voicework in different regions, mostly in Canada and the US but also in Europe, Mexico and India.
- Many of the members of this sample know each other and form a loose community in Ottawa. Lise Roy in Montreal is an exception to this.

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to compare the effects of singing in a healing context with those of singing in general, a questionnaire was given to thirty-eight music students at Carleton University. It is included in appendix 3a. These anonymous questionnaires were filled out at the beginning of class on March 4 and March 9, 2004. The questions deal mainly with the effects of singing (i.e. how do you feel after having sung?) and with the relationship with the voice (i.e. do you like your voice?).

The students were enrolled in first and second year ear-training courses (MUSI 1702 and MUSI 7201). The author was working with them as part of her teaching assistantship. As part of these courses, they developed their ear through working with the voice and thus sang regularly. For instance, part of the requirements was learning to

sight-sing. However, the context for their singing is quite different from healing improvisation and none of them had any experience with improvisation per se.

These 38 students were between 18-25 years old and were mostly (87%) music majors. 24% of them are enrolled as singers. Many of them have been singing since childhood (42%) and some, since adolescence (39%). Most of them (71%) sang daily.

Appendix 3b gives the complete questionnaire with the results. Part of this questionnaire is also occasionally included in the text. In both cases two numbers are given: the first number is the percentage, the second represents the amount of people out of 38 who gave this answer. For instance:

Do you like your singing voice?			
[11% 4]	NEVER	[50% 19]	SOMETIMES
		[32%12]	OFTEN
[8%			
3]	ALWAYS		

Thus, our discussion will be based primarily on the practitioner's interviews and the workshop responses and will be supported by the student's questionnaire. Citations taken directly from the interviews or workshop responses will be in *italics*. Excerpts from the student's questionnaire will be given in the above format.

Chapter 3

The Tool that is Vocal Improvisation

*Sometimes singing won't change anything, sometimes singing changes things,
sometimes it's just spontaneous expression of joy or enthusiasm or craziness
and other times it's very heavy expression of sorrow or loneliness.*

It's the human experience (Anderson, Practitioner).

Singing can be viewed as a metaphor for the human experience. As the voice constitutes a channel of expression of the inner-self, it is likely to have therapeutic applications. Coupled with free improvisation, it seems to be a vehicle for growth and change. The evidence suggests that vocal improvisation enables profound expression and contact with the self, as it is seen as a tangible and creative medium through which the singers playfully let the sound guide them past their judgmental mind into vulnerable places within.

Vocal improvisation is primarily a means of personal expression. Expressing something vocally brings it from one's inner-world to the outer-world. The voice could thus be considered a means of allowing the inner-self to become audible. It appears to be an instrument of expression which enables contact with all aspects of the self as it is flexible, vulnerable and tangible.

The voice seems to have this capacity of expression as it carries a wide vocabulary. Since the voice can utter a variety of sounds that words cannot describe — in singing, growling, screaming, snarling, yawning, sighing, laughing — it is likely to be able to express many different states. *“[The vibration of the voice] reaches not only the physical dimension but it travels through every dimension that I can”* (Anderson, Practitioner). Following Anderson, it appears that every aspect of the self could have its counterpart in the free voice. Thus, various aspects of one’s being, which include one’s inner child, adult or artist, as well as different qualities of being such as playfulness, fearfulness or resistance could all find expression through the voice.

In addition, that the voice functions nonverbally also appears to be significant. Not only can the voice, being part of a gestural language, carry many meanings at once, but its nonverbal nature could also create a level of safety: *“The sound doesn’t use words, it doesn’t use English words so it’s easier, the mind is gone and you don’t have to be concerned that you might be saying something to hurt somebody or yourself”* (Sills, Practitioner). Thus, working through sound symbols rather than words seems to allow these different levels of meaning to be expressed safely.

Moreover, the singing voice, as it also works through sound symbols, is often felt to convey the inner- landscape more effectively than the speaking voice.

[The] speaking voice is working through language and the language is modular. It's blocks of understanding, it's mathematical, it needs to be translated into feeling for us to know what is happening. When you're using a singing voice, the vibration, the sound is carrying the emotional message in a much purer form and, as far as I'm concerned, a much more powerful form. Much more direct (Anderson, Practitioner).

Thus, the singing voice appears to facilitate profound expression of the self as it is direct in communicating a wide range of nonverbal messages. It also seems to be effective because of its personal and vulnerable nature.

The voice is unique to each person. Paul Newham considers that it reflects both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self and thus carries both physical and symbolic aspects. Physically, as there are three different tracts which employ the pathway of the throat - the respiratory, gastrointestinal and vocal tracts - the throat "is the locus for a pantheon of psychosomatic phenomena" (Newham 35). Symbolically, as the voice is the meeting point between thoughts coming down from the head to be expressed with words and feelings coming up from the heart or the gut to be expressed with sounds, the meeting of the two pathways can create conflict. In this view, a person's entire history is present in the audible voice.

From this personal stance, the voice also seems to lead to places of vulnerability. *“It’s such a personal thing. It’s the most vulnerable place we can be is really expressing the voice”* (Marchant, Practitioner). It seems that through improvisation, one can come in contact with vulnerable places within and feel exposed and naked, especially when singing in front of others. The feeling of vulnerability could be heightened by the presence of other people as singing for others seems to be quite intimidating.

For example, this vulnerability was observed in the author’s ear training students. For their evaluation, these students had to sight-sing individually for the teacher and the author who was struck by how the “big tough guys” of the class with little vocal experience looked so intimidated and afraid when they had to sing. It seemed like an immediate and complete transformation from their regular demeanor which then returned after the singing. This could be explained by the feeling of exposure and vulnerability, which seems to be widely experienced.

In therapeutic terms, this vulnerability is often considered a basis for the healing process to begin. As Roy suggests, remaining open, authentic and vulnerable could be a basic element: *“[C’est la] capacité à rester vulnérable qui fait qu’il se passe des choses.”* - *[“[It is the] ability to remain vulnerable that makes things happen”]* (Roy, Practitioner). Although it is impossible to predict what effects will occur, this type of openness, which allows for authentic expression and thus authentic change, seems to be the starting point of the therapeutic process.

However, as was observed in the workshop group, it can be difficult to remain exposed and vulnerable. Feeling naked is not easy. Fear and resistance thus seem to come into play quite easily. Connie Kingsley often felt these blocks and held back in the six sessions that she attended. However, this was most obvious during the fifth session. That week, four people were in attendance including the author. The exercise was to improvise individually over an ostinato (short repeated pattern) held by the rest of the group. It was the first time people were asked to sing on their own. Kingsley tried her solo once but then closed off, seemed afraid or defensive and refused to try again. She related to us that she found it extremely intimidating and felt a big emotional charge.

Although it is difficult to assess what this experience meant for Kingsley, this event did cause her to withdraw immediately. It seems possible that the experience carried an amount of risk and put her in contact with something inside. The withdrawal felt like a protection, as if singing again was too dangerous or exposed her too much. The block therefore seems to have created an armor against vulnerability.

Kingsley's experience also speaks of the ability of the voice to create a bridge to the inner-self. If indeed, her voice put her in contact with something within, then it acted as a connection to her inner-self. On that basis, it could be that the voice can be a means of contacting and accessing the inner-world, thereby creating bridges between different aspects of the self.

Interestingly, the voice seems to sometimes act as a mirror of the inner-self.

Consider Joyce Fleming's experience: *"The sounds sometimes come from very far down, are not thought through logically and reveal me to myself"* (Fleming, Workshop). In revealing the inner-self in this way, the voice could enable not only fragments from inside to become audible but also a contact with this inner reality, thereby bringing the inner-self to the forefront.

The voice's potential to act as a mirror was observed in the seventh workshop session. The participants were in pairs: one person was leading and the partner was following with the instruction to be "the leader's second voice." This brought out varied reactions. For example, Annette Cameron found leading more difficult than following: *"It was harder to lead. Because every once in a while I started to worry if I was going somewhere too suddenly that I cannot be followed or something. Every once in a while I would worry that I'm not being cooperative here . . . "* (Cameron, Workshop). In contrast, her partner Fleming, found leading easier. When following, she *"was feeling 'what if [my partner] doesn't like this', . . . 'what if I go in a different direction and that's not where she wanted it to be"* (Fleming, Workshop). However, when they were asked if there was a parallel between their reaction in singing and life in general, they both answered yes. Their personalities appear to have been brought to the fore in their singing and revealed through their voices. It thus seems possible that the voice can reveal different parts of one's being and enable a deep connection to occur on this level.

In addition, this connection seems to be further facilitated through the concreteness of vocal expression. Music and singing are tangible and audible as voices are vibratory instruments which travel on physical sound waves. Although this process is invisible, it carries a physical reality that appears to make vocal expression meaningful by giving it a tangible and concrete component. Anderson's experience suggests that there is some concreteness to using the voice to express something from within in a vibratory way:

It's like at one end of my voice is my physical existence and at the other end of my voice is my unlimited potential. And the voice to me is what makes a concrete bridge from one to the other. You can go with your mind from one to the other, but the actual concrete ability to reach from one state to the other, in the concrete, in the way of something real, is the vibration of the voice (Anderson, Practitioner).

This vibratory aspect, the concrete feeling of having expressed something tangibly, could be part of the voice's healing aspects, and was also echoed by Maureen Littlefield (Workshop).

Therefore, the voice appears to enable a healing process by being a vibratory instrument which, through its wide gestural vocabulary, could allow profound expression and contact with the inner-self. This contact seems to be further facilitated by improvisation itself.

I really feel that [when] improvising with the voice we can access emotions, we can access states of being that we don't necessarily want to be in, we don't necessarily want to stay in, but that are real to some extent at certain times in our lives as humans. By being able to play with sound, improvise freely with the sound guiding you into the darker stuff or up into the lighter stuff, all as a means of being present with the emotion whether they're hard to be with or not (Sills, Practitioner).

In order to illustrate this clearly, let us take a moment to create a picture of what improvisation in this context can resemble. What follows is a detailed description of the unfolding of a typical session, including three different improvisation exercises.

ACCOUNT OF AN IMPROVISATION SESSION

As the last group members arrive, others are getting settled. It will be a small group tonight, maybe five or six people. Members are talking a bit before the singing gets under way. They are seated comfortably on cushions on the floor, in a circle formation. Extra cushions, shawls and water are always available. There is a candle lit in the middle of the circle.

When everyone is settled, the group leader begins the session. To start, singers are led to notice their body, posture and contact with the floor. Secondly, the facilitator brings their attention to their breath and they let it become longer, deeper and more

regular. The silence allows them to tune in to themselves, to each other and to the singing they will do together.

The facilitator then leads them into making sounds that resonate within the body in different energy centers (chakras) starting from the root up to the crown. This is the warm-up. It is referred to as “toning.” In this case, it prepares the singers to sing further by focusing their attention in the present moment and in their body.

The exercises begins by singing a sound that will resonate in the root chakra, located in the lower body between the anus and genitals. The sound that resonates there is usually a very low sound and is sometimes a growl. Each person finds their own sound, the one that resonates best for them. They repeat and adjust this sound to feel that it is working to balance and open this area of the body. The vocalization lasts until the singers feel a sense of completion. A few breaths are taken in silence and then sounds are made for the second chakra, two inches below the navel. Focusing on this area, singers let a sound come that will create vibration. The vowel may be different from the first and the pitch is likely to be slightly higher as we move upward in the body. This sound is held until it naturally ends and singers have felt its balancing and opening effect. It is followed by a few breaths in silence. The third sound is based in the solar plexus. Again, it comes intuitively to resonate that area, the vowel and pitch are usually altered, it finds its own resolution and is followed by silence. Following this pattern, singers move through the rest of the chakras -the heart, the throat, the third-eye and the

crown - putting their focus in these different areas and letting the sound vibrate, balance and open them. A free improvisation follows the toning of the seventh chakra, where singers let the voice go and improvise whatever sounds come, in order to create an integration of the exercise throughout the body. The exercise ends with a few moments of silence, to notice the changes that have occurred.

There is then a different type of improvisation which is based on drones. - A drone is a long held note, most often on a low pitch. - Half the group will hold the drone and the other half will improvise together. After the drone is established and stable, the second group begins to sing. They sing freely, whatever comes from within. They can sing low or high, fast or slow, long notes or melodies that they invent as they go along. Singers listen to each other, follow each other and create music together. All this occurs in the moment, and singers strive to be fully attentive, fully present, and within their bodies. They let the music move up and down in intensity until it finds its own conclusion which they all perceive. They then listen to the silence that completes the piece of music.

Lastly, each person takes a turn around the circle to sing their individual improvisation while the others hold the drone. One at a time, they stand in the middle of the circle, feel their center and open their mouth. Although they probably have no idea what's going to come out, they let a melody be born, a song come from within, by following their body and their intuition. They sing until a natural ending occurs and they have said what they needed to say.

LETTING THE SOUND GUIDE

Through this description, it becomes obvious that in the process of improvisation, singers follow their own inner-sense and appear to be guided by it, as Sills suggested in the citation prior to the account. Improvisation appears to be a means through which singers can let live their inner currents. By being guided intuitively by the wisdom of the body and sound, it seems that the singers touch their ability to be in the moment, their own creativity and the joy of singing.

Relinquishing power to the voice and the body and not controlling directly what is being expressed is to let the sound guide. This implies letting go of the cognitive mind, becoming detached from it and following the body instead since “*the body is singing*” (Sills, Practitioner). When the body sings, the sounds come from below the head, from the heart, from the gut or from the center of the self. This is when the sound guides. In this view, the body is not seen as a machine, but as a whole working with the mind. This is emphasized by much of the mind-body literature. For instance, Thérèse Bertherat, in Le corps a ses raisons (The Body Has Its Reasons), repeats that the body is an equal partner to the mind in health and wellness. The body can thus be seen as trustworthy:

It's very liberating to just let the body move and let the sounds come. I'm a very active person, my mind is always busy. It's good to let my body guide, to let my soul guide. I was surprised by some of the things that came out. Maybe I should spend more time consciously stamping my feet (Kingsley, Workshop).

In letting the body express, it seems that an intuitive and somatic type of intelligence is called forth. The sounds are not thought through but are simply allowed to emerge from the body in an intuitive and organic way. This puts forth a different way of functioning which is not validated in our society, as Sheridan points out in his article “Sacred Land - Sacred Stories - The Territorial Dimensions of Intuition.” He adds: “part of why intuition is overlooked can be explained by the very absence of a somatically integrated intelligence in living modern life” (60). On that basis, it seems that intuition could have its roots in the body and be more widely recognized if the body-mind dualism were to break down. In improvisation, this is what occurs, at least in theory. Singers seem to experience a wholistic sense of integration between the body and the mind as the sounds emerge from embodied intuition - an intelligence that lives in the body.

It thus appears that the body has its own form of intuitive wisdom. Most practitioners and workshop participants have experienced this sense of intuitive guidance:

- *“[I feel more connected to spirit after I improvise.] Because of the experience of following my own sense and finding that it is not arbitrary. Finding that it has its logic, tendency, nature, which is not imposed by me [my conscious mind]” (Cameron, Workshop).*

- *“We don’t know every little thing that’s best for us to do and if we’re playful and move around and go with what feels right,*

you're bound to get a lot of better work done" (Marchant, Practitioner).

On that basis, it seems that through vocal improvisation, singers are able to experience a sense of wisdom of their body through sound and movement. When following this sense and letting the body sing freely, the improvising voice seems to guide with an inner sense that knows what sounds need to be sung and which movements need to be made. It could thus become an instrument to create balance or healing. Letting the sound and the body guide intuitively in this way appears to be at the root of therapeutic improvisation itself.

In addition to following the body and sound, being present with them in the moment seems to be another key element. Improvisation exists only in the present. It is immediate. Composition and performance occur simultaneously. Being in the moment could thus be of importance, as Nightingale suggests: *"To really improvise . . . you move with the moment, with presence. So it puts you in that place where you just want to be anyway. And you have the sound that's happening, the sound of being present"* (Nightingale, Practitioner).

The improvisation could enable the singers to be more present in the moment. This could be part of the therapeutic aspects of the experience as it is a central tenet in gestalt therapy: "Power is in the present . . . The therapy experience - individual or in

groups - is an exercise in unhampered living *now*, where topics of past and future activities are no longer of prime consequence” (Polster 7, 11). The same occurs in improvisation: the singers start from the present moment and express what they have to express at that particular time. By being in the moment and vocalizing one’s reality, it could enable a coming together of different aspects of past and future, but in the present.

For instance, following Small, the improvisation could create a situation where singers can experiment with new ways of being and with new relationships, in the present. This could be done through the element of playfulness: “To play is to change the context of communication, to lift it temporarily from the context of the everyday in order to explore the implications of a relationship or set of relationships without needing to commit oneself to it” (Small 63). In our context, playfulness can be described as the act of being guided playfully, freely or gently - as opposed to rigidly - by the sounds that emerge. It can also occasionally be taken to mean the emergence of funny sounds. Playfulness could create a container for free experimentation.

Playing in this way might enable one to contact their inner-child and the sounds that come seem likely to be influenced that person’s childhood experiences, especially that of language acquisition, which takes place during the second year of life. Thus, certain sounds which were encouraged in childhood might be expressed whereas others, which may have been discouraged at that time, could remain hidden. As Lois Bloom and others have shown: “Developments in emotional expression consist of the infant’s gaining control

over the mechanisms of expression and modulating the forms of expression to conform to social and cultural expectations and practices” (Bloom 1993:187). Thus, even in playfulness, certain social and cultural norms may restrict the expression. However, as improvisation could enable one to regress to different periods of childhood, the restrictions may only apply in certain cases, as when one regresses to the age of language acquisition. A detailed analysis of the sound forms that occur in adult vocalizations is needed to determine whether this correlation does exist.

