

ARTICLE

Moments of thirdness in music therapy: A qualitative meta-analysis embedded in Jessica Benjamin's intersubjectivity

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ABSTRACT

Background: The study of intersubjective processes is evident across various therapeutic schools, among them music therapy. Several researchers deal with the intersubjective meanings of musical experiences in music therapy. Focusing on unpacking the formation of intersubjective relations through dyadic improvisation, this research centered on six music therapy studies, all entailing thick descriptions of clinical improvisations or music therapy informed (but non-clinical) improvisation, which also emphasise relational aspects. **Methods:** Following a four-step methodological sequence, a meta-analysis was performed. After identifying a research question, the researcher gathered related qualitative and mixed-methods studies. Six studies met the inclusion criteria, after which a thematic analysis was conducted to capture underlying themes which reflected intersubjective essence of dyadic improvisation. Finally, the researcher formed a conceptual organisation of different phases of thirdness as reflected in clinical improvisation, forming the results section. **Results:** Two central themes were identified through the thematic analysis which highlighted distinct developmental phases in clinical improvisation and reflected intersubjective processes as described by Jessica Benjamin: (1) Emerging musical recognition: approaching "one in the third"; (2) Recognition of musical separateness: reaching "third in the one". **Discussion:** Embedded in Jessica Benjamin's intersubjective theory, this paper dealt with the complex construct of thirdness and possible manifestations of it within clinical improvisation. This paper showed how improvisational processes may allow the opening of an intersubjective space between client and therapist and enable mutual recognition in each other's otherness.

KEYWORDS

music therapy,
improvisation,
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INTRODUCTION

Clinical improvisation has been a central theme in music therapy research. It has been examined from various perspectives, e.g., music-centred (Nordoff & Robbins, 2007), developmental (Carpente et al., 2022), humanistic (Ansdell, 2014), and psychodynamic (Odell-Miller, 2001), as well as in treatment of different populations, e.g., adults and children in psychiatric wards (Chen, 2019; Oldfield et al., 2012), Autistic children (Carpente et al., 2022; Geretsegger et al., 2015; Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant, 2019), groups (Gardstrom, 2007; McFerran & Wigram, 2005) and more (for further expansion see Sutton, 2019). Several guidebooks for improvisation in music therapy (e.g., Bruscia, 1997; Carroll & Lefebvre, 2013; Nordoff & Robbins, 2007; Wigram, 2004) provide different techniques and models for using improvisation in therapy. Foubert et al. (2020; 2021) and Trondalen (2016; 2019) provided relational frameworks for examining and understanding clinical improvisation, contextualising music therapy practice within object relation theory, thus expanding the psychodynamic understanding of music therapy in this direction. Trondalen's relational perspective argues that a foundational element in music therapy is a therapist's position rooted in recognition, characterised by acceptance, empathy, and confirmation. This stance, grounded in insight, understanding, and respect, extends beyond the therapist's internal state to manifest in the therapeutic relationship itself. Trondalen emphasises the importance of a recognisable relationship as a prerequisite for transformative development. This relationship allows for self-assertion and individuality (autonomy), as well as for connection and confirmation. The client's perception of empathic and respectful regard, affirming their intrinsic value and self-esteem, is deemed crucial, with potential implications for therapy outcomes. Furthermore, Trondalen (2016) underscores the significance of respecting the client's integrity and freedom as fundamental values in music therapy.

Embedded within a relational perspective, this paper aimed to further expand our understanding about the subtle relational processes facilitated in clinical improvisation, more specifically in client-therapist dyadic improvisation. In this paper, the author used the term improvisation to refer to moments when therapist and client engage in musical spontaneously and authentically, expressing their relational being through sound and intention. This study aimed at integrating theory of music therapy improvisation techniques with approaches which view improvisation as representing psychoanalytic processes. Through synthesising findings of six studies, the author investigated the question of how dyadic improvisations created the grounds for deep intersubjective connections to transpire.