Regardless, it seems that those in this study experience playfulness mainly as a permission to experiment and possibly to experience new ways of sounding and of being. *“Improvisation is lovely because it’s outside. It’s always new, you don’t know what’s going to come and everything is possible”* (Nightingale, Practitioner). That means that all sounds are allowed, that experimentation with funny sounds, high sounds, animal sounds or whistling sounds is all within the range of improvisation. This liberty enables the process to remain flexible as singers explore the range of their voice and discover what their voice is capable of. *“I have discovered that my voice is expressive, good for many kinds of sounds, powerful. I have done things with my voice that have not occurred to me before, and found it very satisfying”* (Cameron, Workshop). Playfulness thus seems to make the process enlivening since there is permission to be children again and to explore whatever sound comes.

A lot of people think that this is a serious practice, that it's sacred - all these different chants and stuff, it's very serious. Playfulness is pretty serious I think. It's pretty serious for us to start having more fun or I don't know what's going to happen . . . (Sills, Practitioner).

In week six of the workshop, we explored one aspect of playfulness. The second half of the session was spent improvising freely on different themes: a jungle scene, a jazz ensemble and a symphony orchestra. Thus, we played with sounds of the jungle (sounds of different animals; sound of the wind in the trees) as well as the sounds of different styles and instruments (different rhythms; different timbres). This activity enabled the singers to explore a variety of different sounds through the voice, without much inhibition. It also stimulated creativity and imagination.

Playing freely with sound seems to provide a playground for one's artistic child as improvisation could stimulate his/her creativity. In The Artist's Way, Julia Cameron discusses how the inner artist is a child that needs to play to create art. The playfulness that improvisation allows could create a milieu that fosters this creativity and brings about creative expression.

In addition, in healing improvisation, it is assumed that every person is creative. For McMillan, this theme of innate creativity is central to his understanding of improvisation. In his view, an exercise such as making up a pair of phrases, attests to each

person's innate creativity: *"I'm very taken with the notion of every human being as a creator, and [improvising] to me is an example of it. [A] pair of phrases is not there until they just appear"* (McMillan, Practitioner). Improvisation could thus enable one to get in touch with this creative aspect of the self and to bring it forth through the voice.

It therefore seems that improvising could provide a creative container for the vocal expression. That the product of the improvisation can be artistic appears to be both a motivating and healing factor. Littlefield experiences the motivating aspects: *"It's a much more fun and productive way to deal with the emotion than not doing it at all"* (Littlefield, Workshop). McMillan sees in it more therapeutic aspects and states that the process of making music from free vocal expression allows *"people [to] begin to make art out of their pain, passion and joy"* (McMillan, Practitioner). In Newham's *Voice Movement Therapy*, this art-making process is seen as enabling a sense of artistic distance. In this view, putting one's life experience in an art-form could enable a therapeutic process. The art itself is seen to become an individual and independent carrier of the artist's feelings which he/she can perform with some distance, thereby make it easier to work through difficult emotions. Whether Newham's view applies to improvisation is difficult to determine, as improvisation occurs in the moment. However, that something creative and constructive is created as the music captures one's inner experience could be significant. This creative expression appears to carry a level of satisfaction and inspiration.

However, making art is not necessarily at the center of this practice. There is no requirement to produce a master work. Rather, emphasis is often on the process of improvisation, not on its product. The experience of singing and of personal expression is at the center and could be enough in itself. According to Sills, the only performance that exists is the inner performance for oneself.

JS: Whatever comes out comes out, just let it be, just do it. That's . . . the whole performance / performer vs. internal performance / performer - outer / inner.

MLS: So singing is an internal performance?

JS Yes, for oneself alone (Sills, Practitioner).

In this light, it seems that improvisation could be considered a healing art, as Marchant suggests: *“it's a healing art. I would not consider it a performing art in any way”* (Marchant, Practitioner). Nonetheless, the creative and artistic elements are a significant part of improvisation. They seem to draw people to this medium and facilitate a healing process.

In addition, people are drawn to singing because many find it enjoyable. This is corroborated by everyone in this study. The practitioners, the workshop participants and the students all say they enjoy singing. The student's questionnaire provides a good example:

Do you enjoy singing with other people (i.e. in the choir, with friends)?				
[5% 2]	NEVER	[18% 7]	SOMETIMES	[39% 15]OFTEN [37%14]ALWAYS
Do you enjoy singing on your own (i.e. in the shower, with records)?				
[0]	NEVER	[11% 4]	SOMETIMES	[34% 13]OFTEN [55% 21]ALWAYS

As a result, singing as a healing medium could be attractive because it has an element of joy inherent in it.

It thus appears that improvisation is an enjoyable and creative means of expression which enables contact to the inner-self by letting the sound guide through its embodied wisdom. It seems to create freedom which can take the singers into a paradigm where all that is authentic is possible. However, defeating the inner-judge appears to be necessary in order to move to this new paradigm.

DEFEATING THE INNER-JUDGE

The inner-judge is defined as an inner-critic judging the voice and its expression. This inner-judge appears to be widely experienced in our culture. However, the evidence suggests that vocal improvisation could be a process through which, by gaining freedom to explore and to play with the voice, these restrictions on expression can be alleviated and an authentic relationship with the voice can be created.

The student's questionnaire suggests that the inner-judge is quite prominent. Although most of the thirty-eight students seem relatively comfortable with their voices,

they all experience this judging inner-voice (with one exception) and very few of them are never self-conscious singing in front of others. In addition, over half of them (58-60%) say they sometimes or never like their voice. When describing their voices, 37% of them (14/38) use the terms weak, needs improvement, scratchy or bad. Some give other terms (11% 4/38) such as untrained, plain and not bad. The other half (52% 20/38) give the positive terms melodic, strong, flexible, responsive.

Are you ever uncomfortable with your voice when you have to speak or sing?				
[26% 10]	NEVER	[37% 14]	SOMETIMES	[29% 11]OFTEN [8% 3]
]ALWAYS				
Do you experience an inner voice judging your voice? (i.e. "That's no good!" or "That's not music!" or "You're off key!")				
[3% 1]	NEVER	[39% 15]	SOMETIMES	[32% 12]OFTEN [21% 8]
]ALWAYS				
Are you self-conscious about singing on your own in front of others?				
[16% 6]	NEVER	[37% 14]	SOMETIMES	[16% 6]OFTEN [32% 12]
]ALWAYS				
Do you like your speaking voice?				
[8% 3]	NEVER	[50% 19]	SOMETIMES	[24% 9]OFTEN [6% 6]
]ALWAYS				
Do you like your singing voice?				
[11% 4]	NEVER	[50% 19]	SOMETIMES	[32% 12]OFTEN [8% 3]
]ALWAYS				

Thus, consistently liking one's voice seems to be the exception. Rather, most students have reservations about it. It could be that they feel restricted by it, as Roy suggests: *"Ce que je pense qui fait qu'on aime notre voix, c'est de sentir qu'on en est pas prisonnière principalement. C'est sentir qu'on la laisse vibrer"* - [*"I think that what*

makes one like their voice is to feel that they are not held prisoner by it. To feel that they let it vibrate”] (Roy, Practitioner).

These results are surprising since a large majority of these students are music majors who sing daily (71%) and that almost a quarter of them are trained singers (24%). Thus, it would seem likely that these musicians would have a positive and harmonious experience of their voices. This is certainly the case for some, but the group is split in half. If half of these students - who are musicians and sing as a requirement for their degrees - are not at ease with their voices, then in general, in our society, it seems probable that quite a large number of people feel uncomfortable vocally.

This could be due to our cultural attitudes toward vocal expression and music. Consider the following contrast between our musical attitudes with those of African societies:

In African societies it is taken for granted, still today, that everyone has the ability not merely to perform someone else’s songs and dances but also to make creative gestures of their own. Through the constant stimulation of the musical faculties that takes place in day-to-day interaction, everyone does indeed develop such abilities. Their social and conceptual world is not divided into the few “talented” who play and sing and the many “untalented” to whom they perform but resembles more a spectrum that

ranges from little musical ability to much, but with every single individual capable of making some contribution to the communal activity of musicking (Small 208).

In our culture, the separation between the “talented” and the “untalented” appears to be significant. It could be that many people have little experience of their voice if at all, and believing that they belong to the “untalented” category, dislike their voice and deny themselves access to it. Not only did half of the students occasionally dislike their voices, this was also the case for workshop members and the practitioners. Out of eleven, six of them said they liked their voice, whereas the other five gave conditions.

Do you like your voice?		
Practitioners	4 - yes	1 - yes but not always 1 - not really
Workshop Participants	2 - yes	1 - usually 1 - sometimes 1 - depends

The inner-critic was also observed in the workshop group, where it is perceived as canceling both play and authenticity, thereby creating a block to free expression. It could be that when the mind is busy criticizing, it is difficult to be in the body and to let intuition come through. For instance, consider the following exchange with Fleming:

MLS - Do you feel your voice is an authentic expression of yourself when you improvise?

JF-Yes, usually. Unless I begin to worry about what others are thinking.

MLS - Do you experience the mind interfering and judging?

JF - Sometimes telling me I'm not doing this right and that it is a strange thing to do.

MLS - Do you experience the mind as contributing to your awareness and your listening?

JF - Yes, usually (when it is not in judgmental mode) (Fleming, Workshop).

This exchange demonstrates how the judgmental mind can bring about a disconnection from the authentic self. It seems that when it is present, it takes the central role and distracts from the improvisation as the singer, dealing with the chattering mind, could be unable to be fully present, to listen or to connect to the body. In addition, judgments seem to easily bring about fear, which further restrict the expression. *"I don't feel that my voice is an authentic expression of myself because I hold back out of fear, fear of judgement mainly, mine and others"* (Kingsley, Workshop). This suggests that the judgmental mind could create a substantial block to a healing experience in improvisation.

However, most of the practitioners and workshop participants seem to have undergone a process which has enabled them to move toward the acceptance of their

voices and the rejection of the critical inner judge. As a result, although both groups did not all like their voices, they used positive terms almost exclusively in their voice descriptions. Also, most of them are comfortable with their voices, rarely experience the judge and are less self-conscious about singing alone than the students. In fact, the practitioners are more at ease with their voices than the workshop participants, who themselves are more at ease than the students. This could attest to the extensive work the practitioners have done with their voices and the process they have undergone, as Marchant's comment suggests: "*Yes [I like my voice]. It took me a long time to say that*" (Marchant, Practitioner).

This process is further confirmed as, through voicework, the practitioners and workshop participants have all felt a move forward in their relationship to their voices. For some practitioners, their voice is at the center of their life: "*the voice has become my primary approach to community, to interaction with people*" (McMillan Practitioner). Others have reported developing more freedom, more confidence, more awareness, more respect for it and more conscious use of it through voicework.

Voicework thus appears to provide a means of developing this relationship with the voice. Roy's experience further illustrates how this process can occur:

*J'aime ma voix, mais si je suis franche, pas tout le temps. En général, oui
 . . . Le timbre de ma voix et tout . . . ça a été ça aussi une victoire à*

faire, parce que quand elle était étroite, toute sous contrôle comme quand j'étais jeune, je ne l'aimais pas. Je me suis mise à aimer ma voix quand j'ai gagné de la liberté au niveau de me laisser aller. . . . Moi mon complexe, c'était de ne pas être assez bien, de [ne pas] prendre le risque, le regard de l'autre était trop . . . j'étais trop marquée par une mère exigeante et qui dans ses propres complexes à elle, . . . [trouvait que] ce qui était bien c'était le son classique. En dehors de ça, tout était pas bien finalement. Alors, dans le contact avec soi, il y a plein de types de sons qui peuvent être . . . plus accordés à ce que l'on ressent vraiment. Alors tout ce qui est plus léger, tout ce qui est musique pour danser, pour s'amuser et tout ça, bien que c'était bien pour les autres, aux yeux de ma mère, dans le sens que ça pouvait être le fun pour danser et tout, c'était pas bien que sa fille fasse ça. Alors tout ça, c'était encore difficile à laisser vivre. Alors des gains sur tout ça, toutes sortes de sons en même temps que des gains sur sortir de l'esthétique du son, au profit du son qui est l'émotion réelle.

[I like my voice, but if I'm honest, not always. In general yes . . . The timbre of my voice and all . . . That also was a victory to make because when it was all tight and under control when I was young, I didn't like it. I started liking my voice when I gained freedom to let myself go. . . . My complex was to not be good enough, not to risk, the look from others was

too much . . . I was too influenced by a demanding mother who, in her own complexes, thought that anything outside a classical sound was no good. However, in the contact with one's self, there are all types of sounds that can be tuned with what we feel authentically. Yet, in my mother's eyes, everything that is light, or dance music to have fun was alright for others but not for her daughter. So all [these types of sound were] difficult to let live. So I have made gains on all that, on allowing all kinds of sounds, on getting out of sound esthetic to get into sound which is true emotion] (Roy, Practitioner).

Roy's process shows how by gaining freedom to express one's inner-landscape through the voice and by letting the voice vibrate more and more authentically, the judgments can be overcome and authentic expression can become more possible. Freely playing with sound in improvisation appears to be particularly instrumental in gaining this freedom: *"C'est le jeu qui va être capable de vaincre le juge critique, sévère [qui nous dit] 'ça s'est bien, ça s'est pas bien. Le jeu aide beaucoup l'authenticité" - ["It is play that will defeat the critical and severe judge [telling us] 'this is good, this is not good'. Play helps authenticity"]* (Roy, Practitioner).

Thus, through improvisation, it seems that a process of relationship can occur: relationship with the voice itself and also with the inner-self that the voice can express and put one in contact with. This corroborates Small's theory, which states that all musicking

is ultimately about relationships:

Musicking is about relationships, not so much about those which actually exist in our lives as about those that we desire to exist and long to experience: relationships among people, as well as those between people and the rest of the cosmos, and also perhaps with ourselves and with our bodies and even with the supernatural, if our conceptual world has room for the supernatural. During a musical performance, any musical performance anywhere and at any time, desired relationships are brought into virtual existence so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist (183).

Small's comments are quite relevant in our context. The evidence supports that a relationship with the self and with the body can be brought into existence as a result of improvisation. As different aspects of the self are expressed and the body is allowed to lead, it seems that this connection does occur. It also seems probable that this connection or relationship, which entails authenticity and self-acceptance, could be considered desirable by those taking part in the improvisation. Small's theory thus appears to provide a strong theoretical framework for this type of improvisation.

However, the theory does not take into account the presence of blocks. Kingsley and Fleming's experience suggests that when the judgmental mind is present, the authentic

expression becomes more challenging. It thus follows that the relationship with the voice, self or body can occasionally be difficult to establish or not occur at all. This difficulty could also result from the resistance brought on by the voice's vulnerability, as was the case for Kingsley in the workshop group. The relationship thus seems to require work and to be an on-going process. The ideal of authenticity and self-acceptance does not appear to be guaranteed to occur.

Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the improvising voice can be a personal and vulnerable instrument that can create access to all the different parts of the self through letting the sound guide and acquiring the liberty to play. Although this liberty can be inhibited by blocks of fear and of judgment, judgment of the sound and of the voice, it could also be a means of getting past these blocks. In doing so, one could access vocal improvisation's healing potential as it is an artistic and vibratory medium that seems to allow profound expression of the self.

Chapter 4

A Context for Singing

The environment and context in which the singing takes place seem to have a direct impact upon its therapeutic potential. Different parameters appear to bring about different healing effects. For instance, the physical environment, the emotional state of the singers, the guidelines for the improvisation, the ritual aspects that enclose it, as well as the presence or absence of others and the leadership style of the facilitator were all observed to affect the overall experience. This chapter will consider these seven parameters around which the experience of vocal improvisation can be built.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Let us first consider the physical environment. There are indications that the set-up, vibration and acoustic of the room as well as the level of comfort and of safety the singers feel have an impact upon the risks they will be willing to take in their improvisation.

The set-up of the room seems to intuitively make an impression upon the singers. If it is neat and calming, with candlelight for instance, the room itself might invite a more positive experience. The physical comfort of the singers is also seen as an important starting point: “*warmth, comfortable chairs or a place to sit that’s cozy*” (Marchant, Practitioner), “*enough space [and] comfortable clothes*” (Cameron, Workshop) all make

a difference. If this is lacking, the discomfort could create a distraction from the improvisation and a barrier to the inner-connection with the self.

Likewise, it seems that how the singers are arranged physically could have an impact. For instance, sitting on the floor in a circle is quite different from standing in a choir formation. The contact among the singers could be facilitated by a circle formation since the singers are able to see each other. The possibility of this visual contact might be significant as “*certain signaux qui pourraient être donnés visuellement*”- [“*certain signals can be given visually*”] (Roy, Practitioner). This could enable a sense of group cohesion and togetherness as well as an egalitarian atmosphere. Thus, it may be that singing in a circle is more appropriate for this type of music making.

The vibration of the room itself could also have an impact upon the experience. Consider Littlefield’s experience of Nightingale’s setting:

In Kaia’s space, I think there’s a lot of energy in that room and that has a lot to do with the way I feel after [singing], as much as the improvisation perhaps. You start to vibrate with that and then you’re total buzz
(Littlefield, Workshop).

Nightingale’s space is often used for meditation and chanting and could thereby vibrate from these activities. Furthermore, Nightingale pays attention to this vibratory

aspect: *“I would do certain things, sometimes I would smudge the room, I’d clear it, I’d put out intentions, all kinds of things”* (Nightingale, Practitioner). Preparing a space in this way could bring about a welcoming feeling that makes people feel comfortable. It thus appears that the energy of the room itself could enable the improvisation.

The acoustic conditions of the room could also facilitate the improvisation. If the room vibrates with the voice, it is physically easier to sing. That *“good acoustics help a lot”* (Grant, Workshop) is mentioned not only by Grant but also by the practitioners Sills and McMillan. McMillan gives his chant workshops in St. Luke’s Church, where there are good acoustics. *“The building gives your voice back to you”* he says to his students. In his teaching, he emphasizes the importance of the partnership between the voice and the space. It could be that in such a space, where the building makes the voices resonate easily, it could also be more tempting to take the risk to sing out, as this support from the building could be tangibly felt.

The room thus seems to help to create an environment in which it is safe to explore the vocal instrument. This sense of safety appears to be essential if the singers are to sing authentically. *“The first thing you need for that kind of environment is safety, feeling safe with the environment you’re in and the people you’re with”* (Anderson, Practitioner). As discussed in chapter three, the voice can be quite vulnerable and the judgmental mind can bring about fear and withdrawal. This suggests that feeling safe, protected and accepted in the environment is of tremendous importance. For instance, in a group

setting, agreeing to share one's voice with others could be dependant upon having a sense that it will be welcomed. When singing alone, the sense of safety could translate as knowing that the environment will not allow undesirable interruptions. In both cases, it seems that if this sense of safety is not present, blocks will occur without delay. For instance, in the workshop group, Kingsley did not feel accepted or safe, was constantly on her guard and was thus unable to sing authentically. *"The lack of relationships within the group added to my feeling of unsafeness and untrusting"* (Kingsley, Workshop). Safety thus seems to be an important base and may be the most decisive factor of a healing experience as vocal improvisation requires an amount of letting go that is not possible in a threatening environment.

EMOTIONAL STATE OF THE SINGERS

The amount of letting go could also be dependant upon the singers' emotional state at that time. If everyone is open and . . .

. . . shares their opening with each other, . . . it creates a very strong, positive, light feeling. [However] it depends on the group and it depends on the night. What it really depends on is the emotional make-up of everyone at that time and how compatible they are (Anderson, Practitioner).

Thus, in Anderson's experience, the group itself is in a constant state of becoming as one's emotional make-up is never the same. It may occur that singers could be tired or upset and find it difficult to get past their blocks. For Anderson, these blocks take the form of emotional turmoil present prior to the singing, which can occasionally prevent him from getting fully involved in the music.

[My mind usually contributes to my awareness and listening], unless there's emotional turmoil that's keeping me from expressing myself in a chant or something. Unless there's something that's already there that's not going to let go where I can access the sort of no-mind space
(Anderson, Practitioner).

Although singing can help move through emotions, it may happen that one's emotional state prior to the improvisation will create a block and a distraction, where the mind will be busy with the turmoil and not able to let go to get immersed in the singing. Preoccupations such as this can create barriers in the group and appear to be another form of block that might occur. The guidelines for the improvisation - the type of exercise that is sung - seems to have an impact on whether or not this block is overcome.

THE GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPROVISATION

Improvisation can be done in various different ways and many exercises have been designed to act as containers for it. The evidence suggests that improvisation exercises

tend to be most efficient when they carry intention, are adapted to the needs of the singers and are simple enough to be accessible. From these bases, the contexts for singing, which may include movement, stillness or soloing, seem to bring about different types of healing experiences.

Intention is defined as the reason behind the improvisation. *“[It is significant to know] what we are doing and why”* (Cameron, Workshop). In the experience of the practitioners and workshop participants, an intention held by the conscious mind helps to focus and direct the improvisation.

The mind gives the parameter and the focus for what the improvisation will represent, where it's going or where you're putting it. The improvisation can have different effects and different roles and that depends a lot on the frame that the mind is giving for it (Littlefield, Workshop).

Thus, holding an intention, even if it is very broad, seems to be an important part of healing voicework. In the course of a session, various types of improvisations can take place, each carrying its own intention. Below are a few examples of intentions around which improvisation exercises can be built. They are taken from the workshop sessions and the practitioners' comments:

- Warm-ups: to warm-up the body and the voice; to create a connection between the voice and the self; to create a connection between the group members.
- Themes: to express or explore a given theme - i.e. love, grace, faith, joy, peace, affirmation (sung in workshop # 4) or jungle, orchestra, jazz band (sung in workshop #6).
- Broad intent: singing “*what is*” as Joyce Fleming did for her solo in workshop #7; singing “*to see what needs to be done*” (Marchant, Practitioner); singing to feel better.
- Specific intent: singing to heal a body part; to connect to light or to spirit; to promote health; to cleanse or release an emotion; to align and balance energy.

These intentions create a package for the improvisation that will take place. The sounds that come up will no doubt be adjusted to what the singing is for. “*In a meditation group, I would be less inclined to start ‘squawking’ like a monkey than I would with my friends, hanging out in the evening*” (Nightingale, Practitioner). The intention thus seems to dictate the overall feel of the improvisation as well as the sounds appropriate to its context. It follows that “cleansing” improvisations will sound and feel very different from those done to connect to spirit.

In addition, it seems that as there are many different types of intention, improvisation can address a wide range of experiences. “*For most kinds of personal need there can be some type of improvisation that will fit and fill that need*” (Cameron,

Workshop). Often, especially when singing alone or in small groups, the improvisation's intention can be chosen to address a felt need. Improvisation can thus be very flexible and adapted to the singers.

In fact, the exercise itself has been observed to be most effective when it is compatible with the singers' needs and emotional state. It seems that the singing needs to be attuned to the singers to facilitate a therapeutic effect. The author realized the importance of this during the third workshop session. She had planned high energy exercises with rhythm, drumming and movement and had not inquired about the group members' inner state. None of the proposed exercises were taken up with energy. Rather, there was a general sense of discomfort. For instance, the group sang one improvisation with body percussion while the author was maintaining a rhythm on a small hand drum. The piece did not last very long, the rhythm did not come together and the discomfort grew. In a group discussion following the session, it transpired that three of the women were menstruating and that everyone had low energy. Thus, the exercise was not adapted to the needs of the members and appears to have brought into play a number of other emotions such as frustration and resistance which added to the feeling of discomfort. Consequently, in the following sessions, the author began by going around the circle and having everyone say a few words about what they were bringing to the group at that time. From then on, the author became much more aware of each person and more flexible in the exercises she proposed. This seems to have been a positive change as the following sessions were much more comfortable in comparison. It thus

appears that the emotional make-up of the members is a dynamic part of the group that must be taken into account by the facilitator (this is further discussed below in the section on the role of the facilitator). The exercises chosen could carry greater healing potential if they are in harmony with the singers themselves.

Also, the exercises appear to be more efficient if they are kept simple and accessible. Having to do too many things at once, or things that feel complicated seems to hinder the sense of safety and activate the judgmental mind. In contrast, a simple exercise could bring about a more focused and intense experience. This was observed a few times in the workshop. The second week, the group did movement in silence followed by movement with sound. The movement in silence seemed to be more centered. Grant remarked: *“if you remove one of the options, it focuses on the movement and makes it more calm”* (Grant, Workshop). Along the same lines, Cameron noted that: *“It is more natural to me to sing while sitting still. More concentration goes into my voice”* (Cameron, Workshop). The need to deal with one element at a time seems to be a recurring theme for Cameron as she experienced the overload of having to do too many things at once a few other times in the workshop. For instance, the fifth week, the group sang an aligning and balancing improvisation holding hands in a circle while sending this energy out. Having to send out the energy was too much for her, she could not do it all. Also, the third week, drumming, movement and singing were combined. Again, all this proved to be too many combined elements not only for Cameron but also for most participants. Nightingale suggested that the elements combined might have been possible

if the warm-up had led to a build-up of energy that made it happen organically, but as it stands, it seems to have been disconcerting to have to move or drum and sing and listen all at the same time, while maintaining a thread of connectedness to the inner-self. From these observations, it seems that keeping the intention and the exercise as clear and simple as possible can enable more concentration to go on the singing rather than on the guidelines. This might thereby be more therapeutic as singers could have their attention on their inner experience and perceive the full impact of the singing.

While keeping this in mind, it is possible to explore different parameters than can be brought into play in improvisation exercises. Movement, stillness and soloing are three ways to create a musical context for healing.

Purposely letting the body move while singing seems to create a context for a particular type of experience. Inviting the singers to move freely through the space while vocalizing or to move slightly in a sitting position introduces a new parameter that could bring about different reactions. *"I don't have any specific idea about what this is going to open up in any person but the moving combined with the sound does create a context in which more things are liable to occur to people"* (McMillan, Practitioner). It could be argued that *different things* rather than *more things* are liable to occur to people since it seems likely that the results change according to the context. For instance, during the second workshop session, when the exercises dealt with movement in silence and movement with sound, the change of parameters brought out different reactions: *"If I*

remained silent [while moving], some things just wouldn't occur to me. The direction to be silent makes different things come than the direction to have sound" (Cameron, Workshop). The same can occur with movement and stillness. When movement is added, another dimension for expression becomes accessible. *"In movement together with voice you're more completely involving the internal artist. You're making a Gesangkunstwerk"* (McMillan, Practitioner). However, as Sills points out, it is difficult to generalize on how this new parameter will impact the healing effects.

[Moving] feels more like I'm trying to shift something, I want to get something moving that I'm not content to just sit down and improvise and go in because I'm feeling restless or something. I have not found, however, a specific recurring experience that occurs when adding movement to the voice (Sills, Practitioner).

Nonetheless, there could possibly be a link between the voice, the expression of emotion and the movement of the body. *"If I'm in my body expressing sound, even in meditation, like healing or whatever, I will tend to ever so slightly rock or move in some way"* (Anderson, Practitioner). For Anderson, expressing emotion involves some movement of the body. Littlefield also has felt this connection:

[We were] doing movement improvisation and using the voice to see . . . if we could locate our emotion anywhere in the body and then use the

voice to express that . . . That kind of specific exercise really brought home to me the connection [between voice, emotion and body] (Littlefield, Workshop).

Therefore, although the experience of voice and movement combined will be different every time and for every person, it seems that it is linked to an emotional expression.

In contrast, the experience of singing while remaining still appears to carry a spiritual connotation. *“I find that the more I connect to the more ‘spiritual’ side, the more still I become”* (Fleming, Workshop). Fleming is not the only one who experiences this link between stillness and spiritual expression:

To me, if I’m sitting, meditating and OM-ing, not moving but just OM-ing, then I’m carrying my awareness with the sound beyond my body, to connect with Source, with Light, with however you want to call it or define it. My awareness is not then in the body, it’s outside of the body and the body is not moving, because the awareness is activating something else (Anderson, Practitioner).

Hence, stillness could bring a heightened awareness to something beyond the self. It might also bring heightened awareness to the sound, to the body and to the self. Stillness might thus be associated with awareness in general, although this is likely to be an

individual matter, as movement seems to also be very natural.

In fact, about half of the participants in this study were more comfortable singing with some form of body movement. Allowing the body to move while singing can be very natural as music itself is based on movement.

Le mouvement, c'est l'énergie de la musique en quelque sorte. . . . La musique n'aura pas un bon mouvement si la personne n'est pas déjà toute ouverte au mouvement, si la personne ne saisit pas ce que c'est un mouvement, ça ne fera pas partie de sa musique non plus. . . . Mais des fois, tu peux être assis et le mouvement peut être subtil, très ressenti de l'intérieur aussi . . . [Tu peux être] toute présente au mouvement intérieur parce qu'il y a du mouvement, on est du mouvement à quelque part, l'énergie c'est du mouvement.

[Movement is the energy of the music. The music will not have movement if the person is not already open to movement or if the person does not grasp what movement is, it will not be part of his/her music . . . However, sometimes, you can be seated and the movement can be very subtle, felt from the inside . . . and the person can be present to the inner-movement because there is movement, we are movement, energy is movement] (Roy, Practitioner).

Thus, stillness and movement appear to be interrelated. Both movement in stillness and stillness in movement were reported in other instances and support Roy's comment. Kingsley experienced movement in stillness in the fifth workshop session when, while lying down, she was singing an aligning improvisation. Although she found the physical stillness challenging, she experienced some movement in her chant: *"I developed a little chant -ooo, eye, oh - probably because that wasn't stationary - and the movement in the singing made it easier"* (Kingsley, Workshop). There thus seems to be movement in vocalizing itself, without any other physical gesture. On the other hand, McMillan perceives stillness in movement, as in a moving meditation.

BM- Certainly the stillness . . . the sounding in one position, is very close to what we think of as meditation, but then we have a lot of Buddhist experience in walking meditation, so I think it just takes it into another dimension. I don't think that one of them is necessarily deeper than the other; it's two ways of entering into that stillness of meditation.

MLS - Stillness even in the movement?

BM- Yes. I think certainly. And that groundedness, that centering
(McMillan, Practitioner).

For McMillan, moving and singing from a centered and grounded place can bring about a sense of inner-stillness. There is thus an interesting correlation between movement and stillness. Although movement seems to be associated with body and

emotion, and stillness with spirit and awareness, they might occur simultaneously. The experience may simply depend on the intention and on where the mind's attention is placed.

Solo singing in a group context is another parameter that can be explored in improvisation. Something quite profound seems to take place when a person takes the risk to sing on their own in a group. Soloing appears to be one of the exercises that brings about the most pronounced reactions. In singing solo, the singer takes a leadership role in the music-making and his/her voice is heard above that of others. Rather than fitting comfortably within the existing texture of the song made by the collective group, the soloist is called to take center stage and to share her/his own song with others. The feelings of vulnerability and of exposure could thus be heightened as we have seen when discussing Kingsley's experience of soloing in the previous chapter. Although she was often holding back, it was when she sang on her own in the fifth session that she withdrew completely. Also heightened seems to be the voice's reflection of the inner-self. When discussing this in chapter three, we drew from Cameron and Fleming's duets in the seventh group session and saw how the inner-self was revealed through the singing. These duets were actually solos with a supporting voice sung in an exposed situation, where the rest of the group was listening. It thus could be that when singing in a particularly exposed and vulnerable situation, the voice becomes even more of a revealing mirror of the inner-self. We could also speculate that a number of issues could be brought to the fore through this process. For instance, issues dealing with space and boundaries can

come up as the soloist is invited to fill the space completely. Also, issues dealing with support and acceptance might arise since generally, the group supports the soloist musically by singing a drone (a long held note), an ostinato (a repeated pattern) or an improvised accompaniment. Hence, singing solo could bring about a more intense experience of improvisation.

Thus, the guidelines for the improvisation seem to create a context for healing to occur. Starting from a base intention, adapted and accessible exercises which can include the parameters of movement, stillness and solos may bring about therapeutic effects.

RITUAL ASPECTS IN VOCAL IMPROVISATION

These effects appear to be further enhanced by what will be referred to as *ritual aspects*, which surround the singing itself. Recurring in the data are the *ritual aspects* of breath, inner-connection, silence and awareness which enclose the experience of improvisation and seem to deepen its impact. They take place prior to, during and following the singing.

The term *ritual aspects* is not meant to imply that improvisation is a ritual per se. In general, following McMillan, “*ritual is patterned activity that’s invested with meaning or intention. It has to be done in a certain order and in a certain way*” (McMillan, Practitioner). From this definition, improvisation is not structured enough to be considered ritual per se. Nonetheless, the structured framework within which it is

undertaken could contain spiritual and sacred elements as in ritual. This is significant since singing involves a level of vulnerability which requires respect:

Il y a une mise à nu qui demande un côté sacré, qui demande beaucoup de respect. C'est certain qu'une session d'improvisation à plusieurs, ça a besoin d'être traité avec respect. Le rituel, [c'est] dans le sens de respect du côté sacré qu'il y a pour chaque personne d'être là et de ce qu'il se bâtit ensemble et de ce qui se bâtit pour chacun.

[There is a nakedness which entails a sacred element, which requires a lot of respect. A session of improvisation in a group has to be treated with respect. The ritual is in the sacred aspect that is there for each person to be there and for what is being built both collectively and individually]
(Roy, Practitioner).

Thus, the ritual elements of breath, inner-connection, silence and awareness could help to frame the sacred aspect of the experience and to ensure its respect. Sills addresses all of these elements in describing a healing session:

In a group setting, beginning centered so that everyone starts in silence, go in, center, place an intent if you want, go into the sound and have the elements of listening and breathing . . . just allowing the sound. When

it's over, just let it sit for a while, doing a little meditation in silence.

Those elements feel like a regular part of what makes a good healing session (Sills, Practitioner).

Following Sills, it seems that all the ritual aspects influence each other and interplay together. Taking the example of the breath, consider Littlefield's experience of its encompassing nature:

I'm very aware of how the breathing is an integral part of it . . . I was very aware of chanting on the outbreath and then taking a long inbreath and being OK with not singing all the time. Mostly about breathing and the sound was coming out as part of the breathing - completely married (Littlefield, Workshop).

Littlefield seems very aware of the breath itself, especially of the connection between breath and sound. There might also be a link for her between breath and silence in the periods where she is not singing. Those times could become like meditation, which is often based on noticing breath during the silence.

Furthermore, this type of conscious breathing seems to be associated with a sense of connectedness and of relaxation:

Breathing - I do a lot of diaphragmatic breathing as I'm improvising in a healing setting - whether I'm just singing full tones, full vowels for full outbreaths or something like that. So I definitely feel more relaxed and centered (Sills, Practitioner).

Breathing could thus enable not only the singing, but also an inner-connection, a meditative silence and a sense of awareness.

Silence prior to and following the improvisation seems to also be significant. The importance of this silence is shared by everyone in this study, both practitioners and workshop participants alike. Silence is seen as an integral and indispensable part of a healing experience. After all, “music begins in silence and ends in silence,” as McMillan often reminds the students in his workshops. In fact, it appears that the silence prior to the improvisation and that following it both have a key role to play.

There are indications that the silence prior to the improvisation prepares the singers for the sound by creating a quiet place of stillness from which to sing. This appears to facilitate the connection to the center of the self and to allow one to be fully present with the sound. McMillan, Roy and Nightingale have mentioned this relationship. Consider Nightingale's comments:

KN: If you're content with silence, then [singing] comes from inside . . .

'I feel to make this sound now, it's not because I need to'

MLS: So it creates the deeper context?

KN: Yes, and the authenticity (Nightingale, Practitioner).

It thus seems that it is out of this focused silence that an authentic and connected expression can come forth.

In contrast, the silence following the improvisation is seen as one of integration, where the body receives the sounds that were made and the healing can take place. This is mentioned frequently in the data. “[Silence is] the time of integration of the energies and experiences that were running through the body intensely” (Cameron, Workshop). Sills elaborates on this point:

In the silence, our bodies are no longer working, we're not active, we're receiving, receptive. It's in those moments that you receive the sound that was created and our body can integrate that and heal and align, so it's really important that silence is an element in any sounding practice in the framework of healing (Sills, Practitioner).

Thus the silence following the improvisation seems to have a different role than that which precedes it.