Intersubjectivity in music therapy

The literature about relationality in music therapy improvisation encompasses various clinical orientations: from Langenberg's (1997) discussion on the resonator function and Levinge's (2015) illustration of relationality in music therapy to, for example, Bensimon's (2020) theorisation about relational music therapy with victims of trauma. It appears that many theorists who studied *moments* in the parent-infant context (Stern, 2004, 2010; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000) and in the music therapy context (Foubert et al., 2020, 2021; Hadar & Amir, 2021; Smetana et al., 2023) navigated from the ephemeral essence of the moments to its wider relational influence on parent and infant or client and

therapist. In many cases, the researchers found a theoretical home among intersubjective theory (Birnbaum, 2014; Mårtensson Blom, 2010; Smetana et al., 2023; Trondalen, 2016, 2019). The construct of intersubjectivity entails a wide spectrum of meanings, originating in the phenomenological thinking of Husserl (1964) and Buber (1971). Within the music therapy literature, Trondalen (2016) specified three main branches stemming from this term: (1) a framework for relational transference and countertransference; (2) an oscillation between intra-psychic phantasies and intersubjective recognition; and (3) a developmental process of parent-infant mutual co-creation. Trondalen explained that intersubjectivity emerges from the micro-context of moment-to-moment connection of two individuals. Trondalen emphasised the role of mutual recognition between client and therapist in creating an intersubjective relationship. Furthermore, she explained how the sensitive musical exchanges and verbal conversation in therapy enable such recognition, which act as fundamental building blocks of the therapeutic relationship. A manifestation of therapists' recognition can be seen, for example, when the therapist accepts a child's suggestion in group therapy, when acknowledging a musical gesture maintained by music therapy group members, or when reflecting a client's transformative moment (Trondalen, 2016).

The current research suggests a possible theoretical and experiential leap: from the "here and now" moment to the intersubjective connection, while trying to unravel the subtle layers of musical recognition as manifested in clinical improvisation. As this piece focuses on Jessica Benjamin's theory, I will next expand on intersubjectivity by exploring Benjamin's concept of *Thirdness* (Aron, 2006; Benjamin, 2002, 2004).

Jessica Benjamin's theory of thirdness

Jessica Benjamin's theory evolved as a result of a significant shift in theoretical and clinical focus within the psychoanalytic field, often referred to as the "relational turn". This shift, which gained momentum in the latter half of the 20th century, moves away from traditional Freudian and Kleinian emphasis on individual intrapsychic processes and instead places a greater emphasis on the interpersonal and relational aspects of human experience. The relational turn recognises the importance of relationships, both past and present, in shaping an individual's psychological development. It emphasises that the mind is not isolated but is deeply embedded in a social and cultural context. This perspective challenges the earlier notion of a detached, autonomous individual and underscores the significance of the therapist-client relationship in psychoanalytic treatment (Aron, 2006). One key concept, central to relational approaches is the analytic third.

The concept of the analytic third was used by various psychoanalytic schools (e.g., Green, 2004; Ogden, 1994; Storolow & Atwood, 1992; Winnicott, 1971) and meant different things to different theorists (Aron, 2006; Coelho, 2015). Winnicott (1971) originated the concepts of transitional object and transitional space, which allows the child to create a psychological area that exists between the subjective inner world and the external reality. This intermediate space is crucial for the development of creativity, imagination, and a sense of self. The transitional space is not only about the physical object but also about the experiences and processes that occur in the in-between zone where inner and outer realities meet. Winnicott's *third* represents the intermediate zone where subjective and

objective realities meet, fostering the development of creativity, cultural engagement, and a more authentic sense of self.

Green (2004), who was influenced by object relations theories, emphasised the importance of triangulation in the development of psychic space and in the emergence of thirdness. According to Green, triangulation involves the introduction of a third element into the dyadic relationship, contributing to the complexity of psychic life. Furthermore, Green engaged with Freud's Oedipus complex but extends it beyond a focus on parental figures. For Green, the Oedipus complex is a broader process of structuring psychic space through the interplay of multiple objects. The *third*, in this context, represents the symbolic dimension that allows for the representation and displacement of desires. Symbolism, according to Green, is a fundamental aspect of psychic life, and the *third* plays a key role in the development of symbolic thinking.