Silence also appears to add depth to the experience. *“Le silence, c’est ce qui donne . . . de sentir plus en profondeur ce qui s’exprime”* - [*“Silence is what enables one to deeply feel what is being expressed”*] (Roy, Practitioner). This could be taken to mean that, by paying attention to silence, singers could develop a deeper awareness of the impact of the improvisation as its effects seem to be perceived and integrated in the silence.

However, there is no evidence that suggests that one has to wait for silence to perceive the effects of the singing. It seems more probable that they are also felt at the time of the vocalization as well. This sense of awareness could be understood as part of the role of the mind in improvisation.

In fact, when one can move past its disruptive aspects, the mind appears to have an active role to play in supporting the improvisation by being an open and detached observer. *“It takes the conscious mind to pay attention in the body”* (Sills, Practitioner). By paying attention, the mind could allow the singer to become more aware of different aspects of the process. Where the mind’s attention is placed could thus guide the experience:

Where the mind is at any given moment during the improvisation, what it’s focusing on [has a big impact]. Is it focusing on expressing the breath? Is it focusing on a specific part of the body? on finding a rhythm?

on expressing a specific idea or emotion? (Littlefield, Workshop).

Hence, depending on where its attention is placed, the mind seems to allow the singers to become more aware of breath, body, rhythm or emotion, to use Littlefield's example. Various aspects of improvisation could thus be experienced more deeply and more consciously as the mind puts its attention on them.

Accordingly, the ritual aspects of breathing, inner-connection, silence and awareness appear to further the healing effects of an improvisation session by providing a container for the sacred elements that take place. These aspects return in different circumstances, as when singing alone or in a group of people.

SINGING ALONE

Although most of this paper deals with group singing, improvising alone, without anyone else present, appears to also carry therapeutic elements. When singing alone, one has the liberty to let the voice lead without any of the social constraints brought about by the presence of other people. One can thus take their exploration into all kinds of different sounds and emotions that might not feel appropriate in the group context. Thus, it seems that the therapeutic effects of singing alone are different from those of singing in a group.

[If I'm singing alone], I can be as loud as I want or as quiet as I want, I can do whatever, I can stop, I can start and definitely, . . . if I'm alone,

I'll explore things that I would never explore with a group of people, unless I really really knew them. So in a group, it's more of a conscious attempt to align with the group and do the group thing (Sills, Practitioner).

Many people in this study have reported experiencing this sense of freedom in singing alone. Consider Nightingale's experience: *"I wouldn't want to inflict on someone else my irritation and anger, for example. I'd rather put it on my 4-track as a rap thing. I get the benefit of expressing myself without somebody else having to listen"* (Nightingale, Practitioner). It thus seems that the boundaries present or perceived in the group context can become a hindrance when emotions such as frustration or anger come up. Their expression can feel unacceptable in the group whereas they can be expressed freely when singing alone.

The group appears to dictate what is acceptable as each individual perceives boundaries and reacts to them. *"Depending on the environment, you'll only express to certain degrees, and that's a perfectly normal social way of behaving which has to do with respecting other people and the space as well as yourself"* (Anderson, Practitioner). Hence, singing in a group entails a social aspect. The sounds that are expressed are often filtered through the social standards perceived by the singer. Wanting acceptance from the social group could thus sometimes restrict the expression.

Sometimes the judgments come in: Are people listening to me? Do they think I'm singing ok? Am I out of tune? Did I do something that's too loud or off? - the judgments come into that. And it happens when I'm alone too, but not the same kind of sense of social responsibility or shame - wanting acceptance from the social group (Littlefield, Workshop).

However, in singing alone, these restrictions are alleviated. One can follow their connectedness without filtering the sounds through the social filter. In addition, it is sometimes easier to keep a strong inner-connection when no other sounds are heard. *"Sometimes I get distracted by the number of sounds/vibes, because they also come into me and affect me . . . Sometimes it's too much to process everybody else's noises and also keep the thread of my own connectedness" (Cameron, Workshop).*

From these indications, it seems that singing alone, without anyone else listening, could be a personal inner-experience whereas singing in a group could be ultimately a social one, where voices come together to form a larger whole.

SINGING IN A GROUP

Singing brings people together. Improvising in a group of people can be very pleasurable as the voices merge together to freely make music. This coming together can be experienced as a *"more supported, richer sound"* (Fleming, Workshop). There is richness in the combination of different voices, each with its own timbre and color. The

group thus seems to create a context where there is a merging of people and voices that can occur on different planes. There are indications that singers feel a sense of community, meet each other on a profound level, resonate with each other as they sing and experience a sense of unification together.

“Singing in itself creates . . . community. It is a facilitator of an experience of community” (McMillan, Practitioner). Many people in this study have experienced this sense of community. Singing itself seems to bring about a feeling of connectedness with the other singers, as if the group itself became one. In McMillan’s monthly drop-in singing sessions, there are very diverse people from all walks of life who come together to sing. Most of them do not know each other, yet in the singing, McMillan suggests that they come together as a community and that there is a sense of belonging. This in itself could be a therapeutic element.

In improvisation, this sense of community seems to also occur as the group members connect on a different level than the usual social plane. Roy explains this in reference to her improvisation groups:

Pour plusieurs personnes, c’est comme un lieu spécial où ils ont l’impression à chaque soir de rencontrer intimement les gens qui sont avec eux et pourtant ne pas savoir beaucoup de choses de leur vie pratique de tous les jours. C’est au niveau de l’âme que la rencontre se

fait, [c'est] très spécial. Ça, c'est beaucoup partagé par les gens, ce côté profond-là de la rencontre.

[For many people, it is like a special place where, each time, they have the impression of meeting intimately the people they are with and yet, not knowing very much about their practical daily life. It is at the level of the spirit that the meeting takes place. [It's] very special. This profound aspect of the meeting is very much shared by the group members] (Roy, Practitioner).

This sense of profound meeting is also mentioned by Anderson, who sees in it elements of sharing, respect and acceptance of everyone at the spirit level, even among strangers:

There's a sharing of energies, there's an acceptance that happens through improvisation, through singing that isn't dependant, like speech, on the mind interpreting all kinds of structures. There's an acceptance of you as a being, expressing yourself freely, even though I don't know you, I can mingle with you like I would not dare mingle with you on any other level (Anderson, Practitioner).

This respect and acceptance could also bring a sense of support. *"I don't know how to describe it but I feel 'carried' in a sense"* (Fleming, Workshop). It seems that

group members can feel supported by each other or by the sound itself. This suggests that sound could create a feeling of support on a vibratory, physical or interpersonal level. This support could also enable a greater sense of safety, which, as discussed above, appears to be instrumental in creating healing.

From the sharing of voices, resonance was also observed. This is a common thread of group therapy and group singing. Resonance, or to resonate with someone else's sound is to feel their expression waking up something within.

ML- Were you . . . influenced by the sounds of other people?

CK - . . . The sound was resonating with my own being. It was almost like wanting to create an echo at some moments, not an echo necessarily of what they were doing, but an echo of the reverberations within myself
(Kingsley, Workshop).

Although for some people, others' sounds are too much to process, it seems that these sounds can also act as catalysts to bring out one's own inner sounds or feelings. One's reaction to others' sounds could also be a source of information as it is likely to have its parallel outside of the singing group. This is another instance where the voice could act as a mirror of the inner-self. Taking note of these reactions and bringing them into consciousness could be part of a therapeutic process.

However, it seems that the prominent healing ingredient in coming together to sing is feeling connected and unified as a group in such a way that the voices become synchronized. Technically, this sense of connection is referred to as *entrainment*. Entrainment is the principle of two or more close frequencies locking in rhythm with each other. It was first discovered in 1665 by Huygens, who worked with pendulum clocks. He noticed that if he started the pendulums all at different times, they would eventually synchronize their beating or *entrain* with each other. The same kind of synchronization can occur when singing. Most people in this study can perceive it clearly: it is the feeling of “getting in sync,” of tuning to each other, of literally being on the same wavelength. The feeling of community could be explained in these terms. When the entrainment is strong, the whole group seems to move together, as Nightingale describes:

[It feels] unified. . . . [It] dissolves boundaries between people. It allows for extraordinary things to happen, that the whole group is moving together in. It's like formation flying as a pilot, except it just goes by intuition that the sound dies down or picks up or moves in a certain direction (Nightingale, Practitioner).

Similarly, Littlefield views entrainment as a process where the sounds are taking care of themselves. For her, the alignment of the group members allows a piece of music to be brought into existence, almost as a miracle.

It seems like we're not willfully creating what's happening in the improvisation, it's just the fact that the voices meld together . . . We're becoming a joint, communal vessel for expression of this thing . . . I have a certain awe at how things are coming together in ways that I have so little control of . . . If I'm singing alone, I can get that sense of flow, but it's still just me producing it, there isn't this kind of added miracle of everyone doing that and it's somehow creating . . . one kind of cohesive thing that's bigger than the sum of its parts (Littlefield, Workshop).

This sense of unification or of entrainment, from which a creation is born, is, in Anderson's view, the very center of group improvisation and of its healing effects:

Entrainment is, as far as I'm concerned, what improvisation in a group is about. It's about creating a dynamic where everyone is playing a part in a greater theme which everyone is contributing to developing as it's happening . . . there's a communion that happens and in that communion there's healing (Anderson, Practitioner).

In addition to the entrainment, a number of other interpersonal factors could also be of importance. In Marchant's experience, it is entrainment coupled with these other factors - acceptance, sharing, resonating - that together enable healing:

I don't think it's solely entrainment but it is a sense of getting in tune. People literally tune to each other. But it's also the very active listening to each other in a deep way that causes people to feel better because they're open and actually listening and receiving and expressing, which is a very vulnerable thing to do. You're in a group expressing your being and receiving theirs. And I know that entrainment does happen as far as tonally speaking and energetically speaking, but I think it's also a lot of other little factors, just interpersonally, between humans, getting to this vulnerable junction, that relationship (Marchant, Practitioner).

Group singing thus appears to bring about a deep sense of connection and of relationship. Through the entrainment and all the other interpersonal factors that take place in the group, the singers can sometimes feel a deep sense of connection, not only with themselves but also with the group.

This theme of relationships takes us back to Small's theory which states that through musicking, relationships are brought into existence, especially those that the people taking part consider to be desirable. Certainly, what seems to occur in group singing can be considered desirable as singers come together and share sound in a context of safety and acceptance. Group improvisation thus appears to corroborate this aspect of Small's theory, at least in terms of relationships among people. It could also extend beyond interpersonal relationships to a sense of connectedness with something of a

spiritual nature. It could be that, with the group process and entrainment at the base, these other levels of relationships are enabled. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

However, bringing into being these desirable relationships does not appear to occur consistently. In reality, the blocks that are so prominent with the voice do come into play at various times. The inner-connection is not always as strong, resistance and fear have an impact, as do the circumstances of the day. Thus, some groups come together more easily than others. For instance, in the workshop, since Kingsley constantly felt judged and defensive, her resistance affected the entire group dynamic. Following Posthuma's work on group process, it appears that wanting to belong is a normal initial stage in the development of any group. However, the workshop group seems to have remained in this stage for a large part of the sessions. Kingsley's uneasiness made it difficult to move to a more comfortable dynamic.

If you have a lot of people that are not comfortable with expressing themselves, for each one of those, there's a barrier . . . One excluded person that feels disappointed and not good enough will affect the energy of the whole dynamic, whether it be apparent or not. That healing space, that feeling of safety will, to some degree, have been violated (Anderson, Practitioner).

This barrier was heavily felt in the small workshop group which varied between 4-6 people, depending on the week. Through her resistance and lack of trust, Kingsley felt the energy of the group to be “*flat . . . [and] disconnected*” (Kingsley, Workshop). As leader, the author mostly felt a heaviness and a resistance around Kingsley that created a barrier in the overall group. Thus, the group never came together completely, and it was rare to feel the sense of togetherness or of entrainment. In contrast to Small’s theory, the relationships brought into existence in this context were not necessarily desirable or comfortable.

What is striking, however, is that although the relationships could be uncomfortable, there seemed to remain a striving to reach a group unity and to get in sync with each other in the workshop group. Through the resistance, reaching for the desired experience and relationships might have persisted. The striving itself could thus be a worthy relationship - one where the group together tries to move through the blocks. The sense of connection did finally occur in the workshop group, but only in the last session, when Kingsley was unable to attend.

The experience of entrainment and relationships of connection and communion appear to be at the core of the healing that can take place in group improvisation. This occurs not only through the openness of the group members, but could also be facilitated by the leader of the group who has a marked influence on how the process develops.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FACILITATOR

In fact, it seems that the leader has a large effect on the development of any given session. Following Posthuma, it is likely that the leader's general disposition and emotional state has an impact: "It is important to realize that the leader, by virtue of his/her status, has the power to influence the emotional climate of the group" (Posthuma 44). This was observed in the workshop group, where the author's inner-state appears to have influenced the overall process. The most striking example is the third week, when the proposed exercises were not flowing. The author's inner-state prior to the session was very troubled. As the session went on and it became apparent the planned activities were not appropriate, she experienced a feeling of disconnectedness and of helplessness. Her perception is that these feelings impacted greatly on how the session developed. Since she found it difficult to center herself, the entire group felt off-center. Members in the group experienced this as well. This became apparent in the discussion at the end of the session. At that time, the author started to better understand the role of the facilitator which seems to include a sense of leadership in creating safety, protection, comfort and motivation to the group members as well as being adaptable and flexible to each individual situation.

The importance of safety has been discussed above. It seems that the facilitator can help to create this sense of security. "Holding the space" could be a way to do this. "Holding the space" entails containing the group so that the members feel they are in a protected place. To enable this, the leader could check up on everyone regularly to make sure that everyone is feeling comfortable and involved in the singing. Being open and

receptive to everybody's voice and singing, accepting all the sounds that are uttered and supporting the process by encouraging, nudging, directing and guiding the participants in their singing seems to also be part of creating safety. It could be that by doing this, the leader emanates permission to the group members to express themselves authentically.

[The leader's role is] to remove fear, because people are always so connected to fear about their voice, especially in group, especially in improv, especially when a) there's no rules, b) you can't break them, c) you can't sound bad, d) it's impossible to suck and e) no one is marking you on this. To let people know that everything is permissible (Marchant, Practitioner).

This permission appears to contribute a great deal to the feeling of safety that is the base of risk-taking in improvisation.

Safety can also be ensured through the leader's direction of the exchanges that take place in group interactions. As judgmental interventions sometimes occur, both verbally and nonverbally, the leader's role seems to include being a group "referee," in a sense. Directing the exchanges so that everyone in the group is respected could be significant, as Roy suggests:

Des fois quelqu'un peut s'exprimer en prenant l'autre à charge, il ne veut pas nécessairement faire mal à l'autre . . . c'est de ramener . . . des habiletés de communication . . . chacun est en recherche de ce qu'il ressent, laissant aux autres le même privilège.

[Sometimes, someone can express something that can hurt another group member . . . [the leader's role] is to bring back communication skills . . . everyone is searching for their inner feelings leaving others the same privilege] (Roy, Practitioner).

Communicating clearly and mediating the exchanges could also enable the group to progress. This was difficult in the workshop group, since, although the author could feel Kingsley's uneasiness, she did not know how to deal with it since nothing was ever said verbally and the origin of the discomfort was not evident. This task thus appears to be very delicate.

Feeling safe could also be related to people's knowledge and understanding of what is going on. In Nightingale's experience, that the leader clearly explain the rules could have an impact.

That people know that they can stretch out and move out, whatever, that there's thermoses of tea in the kitchen they can help themselves to at any

time, where the bathroom is, there's a lot of things for physical comfort, and that people know what the rules are (Nightingale, Practitioner).

In addition, also important in the leader's role seems to be explaining the exercises clearly, bringing a cohesion in the intention and adapting the guidelines as the process unfolds to suit what is going on. *"[The leader] will probably be the one to help initiate the process and also help recognize when the process has done its time or when it's time to initiate a change"* (Anderson, Practitioner). Anderson's comment suggests that the leader has to be flexible, "reading" the group constantly and addressing and adapting to what is going on. For example, in the fifth workshop session, when the group sang with ostinato, the author slightly altered someone's ostinato pattern because their initial one would have been too difficult to follow. Doing that ensured the success of the exercise itself. It could be that by being present in this way, the leader creates a safety net which might enable the participants to get past their mind and immersed in the singing. *"[The facilitator] is there, their mind is there to address other minds in the room so we can get on with commuing!"* (Anderson, Practitioner). The communion could thus occur more easily when the leader is trusted and the participants feel safe enough to let go.

Lastly, the facilitator's role seems to include the ability to inspire - to transmit the desire and the joy of singing to others.

[L'animateur doit avoir] les qualités humaines pour faire vivre et déclencher chez l'autre, le plaisir de risquer, avoir suffisamment de feu pour transmettre aux autres." . . . pour animer des groupes, il faut vraiment être passionnée, avoir cette habileté à passer le contenu d'une façon vraiment dynamique.

[[The leader has to have] the human qualities to bring about and let live, in another person, the joy of taking a risk . . . have enough fire to transmit this to others . . . To lead a group, one has to be really passionate, to have the ability to convey the content in a really dynamic way] (Roy, Practitioner).

This aspect can be significant as it might affect the involvement of the group members. If the facilitator can communicate an enthusiasm, passion and awe for the process, it seems probable that the group members will perceive this energy and will want to improvise. This enthusiasm could be like a springboard for the whole process.

The evidence thus suggests that the group process is affected by the leader's overall attitude and openness. By creating safety, protection, comfort and motivation, and by being adaptable and flexible, a good leader could foster the therapeutic components of group improvisation.

To conclude, it seems that the contexts for singing are many, all of which interplay with each other to facilitate a healing experience through vocal improvisation. The contexts can be created by the physical environment, the emotional state of the singers, the guidelines and the intention for the improvisation itself, the presence of other people and the stance of the facilitator in a group. All these elements appear to have an impact not only on the therapeutic effects of the improvisation, but also on what type of effects will occur, if any.

Chapter 5

The Therapeutic Effects of Vocal Improvisation:

Body, Emotions, Mind, Spirit

The participants in this study have experienced therapeutic effects of vocal improvisation on various levels. Singing appears to have an impact on different aspects of the body-mind system. Effects on the physical and energetic body, on the emotions, the mind and the spirit were all found in the data. This chapter examines the experience of the practitioners and workshop participants in terms of each of these components and occasionally refers to the students' questionnaire. It also addresses other effects that were mentioned as well as the length of these effects. Some of these effects could occur not only in improvisation but through singing and sound in general.

Prior to this discussion, it is important to remember that singing in itself is not what is healing. Music has no moral as R. Murray Schafer suggests in Voices of Tyranny, Temples of Silence: “[Music] may heal wounds or induce them; it may bond people together or segregate them; it has served political demagogues and commercial entrepreneurs as well as it has served holy men and rainmakers” (Schafer 1993: 146). Thus, music is not necessarily therapeutic. For instance, in Nightingale's experience, songs can engender a variety of reactions:

“You can change your state of consciousness both ways. If a sage, in the pinnacle of exalted enlightenment wrote a song and you sing that song whether you believe or not, there is some essence of who he is that’s coming through the song. And if you have a politically angry [song], it carries that too” (Nightingale, Practitioner).

This is further supported by Anderson, who applies it to the effects of improvisation:

The vibration [of the sound] brings opening and elation; a sense of healing or a sense of concentration; or a sense of depression: [it] depends on what direction you’re sending in. But it’s a whole gamut from physical well-being to emotional well-being or not (Anderson, Practitioner).

It thus seems that the effects of vocal improvisation are not guaranteed or automatic, nor are they the same for everyone. All participants in the study have their own unique experience of improvisation. There are indications that each person’s personality, interests and life experience brings about unique effects. For instance, Sills experiences the body and the physical component as central to the experience. In contrast, Nightingale, through her interest in spirituality and meditation, seems to experience the spiritual effects more prominently. Thus, effects may or may not occur and are not necessarily experienced in the same way or in the same intensity by all singers.

Furthermore, although music may not be healing in itself, it seems to acquire a therapeutic component when it takes place within certain contexts. As seen in chapter four, there are indications that a framework of acceptance and respect can enable a therapeutic singing experience. Thus, in the following discussion, it will be presumed that the improvisation takes place within such a context. Although obviously this is not always possible and blocks come into play, assuming that the framework for singing is conducive to healing is necessary in order to isolate the benefits of vocal improvisation, which appear to occur mainly in those contexts.

THE EFFECTS ON THE PHYSICAL BODY

The effects on the physical body can occur on various levels as singing is a physical activity which seems to bring not only relaxation and release, but also the sensation of a physical vibration in the body which can be directed to specific places and which can occasionally create physical healing.

Singing is essentially a physical process: the body is the support of the voice and participates actively in vocalization. *“If I sing or speak, it’s really the same voice but one is being held - what’s going on to hold that note is a process within my body that is singing”* (Marchant, Practitioner). The body is thus the starting point of all singing and has an impact on voice production. The more the body is healthy and able to support the voice, the stronger the voice is. It may also be, as Roy explains, that the body allows the vocal process to be taken further:

Plus la personne va être consciente de son corps, de son squelette, de son corps comme instrument, puis va avoir une attitude d'être en disposition d'ouverture pour travailler sur tous les aspects de ce que ça veut dire - la respiration, la présence au mouvement, d'être bien centré, d'être autant en connexion avec ses jambes qu'avec son tronc qu'avec son coeur. Plus loin ça va pouvoir aller dans aider l'outil vocal. Le corps c'est le soutien à la voix.

[The more the person is aware of his/her body and skeleton, of the body as instrument, with an openness to work on what that entails - breathing, being present in the movement, well centered and connected as much to the legs as to the torso as to the heart - the farther he/she will be able to go in helping the voice. The body is the support of the voice] (Roy, Practitioner).

Inversely, singing can also affect the physical body. Vocalizing can require a large amount of energy which, in some cases, can feel like a real workout:

Si . . . je suis dans une soirée très rythmique où tous les exercices visent à stimuler le rythme, c'est comme si j'étais allée faire du jogging après . . . La pratique de l'improvisation vocale . . . c'est en même temps un travail sur le corps physique. Alors, c'est vraiment très physique.

[If . . . I am in a very rhythmic evening, where all the exercises aim to stimulate rhythm, afterwards, I feel like I have been out jogging . . . Vocal improvisation works on the physical body as well. It is very physical] (Roy, Practitioner).

Singing in itself is thus a form of physical activity. This may account for the general feeling of relaxation and calm that seems to accompany singing. For instance, a large number of the students feel this physical effect. Twenty-eight of them (68%) used the following body related terms to describe how they feel after singing: “in your body,” “breathing better,” “relaxed” and “calm.”

How do you feel after you have sung?			
[18] relaxed	[14] calm	[5] self-conscious	[1] tense
[4] breathing better	[20] feel better	[0] feel worse	[11] freer
[2] in your head	[3] in your body		
other: [3] happy, [1] emotionally charged, [1] nothing			

The words relaxed and calm were also used by the practitioners and workshop participants. This appears to be a general physical effect that occurs when singing. The evidence suggests that the physical act of singing may allow a certain release in the body.

In addition, since sound is vibratory, singing creates vibrations that resonate in the body. These vibrations occur not only in the throat or the mouth, but all through the

body and without being intended. Although they can be very subtle in certain areas, they are present nonetheless, being a physical reality. It could be speculated that these vibrations are also part of the relaxing and calming effect that people experience in singing.

In improvisation, becoming aware of these vibrations seems to be part of the process. All of the practitioners are able to tangibly feel the vibrations in their bodies, sometimes even down their legs or to the tip of their fingers: *“When I’m really really into it, it kind of feels like I’m wearing a space suit because I’m so aware of the whole body and I’m making sounds at the same time. [It] is like a channel, like a peripheral awareness all around my body”* (Sills, Practitioner).

This level of awareness can sometimes heighten the sensation of the vibrations. This is postulated by Linklater who, in Freeing the Natural Voice, explains that becoming aware of body and of the voice’s vibration enables one to increase the resonance of the voice. McMillan has a similar experience: *“the ability to perceive [the vibrations] somehow seems to extend, strengthen and amplify that resonance”* (McMillan, Practitioner). This could explain Sill’s feeling of wearing a space suit: the vibrations may be amplified by his awareness of them.

From this awareness, it seems that singers are sometimes able to direct the vibrations to specific parts of their bodies, through their intention. All of the practitioners

are able to do this. *“I can direct the sound pretty much anywhere”* (Sills, Practitioner). The workshop participants, although they also have an awareness of the vibration in their bodies, seem to be less proficient at directing the sound. Learning to direct sound in the body could thus be an ability to acquire. A certain amount of practice appears to be needed to develop that ability.

Furthermore, directing sound in the body can occasionally have a healing effect on a physical level. For instance, McMillan was able to alleviate the angina he experienced as a result of a heart crisis by toning for his heart.

The physical condition of angina is blockages in the arteries and in my case, at any rate, a certain inelasticity in the artery walls which under the stimulation of the sound could relax and allow freer passage of blood. If I did that once a day, at that particular time . . . it got over that period when after a night of inactivity the thing was all tight again, it would loosen things up or something like that (McMillan, Practitioner).

Thus, he found that when he sang for his heart, it *“forestalled the development of angina for a day usually”* (McMillan, Practitioner). Through the singing, he felt *“a kind of an opening in the center of my chest, kind of a softening there, an opening . . . and then something like an infusion of something like warmth . . . all through the thoracic cavity”* (McMillan, Practitioner). From there, he did not experience pain in his chest that

day.

In his free vocalization, he would put his hands on his heart, create a connection to it and ask it for a sound that could heal it. He then sang, usually holding one note for a period of time.

There was usually one sound. It wasn't always the sound that first came, there would sometimes be a false start or two and then something just felt right and it seemed to go on effortlessly and almost as though I didn't breathe. Of course I breathed, but it was so effortless that you didn't even notice breathing (McMillan, Practitioner).

Joanne Marchant, who works one on one with clients, has also noticed this effect: *"when you hit the right note for the right thing for the right person and the healing is really working, you can feel it, then the note will go forever"* (Marchant, Practitioner).

Thus, this sense of effortlessness seems tied to physical healing. Through intention, the note that intuitively feels right sometimes can send its vibration to heal the body. McMillan often says that he has never found anything that works better than just asking the body. Doing so keeps the vocalization flexible, free and intuitive. The notes are improvised based on a physical feeling. Also, it seems that only one note is necessary and that the vibration of that note will be enough to enable the healing. This is in contrast

with when singing is done for other purposes.

In addition to McMillan, Grant has also had a physical healing experience. Through toning in a workshop setting, her knees, which had been swollen for nine years, were healed. However, although physical healing can occur, it does not seem to be prominent as only two participants in this study have had physical healing experiences. McMillan notes that physical healing through sound is not necessarily for everyone and warns: *“I’m not prescribing this for everybody or for all types of angina”* (McMillan, Practitioner). Physical healing thus seems to occur only in certain cases.

Nonetheless, some people experience a direct link between their voice and their cells. In addition to McMillan and Grant, Anderson and Kingsley also have a concrete sense of this physical connection. They can sing to connect to their body, to help it heal itself or to release something on a cellular level. *“I . . . use it in the shower, if I’m connecting with the water and I want to heal my body or remind it that it wants to cultivate health or [heal] any weak parts, then I communicate with those cells, with the whole body actually, through the sound”* (Anderson, Practitioner). Kingsley does something similar: she uses her voice *“to loosen and sometimes release ancient stuck bits from my cells”* (Kingsley, Workshop). This can be understood when considering the theories on cellular memory, for instance. Singing could set cells into vibration, thereby allowing “stuck bits” to be released from them. Such a direct link between the voice and the cells can be experienced by some people when working with sound.

The sound healing literature offers some hypotheses as to why sound may contribute to physical healing. Physicians working with sound in this way understand the body as a vibrational system since the pulses of the heart, the breathing rate, the brain waves and the blood through the vessels are vibratory occurrences. Some researchers believe that each organ vibrates at a certain healthy frequency. In their view, disease arises when the healthy frequency is altered and healing takes place by restoring the healthy frequency to the organ, by means of entrainment. Oncologist Dr. Mitchell Gaynor states: "healing can be achieved by restoring the normal vibratory frequency of the disharmonious - and therefore diseased - parts of the body"(17). The hypothesis is that since sound is an organized structure, it will encourage the body to reorganize itself in a healthy way.

Experiments, especially those of Swiss scientist Hans Jenny, show how sound can be perceived as an organizing principle. Jenny pioneered the field of cymatics, the study of wave phenomena. His experiments consisted of taking a steel plate, placing a substance on it such as sand, salt or oil, placing a crystal underneath it and under the crystal, a sound vibration. His results show that every different substance creates its own unique intricate shape. This shape is constantly in motion and changes depending on the pitch of the sound vibration. Jenny has photographed, documented and published a large number of these shapes (1974). As Beaulieu remarks, Jenny's work is "an example of sound organizing matter"(Beaulieu 38).

Another hypothesis present in the literature is the concept of the vibratory micro-massage. This may be applicable to McMillan's experience. According to this view, the vibration of the sound can set cells into motion thus massaging them on a micro level. McClelland considers this especially relevant when using the voice: "Our internal organs support the sound of our voice and simultaneously receive the benefits of a vibratory massage"(77). It would thus follow that directing the sound in the body could be beneficial on a cellular or molecular plane.

Apart from physical healing, another observed effect of singing on the physical body is a growing awareness of the voice's embodiment. As Littlefield suggests, this consciousness could begin by becoming aware of the physical vibrations that the voice causes within the body: *"It's the breathing and the vibration that make it very embodied"* (Littlefield, Workshop). The data shows that feeling the voice rooted inside the body and resonating from within brings a number of other benefits. The practitioners have reported the following effects:

- groundedness
- comfort
- nourishment
- reassurance
- security
- sense of physical incarnation
- peripheral awareness around my body

- assurance
- power (X2)

Roy elaborates on the sense of security and reassurance:

C'est rassurant parce que dès qu'on connecte au corps, [qu'on] augmente dans la présence du corps [et qu'on] est suffisamment ancré dans le corps pour [en] sentir toutes les parties, le premier état c'est un état de sécurité. C'est . . . comme un arbre: . . . tu sens tes racines, . . . ton tronc et . . . les bras . . . comme des branches, alors le premier sentiment c'est un sentiment de sécurité parce que c'est comme si tu as un sentiment d'exister. Il y a un sentiment plus solide de ton incarnation physique. Donc ça rassure.

[It is reassuring because as soon as we connect to the body and become aware of it, when we are sufficiently stable in it to feel all its parts, the first state is a state of security. It is like a tree: you feel your roots, your trunk and your arms as branches, then the first feeling is a feeling of security because it is the feeling of existing. It is a more solid feeling of your physical incarnation. So it's reassuring] (Roy, Practitioner).

Furthermore, a sense of empowerment could stem from this basic sense of security. Both McMillan and Roy speak of a sense of assurance and power that grows out of the embodied voice. *“Quand tu te sens plus en chair, en os, en vitalité, il y a un sentiment de pouvoir qui vient . . . ça te donne un sentiment de capacité, d’agir, et de ce sentiment d’agir là, un goût de créer.”* - [“When you feel more vital, in flesh and bones, there is a feeling of power that comes [from that] which gives a capacity to act, a desire to create”] (Roy, Practitioner).

Thus, the embodied voice could be understood as a way of being. The practitioner’s experience suggests that if one feels centered, grounded and connected in their voice and in their body, they could be able to take this outside of the improvisation into the social world. There, the embodied voice could become an audible and resonating presence, as is the case for Anderson. *“It feels like [my voice is] a carrier of my identity in a sort of physical way. It is part of the expression of who I am in my body and it’s the resonating part of that. It’s part of my presence”* (Anderson, Practitioner).

However, there was a striking difference between the comments of the practitioners and workshop participants on this matter. The workshop participants did not experience this sense of security, comfort, power or action. Rather, they speak mostly of an awareness of the vibrations in the body. Also, Kingsley’s comment seems particularly relevant: *“I feel that my voice is not as of yet embodied within my body, but it’s closer now”* (Kingsley, Workshop). On that basis, it would appear that feeling this sense of

embodiment could be an ongoing process. Since the practitioners have worked extensively with their voices, it could be logical that they have come to a more elaborate concept of the voice's embodiment. Therefore, it could be the case that as one sings and improvises more and more, the consciousness of the voice and of its root in the body could grow.

It could also be speculated that having an embodied voice might be related to other aspects of the self. For instance, if one feels emotionally centered, it might be easier to be aware of a centered voice; if one feels connected to their spirit, this may translate in how the voice resonates physically. It could be that embodiment is the ultimate goal, when everything comes together in the body, although this would need to be explored further.

There thus seems to be ample evidence that the physical process of singing, where the voice is supported by the body at the same time as it gives it an internal massage through its vibration, can bring about a number of physical effects ranging from relaxation and calming through the physical activity, to physical healing through directing the vibration to a specific part of the body and to groundedness, security and empowerment through the feeling of embodiment.

THE EFFECTS ON THE ENERGETIC BODY

In addition to these physical effects, the energetic body also appears to respond to the vibration of sound. The energetic body is defined as the magnetic field which envelops

the physical body. Although these energetic changes are of an intangible nature, they have been observed consistently and have been experienced by all of the practitioners and workshop participants. This is sometimes perceived as vibration and opening in certain energy centers of the body, as visual effects or as a movement of energy capable of creating therapeutic change.

A key center for feeling these energetic changes appears to be the heart area, as it is the most mentioned by those in this study. Both practitioners and workshop participants have a sense of resonance or vibration in the heart.

- *“The heart is for me the center of resonance”* (Anderson, Practitioner).
- *“Usually [I] sense a kind of vibration around the heart”* (Fleming, Workshop).
- *“[I feel the vibrations] in the heart, very strongly”* (Nightingale, Practitioner).
- *“My heart energy field widens”* (Kingsley, Workshop).

The sense of vibration was also found to occur in other areas of the energetic body:

- *“My root chakra loosens”* (Kingsley, Workshop).
- *“I get a lot of energy above my head and in my head and around, to the point that by the end of the chant group, often I’m really spaced out, just like open open open”* (Nightingale, Practitioner).

The area that will vibrate seems also to be dependant upon where the sound is directed. For example, the chakra toning exercise described in chapter 3 requires the singer to direct their attention, intention and sound to a specific area of the energetic body in order to balance and align that part. In that specific exercise, singers might feel a vibratory effect in the chakra where they are directing the sound. It could thus be possible that directing the sound enables an energetic change.

As Nightingale's citation above suggests, this energetic change could be experienced as a sense of openness in different areas of the body. Opening energetically can feel like a vibration coming from the area that is being opened and expanding outward. This vibration can sometimes create a sensation of radiant energy which affects one's overall state by making it more open and centered in general.

It could be that, as was speculated with regard to the embodied voice, the feeling of energetic opening could have wider implications. If we consider the qualities of the different energy centers (chakras) in Hindu thought, correlations could plausibly exist between the opening of these centers and overall attitudes. For instance, since the heart chakra is associated with love and healing, its opening could bring these types of changes; since the third eye chakra is associated with intuitions, its opening could make room for them to emerge; since the crown chakra (top of the head) is associated with enlightenment, its opening could create changes in consciousness on a spiritual level. The

effects of improvisation on emotions, mind and spirit could thus possibly be related to an opening in the energy. However, these correlations still need to be established through research.

Another effect that was observed in the data is of a visual nature. Nightingale and Roy both attest to having experienced these effects. Nightingale often sees white light all over: *“everything [is] sort of bathed over. I can still see the forms but everything [is] sheemy That’s sort of like normal for me”* (Nightingale, Practitioner). Also, Roy sees blue light between her eyebrows: *“Si je fais des pratiques de son les yeux fermés . . . je vais voir beaucoup de lumière bleue à l’intérieur” - [“If I practice eyes closed, I will see a lot of blue light from inside”]* (Roy, Practitioner). It could be that, since both sound and color are vibratory, light could result from the vibration of the sound. One might see light or color when a vibratory center is opening, for instance.