Thomas Ogden's reading of thirdness introduced the analytic third as a crucial concept in psychoanalysis. The analytic third represents a mental space or a dimension created in the therapeutic relationship. It is not a person or an external entity but rather a psychological space where the analyst, the patient, and the evolving analytic process come together. The analytic third is dynamic and emerges through the interactions and associations within the therapeutic relationship (Aron, 2006).

Benjamin specified her own definition of this construct, which entails two types of thirdness: (1) "one in the third"; and (2) "third in the one." Benjamin's positions of *thirdness* are contrasted to "complementary positions", referring to moments when the therapeutic relation (or any relation) is polarised into two definite and rigid positions of *twoness* (Aron, 2006; Benjamin, 1990, 1995, 2004). Benjamin's "one in the third", or "rhythmic third" pertains to moments when client and therapist are sharing a rhythm or harmony in a way that both are accommodating to it. According to Benjamin, such moments of reciprocity and shared experiences highlight the shared grounds of the relationship, the possibility of similarity and mutual accommodation. One should note that though emphasising shared experiences, Benjamin pointed at moments which required the attunement of both actors, suggesting that such moments exist developmentally from birth (Aron, 2006.; Benjamin, 2002, 2004). In this sense, Benjamin aligns with Stern's developmental perspectives regarding the baby's active search after subjectivity from birth (Stern, 2000, 2004). In "third in the one," however, Benjamin highlighted a sense of separateness between the dyad. In such moments, the therapist (or parent) is *marking* their subjective response, or version of an experience.

Benjamin (2004) described the therapeutic relationship as a dialectic dance between the two types of thirdness, as well as between moments of collapsing to the position of twoness. Benjamin (2004, 2018) articulated the distinction between the dyadic nature of twoness (i.e., complementarity) and the potential realm of thirdness. According to the author, within the framework of complementarity, interdependence takes on a coercive quality. In fact, the coercive interdependence that pulls each individual into the escalating reactivity of the other is a notable feature of the impasse. Conflict, in such a scenario, is unable to be effectively processed, observed, embraced, mediated, or navigated. Instead, it manifests at a procedural level as an unresolved opposition between the individuals, maintaining a split within the relationship.

Meaningful moments in music therapy

At the core of the therapeutic encounter exist moments of meeting between therapist and client (Stern, 2010). Researchers such as Stern (1971, 1995, 2004) and Trevarthen and Malloch (2000) pioneered the microanalysis methodology when looking into the parent-infant primary interactions, bringing researchers' as well as clinicians' attention to the importance of *moments*. Malloch and Trevarthen's ground-breaking work and extensive observations gave rise to the idea of *communicative musicality* (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000). The researchers emphasised the early communication, or proto conversations, between parents and infants. Most relevant to the understanding of infant development as well as to the theory around relationality in music therapy practice, is Trevarthen and Malloch's discussion about the musical basis of parents' and infant's early reciprocal exchanges, i.e., their joint timing and shared melodic textures and contours. Their research highlighted the ability of very young infants to co-create an intersubjective space with their parents.

In the music therapy context, theorists who studied *moments*, highlighted various aspects of the therapeutic encounter: the musical interaction per-se (Hadar & Amir, 2021; Smetana et al., 2023), the psychological sharing of two individuals (Fachner, 2014), the interaction as a whole (Amir, 1992; 1995; Brown & Pavlicevic, 1996; Gilbertson, 2015; Tucek et al., 2022), and the verbal connection between therapist and client (Tucek et al., 2022). Gilbertson (2015) asked six music therapists to re-enact their hand position in a meaningful moment in therapy and captured it in a body cast. Representing contemporary approaches of multiplicity (Matney, 2021) and art-based research (Ledger & Edwards, 2011), Gilbertson explored participants' embodied knowledge as felt, perceived, and created with him during the research process. Wosch et al.'s (2007) seminal guide of various research methods of micro-analysis marks a milestone in the positioning of a microanalytic epistemology within the music therapy domain and the acknowledgment of micro-processes present within music therapy sessions.