In addition to experiencing openness or vibration in specific areas, the improvisation was also found to bring about a more generalized change of energy within the body. Singing seems to create a movement of energy that both practitioners and workshop participants have observed:

- *“Usually my energy feels brighter [after singing]”* (Marchant, Practitioner).
- *“I often feel surges of energy through my body”* (Cameron, Workshop).

- *[I feel] energy in [my] magnetic field (aura)*” (Fleming, Workshop).

Furthermore, Roy’s experience suggests that singing could help to circulate or to augment this energy (or “Chi” in Chinese thought).

C’est pas long qu’après avoir chanté beaucoup de sons [l’énergie] circule mieux. Il y plus de chaleur dans les mains, . . . une plus grande sensibilité, des picotements, ce qui équivaut au Chi quand quelqu’un fait du Tai Chi. Alors conduits d’une façon connectée, les sons donnent vite cette même impression que faire du Tai Chi, d’avoir vraiment plus de Chi.

[It is not long after having sung that the energy circulates better. There is more heat in the hands, more sensibility, tingling, which amounts to the Chi when someone does Tai Chi. Thus, if sung in a connected way, sound can quickly give the same impression as doing Tai Chi, to really have more Chi] (Roy, Practitioner).

A number of people in the study have experienced this type of tingling in the hands, but this effect seems to be less prominent for them than the general sensation of the movement of energy. However, that it occurs may be an indication that this movement does take place.

Also, this energetic movement is experienced in the silence following the improvisation. The silence could also be a time to direct the energy in the body: *“I often have energy piling up in my head, which I can only move through when I become silent”* (Cameron, Workshop). The silence could thus allow for integration of this energy, as we have seen in chapter 4.

Marchant proposes that this movement of energy could be at the base of the healing process that occurs through improvisation. In her understanding, energy is of a spiritual nature and is what enables the healing:

[Spirit] is the mortar if the work you're doing is building a wall. . . . If you're a baker, it's the dough. The spiritual component is what does the work, . . . [it] is the movement of energy. The voicework is the guy kneading the dough, moving the energy, shaking it up, getting something happening. The material itself is spiritual energy I believe, even if the people doing the work may not be spiritual themselves. I mean energy is energy, you can call it spiritual or you can call it the vibration frequencies of molecules or atoms, it's all the same thing, I call that spirit (Marchant, Practitioner).

Thereby, the movement of energy could enable the healing process by engendering movement on other levels, be they physical, emotional or spiritual. This leads us to

ponder upon how improvisation is related to all aspects of the self simultaneously. As was discussed in relation to the opening of energy centers and the embodied voice, there are probable links among the different dimensions of the self. The movement of energy could also play a role in this body-wide phenomenon, although the level of complexity involved in this simultaneity prevents the making of any definite conclusions on this matter.

Nonetheless, there are indications that singing carries energetic effects which range from the opening of different energy centers such as the heart, to visual effects, to the perception of a more generalized movement of energy within the body. These effects have been experienced in one form or another by the totality of the improvisers in the study.

THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

Improvisation seems to also create change on an emotional level. By allowing the expression and the exteriorization of emotion through sound vibration, improvisation can allow a movement of emotion which can be cleansing and balancing; it can create a safe package in which all emotions can exist; and it can be the basis of a process to work through and occasionally resolve emotions.

The main healing ingredient in the emotional effects appears to be related to the free uninhibited expression of emotion. *"I would attribute [the emotional effects] to the expression of what is from the depths of my being without the hindrances of words"* (Kingsley, Workshop). Getting something out, literally expressing, expelling or allowing

is seen consistently by the participants in this study as a means of healing. A good example is Marchant's comment:

Whatever is bottled up, if there is anything held together tightly, improvising will let it go . . . It's expression, in the literal sense of express - to get out of you. You are expressing your emotions and emotions that build up tend to cause stress and strain on various levels in various ways(Marchant, Practitioner).

On that basis, one could improvise simply to express and release one's emotions. The voice seems to already do this spontaneously through natural sounds such as yawning or sighing. In improvisation, the unhindered expression of the inner landscape can become more conscious and thereby facilitate a movement of emotion. *"If it's my soul singing, my spirit singing, my being expressing itself, it's improvisational. [Improvising] is an emotional movement which is expressed through the whole of your being resonating this sound, this song really"* (Anderson, Practitioner).

This movement can result in one's emotional state becoming more fluid and *"less static"* (McMillan, Practitioner). This fluidity possibly has a link to the movement of energy perceived in the body. Interestingly, emotion itself is sometimes understood as just that: a movement of energy (e-motion). This movement can also bring about a number of other effects:

- “*[Improvisation] calms, settles [my emotions]*” (Grant, Workshop).
- “*[It’s] cleansing, it’s relaxing, it’s calming*” (Marchant, Practitioner).
- “*It frees [my emotions], lightens the heaviness*” (Kingsley, Workshop).

Thus, the free expression of emotion through vocal improvisation can engender an emotional movement bringing about effects such as release, calming or cleansing.

In addition, improvisation is also perceived as a safe medium through which this expression can occur. In the ideal context, all the sounds from within are permitted to emerge and no judgments are attached to them. The improvisation thus acts as a container to bring emotions into the world and to experience them: *[improvisation] allows me to experience them [my emotions]*” (Littlefield, Workshop). This suggests that improvisation is a means of experiencing the emotion and of being in contact with it. “*[Improvisation is] a means of being present with the emotions whether they’re hard to be with or not*” (Sills, Practitioner). This accepting and open presence could be a key element.

Being present with the emotion and accepting it as it is is sometimes considered the basis for therapeutic change. Fleming, for instance, seems to make a link between allowing the expression of emotion and the release of that emotion: “*[Improvisation] allows these [more difficult] emotions to have a space, a voice, an existence. After that,*

it is more possible to let them 'be' rather than denying. That allows for release rather than hanging on to them" (Fleming, Workshop).

This theme is also discussed by other practitioners and workshop participants. Giving emotions a legitimate place to exist in the improvisation, without trying to change them or to understand them cognitively is seen as enough to create change. Roy explains that if one is able to accept and to be with a difficult emotion through the improvisation, it becomes easier to do so outside the improvisation. To her, improvisation is a means to learn to accept these emotions and to let them live. For instance, if someone allows sadness to be expressed in improvisation and gives their sadness a legitimate place to exist there, it may be easier for this sadness to exist at other times rather than being repressed, as Fleming proposes.

This suggests that through improvisation, the singers could experience a different way of being that could be applied to everyday living. The improvisation could act as a microcosm where new behaviors or relationships can be experienced safely. As was discussed in chapter three, Small proposes that through the element of playfulness, musicking can become an experimentation ground to test out new relationships. Thus, getting to experiment with different relationships or with authentic emotions could be a basis from which therapeutic change could spring. This is what occurs in gestalt therapy:

Through experiment the individual is mobilized to confront the emergencies of his life by playing out his aborted feelings and actions in relative safety. A safe emergency is thus created where venturesome explorations can be supported . . . What [the client] is doing is not rehearsing for a future event or rehashing an old one but experiencing in the present what it is like for him to flow from awareness to experimental action. Once he senses the rhythm of this existential momentum he may well behave differently in the world outside than he had previously (Polster 234-235).

That a number of healing relationships experienced in improvisation could be transposed into concrete changes in overall behavior might be the most significant basis to claim that this work can indeed be therapeutic.

In addition, as in gestalt, the healing aspects of improvisation could also be related to awareness. For instance, Roy proposes that a therapeutic process is dependant on this element:

Pour . . . avoir des gains au niveau émotionnel, ça dépend de la conscience que tu met sur ce qui sort et qu'est-ce que tu en fais, comment tu te traites ensuite dans la vie quotidienne . . . si [tu as] le désir de changer dans la pratique ou si [tu] préfères vraiment évacuer à chaque

fois et ne rien changer.

[To make progress emotionally, it depends on the awareness that you put on what is coming out and what you do with it, how you treat yourself afterwards in daily life . . . if you have the desire to change in practice or if you prefer to evacuate each time without changing anything] (Roy, Practitioner).

Thus, it seems that awareness facilitates a more in-depth emotional work through the voice and that the work can stagnate or constantly remain in a “venting stage” without it. However, the definition of awareness is problematic. If awareness requires a cognitive process whose role is to understand verbally the sounds that emerge, it may be quite useless since, as Small states: “In engaging in any capacity in a musical performance we are articulating matters for which words are not only inadequate but are also unnecessary” (Small 200). It appears that most often, there are no words to describe what is occurring in improvisation. Rather, the sounds could be symbols emerging from the unconscious: “*The voice is merely sound, the unconscious knows not words but communicates in symbols visual and audio*” (Kingsley, Workshop). Therefore, awareness might entail simply experiencing and being present with the sound. If this definition of awareness is accepted, then awareness would occur on a level other than the cognitive, in the form of openness and of intuition. It seems probable that both the cognitive and intuitive aspects of awareness come into play. (See next section on effects on the mind.)

Accordingly, many of the practitioners and workshop participants use vocal improvisation in a conscious way to deal with, transform, process or resolve emotions. The improvisation thus becomes a tool for them. The process appears to be very individual and to depend on a number of factors:

[It] depends on the state [I'm] in. If life is going on and it's really pretty good but I've got this little thing that's bothering me, makes me sad let's say. Sometimes I can sit down, sing it out, and let it go for the day or for a long time or forever . . . And other times, there's just so much that's so wrong, so much sorrow or grief or pain or whatever or just stress and tension. I could sit and groan for an hour and that will make me feel good for the next hour, maybe if I'm lucky and then I have to do some again. So it's really individual: individual situation, individual person
(Marchant, Practitioner).

Consequently, those who use improvisation to deal with emotions seem flexible in the type of improvisation they choose at any given time. There does not seem to be one correct way to improvise that is more efficient than the others. Rather, there could be a number of ways to use improvisation to deal with emotion. Below are three examples of this that were found in the data:

First, Anderson uses improvisation to express and uplift the emotional state:

Usually improvising is an expression of my emotions and it's one which I normally dedicate to exploring positive emotional development with. Which means that I can go from a depressed state and through the chanting, access a place of no-mind which will eventually have me come out possibly, and sometimes hopefully, into a much higher emotional state, a much lighter emotional state. And if nothing else, it will at least be an expression of the emotional state that I'm carrying at that point
(Anderson, Practitioner).

Second, in Sill's experience, improvisation can be used to go deeper into difficult emotions. In this case, improvising may not always bring up the emotional state, but can help to open to another level:

If it's more going into something deep and dark, I won't necessarily come back to a balance, I may just go in deeper into the thing I was sort of feeling and the sound will take me deeper into that. Whether it's grief or other stuff that we don't necessarily think is good to feel. So in that case, I may just sit with it, because then it's more present and through that presence, it resolves to a state of balance (Sills, Practitioner).

Third, singing can also be used as a means to process and work through difficult emotions on an ongoing basis, as does Littlefield. Although she works with song-writing, the composition of this song comes from a process of improvisation:

I had a broken heart, I was very angry and hurt and I wrote a song that was totally over the top, and I just kept singing that. . . . I just kept coming back to it every day, every couple of days, on my bike - I don't know for how long, maybe months. And now I don't really feel the need - I'm not in that space anymore. So in that sense, I guess it did help resolve something, at least to feel something and I guess if you felt it it's enough
(Littlefield, Workshop).

These three examples are by no means exclusive. Rather, they demonstrate that there are a number of ways to deal with emotions through improvisation. Working through emotions in these ways could potentially help to create a state of resolution, where the emotion has been expressed, released, transformed or resolved, as was experienced by Anderson, Sills and Littlefield as well as others in this study.

In addition, the mind may have a role to play in this process as it appears to not only be influenced by improvisation but to also contribute to it.

THE EFFECTS ON THE MIND

There are signs that the mind can become open and receptive to facilitate the process of improvisation. When asked for one word to describe how improvisation affects the mind, the practitioners and workshop participants gave the following: clear, sleep, liberate, freedom and calm. This suggests that improvisation can contribute to clearing the chattering or judgmental aspects of the mind. This is further confirmed since improvising prior to sitting meditation seems to enable the inner-silence: *“I usually start [my meditation] with my toning or whatever It just clears up the crap - clears my mind, clears my body, clears my emotions. [It] clears all what’s in my way, calms my mind”* (Marchant, Practitioner).

It thus appears that, at least in certain contexts, the chattering aspects of the mind can be calmed through the improvisation. This calming could possibly enable the mind to conceptualize on a different level than the cognitive. *“As in meditation, calming the surface mind can help to make room for intuition to emerge”* (Grant, Workshop). Hence, improvisers sometimes experience intuitions.

Q: Do you experience intuitions as a result of improvisation?

- *“Yes. Very strongly sometimes. Not all the time. When I’m working in a therapeutic context, that’s a big part of it”* (Marchant, Practitioner).
- *“Yeah. They’re pretty common. And they start happening more often,*

during the day and stuff” (Sills, Practitioner).

- *“Sometimes have intuitions re: what I should do and they usually turn out to be right decisions” (Fleming, Workshop).*

However, these intuitions do not occur all the time, nor are they a necessary part of improvisation: four people in the sample, two of which are practitioners did not experience them directly.

Nonetheless, it seems that when they occur, these intuitions can shed light on previously hidden parts of the self. Roy explains how the sounds that come through in improvisation occasionally become like a road-map leading into the core of one’s being by bringing subconscious elements into consciousness:

C’est un peu comme un rêve éveillé faire de l’improvisation musicale.

Dans le sens que . . . si tu te souviens de ton rêve, tu peux contacter des espaces que tu n’avais pas de ton conscient ressenti. . . . Il y a des espaces comme ça qui arrivent dans l’improvisation où à moment donné . . . tu es en contact . . . avec quelque chose. Alors ça peut t’aider drôlement à voir qu’est-ce qui était dans ton ombre.

[Musical improvisation is like having a daydream in the sense that . . . if you remember your dream, you can contact places that you did not have

in your felt consciousness. There are places like that that occur in improvisation: all of a sudden . . . you are in contact with something. It can thus help a lot to see what was in your shadow] (Roy, Practitioner).

From this disclosure, the mind is sometimes able to grasp the meaning of some of the sounds, and from this new understanding, move the inner process forward. Anderson, for instance, will occasionally experience this type of process, which for him, can bring solutions or resolutions:

The chanting is happening on one level, the expression of the emotional state and it has a view to lightness. If during that process, on another level, my mind is also opening to lighter possibilities and different ways of seeing things, although this is not where my focus is at all, then there's a possibility that a connection will happen on a lighter level that lets me, when I come back, see reality in a lighter way and the solution in a different way. And once I have that solution, if I do have that solution coming from that process, then my emotional state will have changed because I will have basically resolved, through the chanting, through removing my mind, I've come to a resolution (Anderson, Practitioner).

Here again, this does not appear to occur all the time: there are probably different levels. Singing and reflecting upon the sounds and movements that came up in

improvisation might create a small step forward in one's inner-work rather than a clear resolution. Thus, it seems probable that the process can bring various levels of new understanding, ranging from nothing at all to complete resolutions, although complete resolutions may not occur frequently.

Also, taking time to reflect upon the experience might enable the intuitions to come forward. This reflection can be done in many different ways, as through meditation, or writing/journaling.

There's something very neat about the writing exercise because you're taking the time to put down what that was, what you're feeling after that improvisation, so you're taking a moment to look at it. . . . it's a way of capturing the intuition or insights that can come from that (Littlefield, Workshop).

Littlefield is the only one who spoke about capturing intuitions in this way. Further research is needed to determine whether writing is helpful or not. It may hinder the process by creating expectations of insights. As intuitions cannot be forced, simply being with the sound and silence, as Sills suggested above, may be more beneficial. It may be in this silence that intuitions emerge naturally, without being expected or forced. On that basis, it could be that the more one is present and open, the more room intuitions

have to come through. Thus, openness and authenticity might be more key than the intuitions themselves.

Hence, there are indications that the attentive and intuitive mind has a role to play in improvisation. Improvisation seems to enable the calming of the disruptive aspects of the mind and to free its intuitive aspects which in turn, can sometimes be open to intuitions and resolutions which may or may not occur. This openness might also bring about effects of a spiritual nature.

THE SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

Vocal improvisation seems to also have spiritual effects. The amount of people that experience this spiritual connection was actually surprising: Kingsley was the only person in the sample who was not sure about feeling this. On that basis, it does seem that the spiritual effects are an integral part of the experience of vocal improvisation.

A working definition of spirit, based on definitions given in the data, has three major aspects. First, spirit is the essence of being human; second, spirit is larger than the conscious self; third, spirit is in everything. Not everyone included the three elements in their definition, some felt one aspect more than the others. Nonetheless, the three aspects recurred consistently. Consider Nightingale's definition, which is quite complete:

Spirit [is] the essence of everything that's inside and out: it's the essence of creation . . . I think of it as the source of existence. If I go right deep within myself: this is sort of the outer bit - the physical body, emotions, thoughts, intuitions and subtle levels of consciousness and finally, if I go right into the very heart of who I am, it's the universal spirit stuff that is common to all beings, we're all of the same one essence (Nightingale, Practitioner).

Thus, spirit will be considered as the “*ultimate reality*” (Marchant, Practitioner) that spans from the individual to the entire universe and is present within all things. This sense of overarching divinity seems to be experienced through vocal improvisation. “*[Improvisation allows] our radio to pick up more than physical and mental frequencies, it also picks up a spirit frequency*” (Nightingale, Practitioner).

However, it appears that these spiritual effects do not occur consistently. The practitioners and workshop participants are divided on the importance of this component. For Nightingale, McMillan, Fleming and Littlefield, it seems to be at the center of the experience of improvisation. For others, like Sills, the connection to spirit does not occur all the time: “*[The spiritual component is] the one that needs the most attention . . . that needs constant checking in*” (Sills, Practitioner). It could be that the intention behind the singing influences this component. Experiencing the connection seems to be an individual matter, depending on the person and the situation.