Amir (1995, 1996) was among the first researchers to consolidate the idea of meaningful moments in music therapy and argued for the fundamentality of moments of insight and transformation. Such moments, she explained, occur on the intrapersonal level, though they affect both client and therapist. Meaningful moments transpire during creative processes and can take place in different realms of the human experience (the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual). In receptive music therapy, Grocke's (1999) study marked a landmark in the research of meaningful moments in Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) approach, which was followed by additional work connecting moments in GIM to intersubjective theory (Mårtenson Blom, 2011; Trondalen, 2019). Additional categorisations of moments include De Backer's (2008) *moments of synchronicity* and Ruud's (2008) and Stern's (2004) *now moments*. While Amir (1992, 1995, 1996) referred mostly to the intrapsychic levels of client and therapist, Fachner (2014) emphasised the contextual meaning of the *moment* (as opposed to the internal musical logic of the music, for example), emphasising the *shared* aspects of the moment, thus implying an intersubjective essence to the microanalysis methodology.

Tucek et al. (2022) examined the feasibility of advanced tools such as Electroencephalogram (EEG) hyper-scanning to study the correlations of clients' neural activity and their perceptions of meaningful moments in music therapy. The researchers defined such moments as moments of interest (MOI). According to the authors, such moments encompass "a musical meeting or a shared awareness or perception of a (non)verbal interaction." Similar to Fachner (2014), the authors

highlighted the situatedness and intersubjective essence of such moments. In a recent publication, Smetana et al. (2023) presented qualitative results of a study incorporating 17 dyads of music therapist-adult improvising on a piano for five minutes. The researchers put an emphasis on the clients' perspectives (as opposed to investigating only therapists' views on this issue) and on the differentiation between meaningful moments (shorter segments of interactions) and time periods (longer segments of interaction). The authors chose the umbrella term *situations* to cover a broader range of possible events between client and therapist. In addition, Smetana et al. examined the intersubjective character of meaningful situations, through comparing the extent of overlap between the dyads in their study.

Focusing on meaningful moments, this study aimed at capturing the possible relational structures within dyadic (and group) improvisation, and specifically to centre on the evolvment of *musical thirdness* in this context. Aligning with Benjamin's (2002, 2004) structural and developmental perspective of the intersubjective space, this paper aimed at identifying the paths created through joint musical improvisation, which allowed the client and therapist to experience one another as separate as well as connected human beings. Benjamin (2004) interprets the third as a position of surrender and thirdness as the mental space that facilitates or results from surrender. In addition, the term surrender also implies the gesture of recognition, of being able to connect to another's mind while accepting one's separateness and difference. When thirdness emerges, one has survived the possibility of their subjectivity being "destroyed," negated, or modified by the other. It also implies the freedom from any intent to control or dominate.

In her writings about the client-therapist relationship, Benjamin (2004, 2018) highlights the dyadic exploration of the "connection-separation" continuum as one involving *accommodation*. According to Benjamin, accommodation is an integral part of being recognised and involves the ways in which individuals adjust or adapt to each other's subjectivities. It is not about one person dominating or submitting themselves to the other, but rather a dynamic process of negotiation and mutual understanding. As highlighted by Benjamin, *accommodating* is fundamentally rhythmic by its nature. In this piece, I wish to further explore not only the rhythmic component of the recognitive function, but to unravel additional musical components which may carry the act of recognition and may establish a musical (sort of) thirdness.

The author's engagement with Jessica Benjamin's theory: A personal note

From the very beginning of my research of improvisation and joint improvisation, I was drawn to its dialogic nature. Focusing on the various musical approaches utilised by music therapists to create dialogues, I realised the range of relatedness facilitated by dyadic improvisation (Hadar, 2018; Hadar & Amir, 2021). In the past few years, I started deepening my engagement with intersubjective approaches, which culminated in a psychoanalytic course I took focusing on Jessica Benjamin's intersubjective approach. Gaining familiarity with Benjamin's theory influenced the way I listen to improvisation and understand it as a relational phenomenon. From the beginning of my acquaintance with Benjamin's theory, I felt a deep connection between her relational and developmental perspective, and salient developmental and relational approaches often used in music therapy (e.g., Stern, 2010; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000, Trondalen, 2016). Eventually it urged me into seeking possible ties

between the relational psychoanalytic approach and the improvisational one, and to expand the musical-clinical vocabulary music therapists could use when interpreting their improvisational connections using Benjamin's approach. Moreover, I had a strong feeling about the possible ability of the improvisational perspective in further illuminating hidden aspects of Benjamin's theory. With the aforementioned ambitions and aiming at identifying a music therapy reading of Jessica Benjamin's theory, I planned the current research.

METHODS

This study utilised qualitative meta-analysis as its principal method. Meta-analysis is a term used to describe methods for integrating findings of several interpretivist (or objectivist) studies, in order to form a broader perspective regarding a phenomenon (Levitt, 2018; Meadows & Wimpenny, 2016, 2017; Timulak, 2009; Timulak & McElvaney 2013). In such inquiry, the analysis is focused on a research question, which guides the procedure of analysis (Timulak, 2009). Through consolidating themes of several studies, the researcher seeks to uncover underlying structures which might explain the recurrence and similarities taking place among different studies and can suggest further insight regarding the examined phenomenon (Levitt, 2018; Meadows & Wimpenny, 2017). In this study, the researcher followed a four-step procedure: (1) Identifying an area of research and research question; (2) Identifying and collating qualitative and mixed-methods studies related to the research question across a wide range of literature, using inclusion/exclusion and quality criteria; (3) Comparing and analysing findings of all studies, and preparing an underlying framework which created a conceptual organisation; and (4) Integrating findings of all studies to form the results section (Timulak, 2009; Timulak & McElvaney 2013). In the following section the author will expand on each step separately.

Procedure

Identifying an area of research and research question

The inquiry encompassed studies which discussed relational aspects of client-therapist dyadic (and group) improvisation. The first research question was:

1. What are the central intersubjective characteristics of therapist-client dyadic (and group) improvisation?

As the analysis was expanded, further research questions were added:

2. How is Benjamin's reading of thirdness manifested within dyadic (and group) musical improvisation?
3. What are the possible musical approaches that enable music therapists and clients to move from a complementary position of resistance in therapy to exploring territories of *thirdness*?

Identifying and collating qualitative and mixed-methods studies related to the research question across a wide range of literature, using inclusion/exclusion and quality criteria

The author searched a range of databases (e.g., Medline, PsycINFO) and music therapy journals (e.g., *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, *Journal of Music Therapy*), examining data from the past decade (1.2012-1.2023). Given that initial database searches resulted in over 70 studies (search words: “improvisation”; “music therapy”; “intersubjective”; “relational”), the author further narrowed the pool of studies to include only ones including explicit descriptions of improvisation, leaving the author with 17 potential studies (see Appendix 1). Finally, the author focused on studies which met three inclusion criteria: (1) incorporated thick descriptions of client-therapist improvisation; (2) included open-ended interviews with therapists and/or clients regarding their experience of improvisation, or written reflections of therapists; and (3) incorporated an underlying, implicit or explicit, intersubjective perspective about dyadic improvisation in music therapy context, i.e., emphasised and elaborated on aspects of relationship as manifested through dyadic (or group)¹ improvisation. This final step resulted in the inclusion of six studies (see Table 1).