Nonetheless, various spiritual effects of improvisation were reported. Participants recount feeling in touch with their range of being, with their essence, their spirit and their aliveness. Both Nightingale and McMillan, who have a large experience with spirituality but from very different perspectives, agree that improvisation can enable this connection.

- *“I think singing really helps in that re-linking of you with who you really are, as spirit”* (Nightingale, Practitioner).
- *“On your own, as you go deep into that trance or meditative state of improvisation, I think you often get close to that ground of isness, which is where everything that is exists, so . . . there is at least implicit community there, whether you conceptualize it or not”* (McMillan, Practitioner).

The participants in this study seem to experience the connection to spirit in different ways. For instance, Anderson experiences this connection through the expression of emotions, as he conceptualizes *“emotion [as] a movement of the spirit”* (Anderson, Practitioner). Thus, by vocalizing emotion, he establishes the spiritual connection. In contrast, Littlefield experiences the connection through a sense of openness, where the ego steps aside to leave room for the spirit. For her, the improvisation seems to be emerging from something larger than the self.

It's not about self-expression in the sense of ego-expression, like 'I'm Maureen and I'm like this' ..[to] box yourself and present yourself to the world. The persona or self-image, the self-construction gets exploded and things happen that I wouldn't have planned or imagined that way. That's when I feel that it's really improvising. Like 'oh, where did that come from' . . . there's not a strong sense of self-identification with it
(Littlefield, Workshop).

Other elements of improvisation might also come into play to facilitate the connection to spirit. For instance, singing authentically from the core of one's being might enable the connection. “[*Improvisation*] is a way to allow the real self - the spirit- to express” (Kingsley, Workshop). Also, feeling a movement of energy or being aware of breath and vibration might have an impact. The interplay of these different elements needs to be further researched. Nonetheless, regardless of how these elements come together, it does appear that improvisation has the potential to create a connection to spirit.

From this connection, the improvisation is sometimes perceived as a meditation, as McMillan has suggested above. Littlefield refers to it as a “*creative meditation*” (Littlefield, Workshop). Improvisation does seem to be related to meditation as meditation's purpose is usually to consciously establish a connection to spirit through an inner-stillness. Thus, improvisation could be considered a form of meditation.

Furthermore, as in meditation, improvisation seems to enable a spiritual connection which is wider-ranging than a personal sense of one's spirit. McMillan and Sills both experience a feeling of connectedness in the world in general.

- *“Yes [I feel a connection to spirit] - in my own self and able to function out in the world meaning connected with everybody else, able to be optimistic about that” (Sills, Practitioner)*
- *“There is great sense of aliveness and well being and of being comfortable in your world” (McMillan, Practitioner)*

This sense of connection in the world could be tied to the sense of interpersonal connectedness that seems to occur in a group context, when singers synchronize together through entrainment (see chapter 4). It is possible that the sense of connectedness that appears to take place in group singing could carry a spiritual element which facilitates a sense of connectedness in the world.

This sense of connectedness can also occasionally take place on an even larger scale. Grant and Fleming's experience includes a sense of connection to the universe:

- *“The creative spark of life is enhanced which tunes in to the universal energy field” (Fleming, Workshop).*
- *“Attuning to the universe .. perhaps because sound/vibration is most*

completely a part of every thing in all dimensions” (Grant, Workshop).

This sense of unity might also extend further. This could bring a sense of connectedness to everything: nature, animals, spirit, universe. Sills experiences this when he feels *“just completely connected”* (Sills, Practitioner).

This connectedness could be understood in relation to Small’s conception of relationships created with the cosmos or the supernatural through musicking. He suggests that musicking could create relationships on this less tangible level as well as relationships with the self and others. Grant, Fleming and Sill’s experience seem to corroborate this theory. On this basis, a possible conclusion could be that improvisation enables a sense of connectedness on various levels.

These spiritual aspects could also be tied to what theologian Matthew Fox refers to as the divine aspects of creativity. In his 2002 book, entitled Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet, he “suggests that there is a special encounter with the divine where creativity occurs” (4). According to this view, by participating in an act of creation, that is, by bringing sound into the world, humans may be accessing their divine nature, as God is Creator. Thereby, a connection to spirit could take place by allowing something to be born in improvisation. Roy also suggests this link:

Pour moi, ce n'est pas difficile d'y voir un côté spirituel parce que je l'associe beaucoup à l'acte de laisser naître quelque chose. Et dans cet acte de naissance où la personne s'implique avec tout ce qu'elle est, je trouve que c'est profondément spirituel, c'est comme ça participe à cet acte de création de la personne.

[For me, it is not difficult to see a spiritual side to improvisation because I link it very much to the act of letting something be born. This birth process, where the person is involved totally, I find profoundly spiritual. It is like participating in the act of creation of the person] (Roy, Practitioner).

It thus seems that creativity has spiritual aspects that could enable a connection to the spirit.

Furthermore, this connectedness to spirit could have direct effects on one's inner disposition as it seems to put life into perspective. For Nightingale, this new perspective seems to be brought about through a sense of openness: *"Improvisation . . . takes your attention from the limited body-mind confinement [and] opens it out, so you get a sense of the source of everyone, of everything, and it puts your life into perspective"* (Nightingale, Practitioner). Sills also seems to experience this sense of new perspective, when he speaks of the *"remembrance [and] recognition"* (Sills, Practitioner) that occurs

for him through the improvisation. This could be taken to mean that improvisation serves as a reminder of where one belongs, of one's purpose and reason for being alive. Sills explains: *"The improvisation is helping us to align with our humanity, with what it is to be a human"* (Sills, Practitioner). If this is the case, then improvisation could create a larger picture through which to understand the world.

Nonetheless, Sills warns that the connected and supported feeling that seems to occasionally occur in improvisation should be incorporated into everyday reality rather than an end in itself.

It's important that [the spiritual connection is] not the end goal, the only reason to be doing this stuff because we can get really spacy off of the higher sounds and the overtones - you can get really out there, and then, what are you going to do here? Are you really feeling everything that's going on in the body? And so it's a definite balance (Sills, Practitioner).

It seems that a balance needs to be established between staying in the physical world and at the same time, keeping a sense of connectedness with everything.

Therefore, the spiritual effects of vocal improvisation appear to be related to experiencing a sense of connectedness. This connectedness seems to occur on a personal level as the participants in this study have reported feeling alive as well as getting a sense

of their essence and life-force. They have also reported experiencing interpersonal and transpersonal connections, with other people and the world in general. There are thus indications that improvisation could be a means through which to experience a profound sense of connection and union.

OTHER EFFECTS

In addition to the effects on the body, emotions, mind and spirit, the practitioners and workshop participants mentioned other effects that did not fit the predetermined categories. The following list includes their answers to: “briefly discuss what you get out of voicework.” This question was at the beginning of the questionnaire. These answers are thus the benefits that first came to mind.

LIST OF THE MAIN EFFECTS OF VOCAL IMPROVISATION EXPERIENCED BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY

Q: Briefly discuss what you get out of voicework.

WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well-being (x4) • clarity • centered (x3) • calm • grounded (x2) • grounded in my voice
CONNECTION TO SELF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional communion • re-connecting with myself • connection to breath and body • contact with emotions

RESOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to process important issues • tool to face and transform emotions • emotional resolution • cleansing • balance • release • release of terror • crying • safety, security • loosen and sometimes release ancient stuck bits from my cells • healing
CONNECTION TO ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental communion • connectedness to the other participants • connectedness to universe • flow with other people's voices and presence
FUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joy • enjoying the surprises
FLOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flow • awareness in the moment • being in the present moment • opening (x2) • elation
BEAUTY AND LOVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sheer beauty (x3) • pure love (x2) • happiness • inspiration
CONNECTION TO SPIRIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sourceful communion • Life force • enlivening • help with meditation • spirit energy • calling

Interestingly, the physical effects are referred to mostly in terms of groundedness and calm and do not refer to physical healing per se. Also, uplifting terms such as beauty, love, pleasure, fun, inspiration and flow are mentioned frequently. It must be noted that some of the participants in this study use improvisation specifically as a preparation for meditation and thus seem to automatically associate uplifting effects with it. However,

these effects could also be intricately related to the other effects discussed. Working through emotion, letting go of the chattering mind and connecting to spirit could all bring about these reactions. In addition, singing in itself is often seen as uplifting. “[*Music is*] *one of the beauties of life, a treasure of life, something that needed to be safeguarded and cultivated*” (Anderson, Practitioner).

LENGTH OF EFFECTS

Furthermore, the length of the effects of vocal improvisation seems to vary considerably. There are wide discrepancies in the data: the effects are said to last anywhere between one minute and forever. The effects thus appear to be extremely individual. For instance, some people experience the effects on different levels of the self for the same length of time, others find great variations depending on the situation. Also, it seems that the length of the effects varies depending on what occurs after singing, can be extended through regular practice and occasionally last permanently.

The evidence suggests that what occurs after the singing is a determining factor of the length of the effects. For instance, remaining in the mind-set of the improvisation could make the effects last for that period of time, which for Anderson is “*as long as my heart is light*” (Anderson, Practitioner). However, bathing in the effects is not always possible as people have obligations. Most people have experienced losing their inner-contact because of mundane responsibilities. It thus appears that the connection can be lost as a result of something else interfering and taking precedence.

I'd say [the effect] is permanent and then, whatever circumstances arise during the day, I get stressed out again. . . . Or a thought will enter my head and if I identify with it strong enough it will take me to wherever it has come from (Sills, Practitioner).

Yet, there are signs that this loss of contact can be minimized by improvising on a regular basis. Regular practice could make the inner-connection stronger and be a place to come back to when it is lost. Roy and McMillan both comment on this and propose that spending time every day or week with one's self and voice can engender longer lasting effects that span between the periods of singing.

I suppose that it is like regular meditation . . . when you meditate, there's a sense of calm and a kind of ripple effect around that calm, and after a while you meditate and the ripples spread farther and fill up all the space between two periods of meditation, so the person generally becomes more calm. I think with improvisation, the same sort of thing can happen (McMillan, Practitioner).

Singing and improvising could thus become a means of keeping an inner-connection every day. For Anderson, it is a stable anchor to self and Source that he carries all the time. *"Once I [am] in civilization, in the machine as-it-were, then I could keep an anchor in my ideals and in my spirit through cultivating, keeping in touch with*

the music, with my voice, and with other people in that environment” (Anderson, Practitioner). In that sense, the effect could be said to be longer lasting.

Longer lasting effects have also been observed in terms of body, emotion and spirit. Although the physical effects seem to diminish quickly afterwards for many people, if physical healing occurs, as was the case for Grant and McMillan, the effect can be longer-lasting and sometimes permanent. The emotional effects are also variable in that way. Emotional cleansing and release can last a short while, but if an emotion is worked through and released, the effect can have a longer term. The same can be said of the spiritual effects although it seems that each person’s experience of them is individual. Nonetheless, longer-lasting effects seem possible: *“[I feel the spiritual connection for] a few days to several weeks depending on chords struck and depth of experience”* (Fleming, Workshop). In general, the length of any of these effects will vary depending on individual and situation.

Hence, the effects of vocal improvisation have been observed on several different planes: the physical body can experience vibration or healing; the energetic body can experience openings or movements; the emotions can be expressed, cleansed or worked through; the mind can be calmed or opened to intuitions; the spirit can be felt through a sense of connection with self, others and universe. Also, joy, beauty, flow and elation were reported. It seems that although these effects are not always felt as improvisation is different every time, overall, people experience a certain number of effects, which can be

permanent or temporary, depending on a number of variables. Vocal improvisation could thus be a fruitful means to engender healing or well-being.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

CREATING HEALING RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout this thesis, the different healing effects of vocal improvisation have been explored, based on people's experiences. The three levels of the research question were discussed: how improvisation itself could carry a therapeutic element, how the context for the singing can create a healing environment and how different levels of the self can be affected by the act of singing freely.

The qualitative methodology included three areas of research: interviews with six voicework practitioners in the Ottawa and Montreal regions; responses from five participants who took part in a vocal improvisation workshop led by the author and; voice questionnaires from thirty-eight music students at Carleton University. The author's experience in leading the workshop was also considered data.

The vocabulary of the practitioners and workshop participants in describing their subjective experience was used throughout the thesis. Although some terms may seem imprecise and vague, it was necessary to let their voices speak since the meaning of vocal improvisation was sought through their own personal experiences. Furthermore, a specific vocabulary is difficult to create as much of their discussion deals with the extremely subjective world of feelings and perceptions rather than that of ideas or

concepts. This subjective language is the lens available through which their personal experience can be understood.

The findings of this research may also seem vague and imprecise as no clear formula can be given to prove that vocal improvisation consistently has a certain effect. However, as this study is preliminary research in the area, it was not within its scope to provide definite formulas that explain or demystify vocal improvisation. Rather, it seeks to comprehend the nature of this activity which takes place on an intimate level where one's emotions and spirituality come into play, from the standpoint of those who take part in it. Although no guarantees of the effects of improvisation are possible, what this research shows is that there are trends, and through these trends, patterns emerge that suggest that vocal improvisation can be beneficial on various levels.

The theme of relationships is one such pattern which was present throughout the research. Words such as connection and communion kept recurring not only in personal terms (i.e. relation to the voice, the body, the inner-self) but also interpersonally and transpersonally (i.e. relation among singers, to spirit, to universe, to cosmos). In every chapter, practitioners and workshop participants discussed how vocal improvisation enabled them to experience a sense of relationship. On that basis, a probable conclusion is that improvisation facilitates connection on various levels.

The connection to the inner-self was found to be of primary importance. This connection appears not only to facilitate the singing and to also be strengthened through the improvisation. It seems to occur on different levels of the self, such as the body, the emotions and the spirit.

The connection with the body appears to be an important starting point as singing is a physical process which allows sounds to emerge. The body seems to carry a wisdom that can be accessed through letting it guide intuitively. Participants in this study have reported experiencing a relationship with their body, which could result from this dialogue that occurs when the body guides. This relationship could also enable the voice to become anchored physically and resonate within the physical self. This could, in turn, enable singers to gain awareness of its vibration on both a physical and energetic level. From this awareness, an ability to direct this vibration with the conscious mind seems to be possible, though not without practice. A relationship with the body thus seems to play a central role in healing improvisation. It also appears to be related to mind, intuition and voice.

Relationships with emotions also appear to be created. Improvisers seem to gain access to their emotions, to be able to experience them and to express them. The improvising voice could hence be a channel through which to let live the emotional reality of the present moment, whatever that may be. Through this letting be, the emotions could be cleansed, released, transformed or given a legitimate place to exist. The connection to the emotions seems to enable this process.

A relationship to one's spirit has also been observed in the data. Through the experience of singing authentically and of letting the intuitive body lead the process, improvisers seem to be led to the center of themselves, to their spirit.

In addition to these personal relationships, which seem to connect the singer to body, intuition, mind, emotions and spirit, evidence suggests that vocal improvisation could also bring into being relationships of an interpersonal and transpersonal nature. Improvisers have reported feeling relationships among people, as well as with universe and spirit.

It seems that the relationships created among people in an improvisation group occur on a different level than regular social relationships. As singing together in this context entails the sharing of one's being with others, it appears to bring about a vulnerability which makes the process very intimate. Group members thus report meeting each other on a spirit level, where this is acceptance of everyone. The elements of comfort and safety seem to enable this process. In addition, as the singers merge their voices together, they report experiencing a sense of unity and of oneness that might be explained in terms of entrainment. The relationships born from group singing thus seem to be ones of sharing, of vulnerability, of acceptance, of safety and of unity.

Relationships with spirit and universe have also been experienced by those in this study. It seems that feeling unified with a group and/or with one's spirit could

occasionally bring about a sense of connection with something beyond. All practitioners and workshop participants with one exception have reported feeling this connection on occasion. Furthermore, it seems that this sense of connectedness might have impacts outside the improvisation. It could be that having a sense of the interconnectedness of all things could create perspective for one's life and a solid stance from which to act out in the world. It thus seems that the feelings of relationships that are created in improvisation could extend to spirit and universe.

Small's theory of relationships thereby appears to find an application in vocal improvisation. Its two central tenets are applicable: not only does vocal improvisation seem to bring into being a number of relationships, but these relationships also appear to be considered desirable by those taking part. In our context, desirable relationships are presumably ones that can create healing in one form or another. It is quite probable that healing relationships are created through the deep sense of connectedness that seems to take place in improvisation. Healing could thus occur through experiencing a deep connection with the inner-self, by welcoming all sounds, by singing from the center of one's being, by being fully present in the moment or by sensing one's spirit. The contact with the self on this level is one of love and acceptance which is likely to be therapeutic. Healing could also occur through the relationships with others that are brought into being in improvisation. Feeling accepted in a group context, having permission to express one's truth in the presence of others or becoming unified with the group itself could also be therapeutic. Lastly, the relationships with spirit seem to also be of a healing nature as they

allow the singers to become rooted in their humanity, to feel their place in the world or to experience a sense of support from the world around.

The improvisation thus seems to act as a microcosm to bring into being healing relationships that those taking part are able to experience. In the protected context of the improvisation, the singers are able to experience an alternative paradigm by experimenting with relationships that could be new for them. In this view, the improvisation is a playground to experience alternative ways of being. It is a trial, to play with what it would be like to really be authentic, to get rid of masks or to feel safe and accepted. The healing process could thus begin by bringing into being these healing relationships and experiencing them in the improvisation.

Creating these relationships could enable the singers to adopt different behaviors outside of the improvisation. Following Polster and Polster's explanation of this principle in gestalt therapy, it seems probable that the same can occur through improvisation sessions. Being authentic and true in the improvisation could enable a more authentic life in general. Accepting all emotions and giving them a place to exist in improvisation might facilitate that process when emotions occur in the day-to-day. The improvisation could thus be a springboard from which to bring new ways of being into everyday life.

However, more research could be done with regard to the effects that improvisation can have outside of the session. There are allusions in the data which

suggest that through a sense of embodiment of the voice or through the connection to spirit, action in the everyday world is altered by the experiences undergone in improvisation. Gestalt therapy supports this idea, if it is applied to improvisation. However, there are few concrete examples and it might be of interest to pursue this vein.