Study	Number of participants	Methods
Hadar & Amir, 2021	10 participants	Qualitative
Foubert et al., 2019	N/A	Qualitative
Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant, 2019	4 participants	Mixed methods
Hadar, 2024	10 participants	Qualitative
Smetana et al., 2022	17 dyads	Mixed methods
Warner, 2014	5 participants	Qualitative

Table 1: Studies included in the meta-analysis

Comparing and analysing findings of all studies, and preparing an underlying framework which created a conceptual organisation

In this phase, the author focused on the findings of the six studies as well as on the discussion section. Themes, categories, and descriptions which deemed relevant to the meta-analysis were extracted from the original publications. Once data from all six studies were gathered, the author sought for an underlying framework that would establish a clear conceptual organisation of the data. It was identified that all explored studies included two prominent stages within their description of dyadic improvisation: one consisting of *a preliminary stage*, in which the clinical musical relation was formed, and *a more advanced stage*, in which the relationship was expanded and could include more complex interactions, musical and non-musical. Thereafter, the author further reviewed the papers and classified various descriptions of improvisational moments as either pertaining to preliminary stages of therapy or representing moments of more complex musical interactions. For example, Foubert’s

¹ Though the focus of this study was on the client-therapist dyadic music making, the author chose to include a study discussing group improvisation. Although group dynamics raises additional complexities and intricacies of multiple relationships occurring in the therapy room in a given moment (Mcferran & Wigram, 2005; Stige et al., 2010), the author focused on the interventions offered by the therapist, which provide information highly relevant to this study’s subject matter.

description of moments of therapist's acknowledgement of the silence in the room was coded as "preliminary stages in therapy", whereas Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant's illustration of moments when the therapist could divert their vocal response from the client's initial expression was coded as "advanced". Through this analysis, the author drew connections between the nature of primary and advanced moments in music therapy improvisations to Benjamin's two phases of thirdness. Guided by Benjamin's relational framework, the author continued to seek specific moments which resonated with Benjamin's two stages of thirdness. Consequently, all extracted data was rearranged into a framework including two broad levels in the process of dyadic improvisation: *Primary stages in dyadic improvisation* and *Advanced stages in dyadic improvisation*. In the process of classifying different moments as pertaining to one of two stages (i.e., Primary stages versus Advanced stages), the researcher further elaborated and refined the evolving framework, which finally crystallised into two themes: *Emerging musical recognition: approaching "one in the third"*; and *Recognition of musical separateness: reaching "third in the one."* In addition, resonating with Benjamin's complementary positions, moments of resistance and/or inability to establish musical connections were acknowledged and incorporated into the findings.

Epistemological reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative research relates to researchers' ongoing examination of how their personal backgrounds shape research and how they, in return, are shaped by research themselves (Dowling, 2006; Palaganas et al., 2017). While reflexivity can be practiced in several ways pertaining to the authors' involvement in their study, in the current study, the author opted to focus on epistemological reflexivity (Palaganas et al., 2017). Epistemological reflexivity deals with authors' possible biases regarding the methodological approaches undertaken, the articulated research questions, and the form of interpretation ascribed. In other words, epistemological reflexivity provides an opportunity to ponder on the implications of such biases on the study's findings. The author of this paper is involved in the study of improvisation and dyadic improvisation for several years and has published in this field. Therefore, prior to conducting the meta-analysis, the author has already acquired preliminary understandings and theories around the subject matter which have influenced her perspectives and choice of research questions. In addition, two of the studies included in this meta-analysis were authored or co-authored by the author of this paper. These conditions created a certain research context for the current study and enforced inherent limitations for this study. To balance the researcher's predisposition, a wide range of literature was included in the first stages of investigation and the manuscript was sent to two academic colleagues of various expertise to obtain a wider scientific scope.

FINDINGS

The integration of six studies focusing on relational aspects in the context of dyadic and group improvisation identified two central themes: *Emerging musical recognition: approaching "one in the third"* and *Recognition of musical separateness: reaching "third in the one."* Relying on all studies' theorisation of similar developmental sequencing, this paper further added an intersubjective lens, suggesting that the two stages captured in the themes indicate the foundation of an intersubjective space between

therapist and client. Table 2 & Figure 1 summarise the various music-centred description and definitions of all six studies included in this review, with regard to the two developmental phases described in this section.