Furthermore, as each practitioner and workshop participant's experience was unique to them, it seems that improvisation is a very individual process. On that basis, it would be probable that the effects outside the session are also individual, especially since experiencing a sense of connectedness and of relationship seems to vary depending on the person and situation. The connectedness might not take place at all or last only a few hours. Nonetheless, it does seem that longer-lasting healing is possible. It could be that improvisation is more suited for some than others or that its effects are tailored to each individual singer.

Thus, the findings of this research seem to be generally explainable in terms of relationships and placed within Small's theoretical framework, with one exception. The presence of blocks, fear and resistance do not appear to fit this theory: they might not be desirable as they could inhibit the healing relationships from being brought into existence. As the voice remains a very personal and vulnerable instrument, fear, resistance and withdrawal seem to be a consistent reality when working with it. The student's questionnaire suggests that many people in our culture do not like their voices and consider themselves unfit to sing. The inner-critic, judging one's voice and sounds seems

to also be widespread. Another distraction from the authentic process could be the chattering mind. Thus, relationships of distrust or fear seem to inhibit the healing relationships. This appears to be inconsistent with Small's theory.

The presence of these blocks raises the question of how to get past them. The context for the improvisation is likely to play a substantial role in the healing effects that occur. The seven workshop sessions have highlighted its importance as it appears that a sense of safety, the facilitator, the guidelines for the singing and the overall intention have an impact on the healing effects. Safety in the environment seems to be a key element, as singing authentically involves a personal risk which could be alleviated by a supporting environment. The facilitator of the group could help to create this safety. Also, keeping the singing exercises flexible and adapted to the needs of the singers seems to be of importance. In addition and most importantly, that the singing is done with the intention of healing and with respect for everyone and everyone's process appears to play a decisive role in the healing that will take place.

However, since the practitioners and workshop participants (with one exception) all had some experience with the voice, this group did not experience the blocks as prominently as they seem to exist. The one exception was a member of the workshop group who had limited experience with vocal improvisation. Throughout the sessions, her uneasiness was only slightly alleviated and she remained constantly on her guard. The healing context was thus less than ideal. Further research is needed to investigate other

possible avenues of getting past blocks as well as different concrete ways to convey safety and acceptance.

Another question that remains is that of the role of the cognitive analytical mind in working through emotion. Since working intuitively seems to be of prime importance to resolve emotions, understanding cognitively the process may or may not be a determining factor. Further research could determine whether the inner-process could be moved forward by the mind understanding the sounds or whether the expression of the sounds is enough. It would be interesting to combine vocal improvisation with spoken therapy to see whether conceptualizing the sounds and understanding them in the context of one's own personal history could be beneficial.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This study carries both personal and social implications as it explores the benefits of a specific non-prominent individual and social paradigm. On a personal level, there is an invitation to authenticity, to staying connected, to being rather than doing and to becoming aware of the voice. This personal invitation could also reverberate socially. Moreover, healing vocal improvisation could carry a social call to wholism and to being more inclusive of all unique voices.

This research can be understood as an invitation to create a relationship with the inner-self through the voice on a personal level. This entails becoming authentic, letting

go of one's mask or persona and connecting with the true self, the self beyond the social constructions and norms. It shows that this different way of being could be beneficial. This suggests the importance of establishing a connection with the inner-self and the need to come back to one's essence in the midst of the fast-paced consumption society as improvisation is more about being than about having. Furthermore, this research proposes that the voice is a means through which this authentic connection can occur. It suggests that the voice is not only an intricate part of the self but is also a means of finding that self and of expressing it. It thus calls for more general awareness of the voice itself and of its healing potential.

This might also have social implications. If the voice becomes a conscious instrument of expression of all aspects of the self, a sense of wholeness is possible, which challenges the traditional body-mind dualism. In improvisation, the body and the voice lead the healing process through the intuitive mind. They encompass all aspects of the self through the act of singing: singing is where body, mind, emotions and spirit meet. There is no division. This suggests a breakdown of body-mind dualism.

This sense of wholism proposes that the voice is also merged with the body and mind. Most people have a voice, not only those who feel vocally-fit. This study could thus be seen as an invitation to those who feel they are part of the "untalented" group of non-musicians to stop denying themselves access to their voices and to take the risk to own them. It could also be a call to society in general and to teachers in particular, to

acknowledge and welcome the beauty and uniqueness of each individual voice, whether or not it fits within their conception of what is proper. In addition, it proposes to adopt a less hierarchal attitude between amateur and professional singers.

In academia, this study adds to the literature on musical improvisation, on music therapy, on the healing arts and on therapy in general. It is complementary to Bailey's study on improvisation, which was also based on people's experience gathered through interviews, but dealt with musicians specifically. This study, shows that improvisation is not limited to experienced musicians but is widely accessible and that a variety of non-musical experiences of it are possible. By showing that, coupled with healing contexts, improvisation can have therapeutic effects, this study contributes both to the music / musicology literature and to the music therapy literature. It is directly applicable in a music therapy context as music therapists employ this medium regularly. It could also contribute to extending the uses of music therapy to be more widely accessible outside clinical settings. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature on the healing arts by giving concrete applications of improvisation for healing. The discussion on context and guidelines provides a detailed addition to this field. Lastly, this study finds applications in other therapy contexts and could be used jointly with other methods of healing.

Thus, through relationships brought into existence, vocal improvisation seems to be a powerful means of healing. Healing appears to be possible on various levels as singing was observed to bring more self-acceptance, to heal the body, to create a connection to

the inner-self, to spirit and to other people. There is joy in singing. There is flow and openness. It is my hope that this thesis will have inspired the reader to begin to integrate the voice within the body and self.

APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRACTITIONERS (INTERVIEWS)
AND WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS (WRITTEN)

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Age:
2. Education:
3. Occupation:
4. Please list all formal musical training (if any):

VOICE BACKGROUND

1. Briefly discuss how you were introduced to voicework. (Is this workshop your first experience with voicework? If so, jump to question 4)
2. Please list all experience you have had with voicework. Include details such as with who, when, length of involvement, length of meetings etc. (choirs, workshops, voice lessons, toning, chanting etc.)
3. Please list all experience you have had with vocal improvisation specifically.
4. Briefly discuss what you get out of voicework. (e.g. sense of well-being, self-confidence, emotional stability etc.)

VOICE

1. Do you like your voice?
2. Are you ever uncomfortable with your voice? (Please describe and select a number from 1-5, 1 - rarely, 5 - very)
3. Are you self-conscious about singing on your own? (Please describe and select a number from 1-5, 1-not at all, 5 - very)
4. Has your relationship to your voice changed since you started voicework? If yes, how so?
5. Do you feel there is a difference between your speaking and your singing voice? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
6. How would you describe your voice?
a) melodic b) scratchy c) weak d) flexible e) responsive f) non-responsive

g) strong h) needs improvement i) other:

BODY

1. Do you physically feel better after you improvise? If yes, how so? If not, describe how you do feel.
How long does the effect last?
2. Do you experience any physical sensations or sound resonance in your body when you improvise, in terms of both your physical and energetic body? If yes, are they subtle or strong?
3. Do you feel anything in your hands, arms or legs? What?
4. Does your breathing change in the process of singing?
5. Do you find it more natural to sing with body movement or while sitting still?
What is the difference between the two?
6. Do you feel that your voice is embodied - within your body? Please describe that feeling?
7. Let one image /word come to mind that would represent your experience of improvisation as it relates to you physical and energetic body.

MIND

1. How would you describe your mind / intellect's role during improvisation?
2. Do you experience the mind interfering and judging?
3. Do you experience the mind as contributing to your awareness and your listening?
4. Do you set up intentions before you improvise?
5. Do you feel that you need to bypass the mind to improvise?
6. Is there a link to meditation for you here? How so?
7. Let one image come to mind that would represent your experience of improvisation as it relates to your mind/intellect.

EMOTIONS

1. How does improvising affect your emotions? What would you attribute that to?
2. How long does the effect last?
3. Do you feel a link between your voice and your unconscious? How so?
4. Do you feel your voice is an authentic expression of yourself when you improvise?
5. Describe the importance of playfulness when you improvise?
6. Do "darker" emotions come up for you when you improvise? Does the voice enable you to work through them to a certain extent? How so?
7. Do you experience intuitions as a result of improvisation? Please describe.
8. What is the role of the silence following the improvisation?
9. Do you feel this type of singing constitutes an art form? How so?
10. Let one image come to mind that would represent your experience of improvisation as it relates to your emotional and psychological self.

SPIRIT

1. What is your definition of spirit / spiritual?
2. Do you feel more connected to spirit after you improvise? How so?
3. How long do you feel this connection?
4. How would you describe the spiritual component of improvisation?
5. Do you find it easier to meditate after improvisation than without having sung at all?
6. Let one image come to mind that would represent your experience of improvisation as it relates to your spiritual self.

RITUAL AND GROUP EXPERIENCE

1. Do you feel a sense of community with the other members of the group?
2. How do you experience the energy of the group?
3. Do you usually sing with your eyes open or closed? What is the difference?
4. How is singing in a group different from singing on your own?
5. How do the relationships / (lack there of) within the group affect your experience?
6. Have you experienced the feeling of everyone in the group getting in sync, on the same wavelength (entraining)? If yes, can you describe that experience?
7. Are there external circumstances/conditions that facilitate a positive experience?
8. What is the role of the facilitator?
9. Do you find there are ritual aspects to an improvisation session?
10. One word or image that would represent your experience of improvisation as it relates to the group experience.

Thank you very much for contributing to this study. Your responses are greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX 2
TRANSCRIPT OF THE WORKSHOP SESSIONS

DATE 2004	#	EXERCISES	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Week 1 January 18	6	<p>11. Humming warm up: with mouth closed, sending a humming vibration to the heart area. Then, moving that vibration down and up through the chakras and creating links between them.</p> <p>12. Exploring different vowels by sustaining them for a period of time.</p> <p>13. Free form improvisation.</p> <p>14. Exploring the sounds from different body parts: letting the body speak through the voice. (i.e. letting the neck speak, then moving up in the head and then down through the arms, back, chest, belly, pelvic floor and legs.)</p> <p>15. Three OM's to close.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did it feel to hold a vowel for a long time? • What was the difference between the vowels? • How did it feel to let the body speak?
Week 2 January 25	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toning chakras with vowels (described in chapter 2) • Authentic movement in silence. Pair people up in 2, one mover, one witness. Moving time is 15 minutes with 5 minute discussion between partners at the end. The partners then switch. Movement is done with eyes closed, remaining aware of sounds that would want to emerge. • Movement with sound with one witness holding the space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was moving with sound different from moving in silence? • Were you distracted or influenced by the sounds of other people?

Week 3 - February 1	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm-up: clarify an intention and let your voice move with that intention. See if there's something that might evoke rhythm, like grounding for instance. • Improvisation of voice and body percussion. Personal exploration. Use anything as a drum. • One improvisation of voice and body percussion. Group listening and contact in the context of musical, artistic form. • Moving and drumming. Two people on drums, three moving. Finishing with everyone drumming. • Chakra toning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of the facilitator?
Week 4 - February 8	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle stretches and voice warm ups • Natural sounds: sighs , yawns • Chakra toning • Three different throat positions (from Newham): everything close together in the head, heart-based more open, belly-based maximum expansion. Improvising in these different positions and moving back and forth between them. • Gift songs one person in the center receiving a song of what she needs now. We sang love, grace, faith, joy, peace and affirmation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was your experience singing in the small, close together place? • What was the difference between the 3 places? • Could you feel your belly vibrating?

Week 5 - February 22	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle stretches and Tai Chi Breathing • 10 minutes of free movement with voice • Lying on the back, singing a low, medium and high pitch and feeling resonance • Aligning and balancing improvisation (5-7 minutes), still lying on the back • Aligning and balancing improvisation, in the circle holding hands - and sending this energy out • Walking together, pushing air up and down • Babbling improvisation, with walking • Ostinato with solos • Hand drawing conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did you feel the low sound vibrating? • How was the experience of aligning for you? • Do you feel differently than when you came in?
Week 6 - February 29	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical warm up: gentle stretches etc. • Drone with different intervals becoming aware of how different sounds affect us, warming up the voice 2 people on the top note • Trios from the drone - three people holding the drone, three people traveling • Stretches and breaths • Creativity - improvising a jazz ensemble, a jungle scene and a symphony orchestra • Solos over the drone that became an ending together piece 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was it like to hold the base note as the others were singing above? • Did you feel any difference in the different intervals? • How did you find the improvisation part?

Week 7 - March 8	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation on “your day”, putting the sounds of the day into the middle, then facing outward and throwing the rest out there • Toning Meridians and chakras 1, 6, 7 • Stretching, feeling feet, being a tree, little foot improvisation • Singing two answering phrases • Singing chords together, moving the hands up as we breathe in together and down as we each voice our own note • Duets with the second person being the leader's second voice - titles: Calling in, Asking for grace, Comfort Song and What is • Song with eye contact • Finale, starting in a tight circle, moving out to a wide circle and back in to a tight circle holding hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was it like to be the second voice? • Is there a parallel there to life in general? • What was it like to lead? • What was it like to sing with your eyes open?
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APPENDIX 3A - VOICE QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO STUDENTS

Program and year: _____ Course: ☐ MUSI 1701 ☐ MUSI 2702

Instrument: _____ Age: _____

Singing experience (choirs, voice lessons etc.): _____

When did you start singing? ☐ AS AN ADULT ☐ AS A TEENAGER ☐ AS A CHILD

Currently, how often do you sing?

☐ ONCE A DAY ☐ ONCE A WEEK ☐ ONCE PER MONTH Other: _____

Why do you sing?

☐ TO PRACTICE FOR SCHOOL ☐ IN THE CHOIR ☐ IN A BAND Other: _____

Do you like your speaking voice?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Do you like your singing voice?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Are you ever uncomfortable with your voice when you have to speak or sing?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Are you self-conscious about singing on your own in front of others?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Do you experience an inner voice judging your voice? (i.e. "That's no good!" or "That's not music!" or "You're off key!")

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Do you enjoy singing with other people (i.e. in the choir, with friends)?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

Do you enjoy singing on your own (i.e. in the shower, with records)?

☐ NEVER ☐ SOMETIMES ☐ OFTEN ☐ ALWAYS

How do you feel after you have sung?

a) relaxed b) calm c) self-conscious d) tense
e) breathing better f) feel better g) feel worse h) freer
i) in your head j) in your body i) other: _____

Do you find that your emotions can be heard in your voice?

☐]NEVER ☐]SOMETIMES ☐]OFTEN ☐]ALWAYS

How would you describe your voice?

a) melodic b) scratchy c) weak d) flexible e) responsive f) non-responsive
g) strong h) needs improvement i) other: _____

APPENDIX 3B
RESPONSES FROM STUDENT'S VOICE QUESTIONNAIRE

Program and year:	58% in first year (22/38) 34% in second year (13/38) 8% in third year (3/38) 13% not in music full-time
Course:	[74% 28/38] - MUSI 1701 [26% 10/38] - MUSI 2702
Instrument:	Piano 9 (24%) Voice 9 (24%) Wind 9 (24%) Guitar / Bass 7 (18%) Drums 2 (5%) None 2 (5%)
Ages:	18-25
Singing experience (choirs, voice lessons etc.):	71% 27/38 Choir 29% 11/38 Voice lessons (but 24% are voice majors) 11% 4/38 None 8% 3/38 Church 5% 2/38 Musicals 5% 2/38 Band
When did you start singing?	42% 16/38 AS A CHILD 39% 15/38 AS A TEENAGER 16% 6/38 AS AN ADULT 1/38 3% - don't sing
Currently, how often do you sing?	71% 27/38 ONCE A DAY 16% 6/38 MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK 11% 4/38 ONCE A WEEK 3% 1/38 ONCE PER MONTH
Why do you sing?	58% 22 TO PRACTICE FOR SCHOOL 39% 15 FUN/ENJOYMENT 39% 15 IN THE CHOIR 8% 3 IN A BAND 3% 1 SONG WRITING

Do you like your speaking voice?

[8% 3]NEVER [50% 19]SOMETIMES [24% 9]OFTEN [6% 6]ALWAYS

Do you like your singing voice?

[11% 4]NEVER [50% 19]SOMETIMES [32%12] OFTEN [8% 3]ALWAYS

Are you ever uncomfortable with your voice when you have to speak or sing?

[26% 10]NEVER [37% 14]SOMETIMES [29%11]OFTEN [8% 3]ALWAYS

Are you self-conscious about singing on your own in front of others?

[16% 6]NEVER [37% 14]SOMETIMES [16% 6]OFTEN [32%12]ALWAYS

Do you experience an inner voice judging your voice? (i.e. "That's no good!" or "That's not music!" or "You're off key!")

[3% 1]NEVER [39% 15]SOMETIMES [32% 12]OFTEN [21% 8]ALWAYS

Do you enjoy singing with other people (i.e. in the choir, with friends)?

[5% 2]NEVER [18% 7]SOMETIMES [39% 15]OFTEN [37%14]ALWAYS

Do you enjoy singing on your own (i.e. in the shower, with records)?

[0]NEVER [11% 4]SOMETIMES [34% 13]OFTEN [55% 21]ALWAYS

Do you find that your emotions can be heard in your voice?

[5% 2]NEVER [42% 16]SOMETIMES [39% 15]OFTEN [13% 5]ALWAYS

How do you feel after you have sung?

BODY TERMS 39 hits	POSITIVE TERMS 34 hits	NEGATIVE TERMS 6 hits	OTHER 4 hits
18 relaxed 14 calm 4 breathing better 3 in your body	20 feel better 11 freer 3 happy	5 self-conscious 1 tense 0 feel worse	2 in your head 1 nothing 1 emotionally charged

How would you describe your voice?

POSITIVE TERMS 32 hits	IMPROVEMENT TERMS 27 hits	OTHER 8 hits
15 melodic 8 strong 6 flexible 3 responsive	20 needs improvement 4 weak 2 scratchy 1 bad 0 non-responsive	lyrical deep random smoky plain loud nasal not bad untrained

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