Position of thirdness	Authors	Music therapy perspective/moment
Towards 'One in the third'	Hadar & Amir (2021)	• Moments of listening and attuning to the client's being • Transforming the moment: utilising the temporal dimension in joint improvisation to lay a basis for meaningful moments to arise
	Foubert et al. (2021)	• Inter-corporal listening • Emergence of shared pulsation
	Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant (2019)	• Exact vocal resonance
	Hadar (2024)	• Augmented time frame (moments of silence) • Emotional time (time-free moments)
	Smetana et al. (2023)	• Relating qualities within the dyadic improvisation • Self-focused qualities within the dyadic improvisation • Intra-/inter-personal phenomena within the dyadic improvisation
	Warner (2014)	• Moments of disconnection, fragmentation (e.g., moments of bursts of crescendo) • Moments of timelessness • Moments of therapist's holding
'Third in the one'	Hadar & Amir (2021)	• Synchronisation discrepancies (established by therapist, e.g., playing around the client's beat) • Moments of insight through joint improvisation
	Hadar (2024)	• Synchronisation discrepancies (established by client and therapist, e.g., following clients' ritardando and fermatas)
	Foubert et al. (2019)	• Moments of polyphonic flow
	Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant (2019)	• Resonance with changes • Creating new vocalisation with/without words
	Smetana et al. (2022)	• Moments of unpleasant feelings, conflict, and autonomy within the dyadic improvisation
	Warner, 2014	• Moments of clear differentiated musical statement (made by the client, e.g., choice of different beat)

Table 2: Moments of thirdness in music therapy improvisation as presented in all six studies

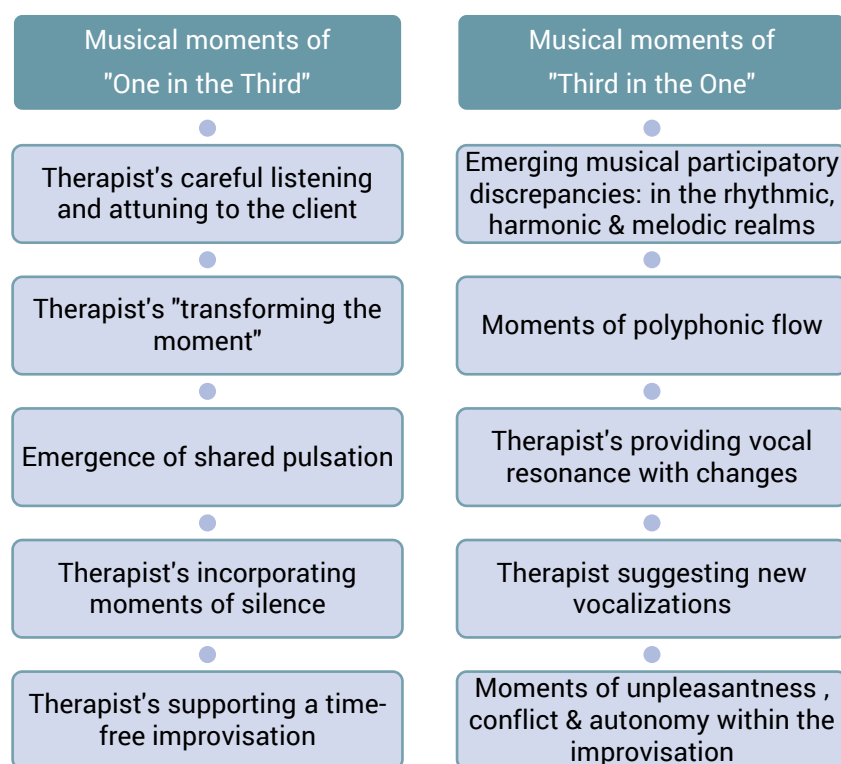


Figure 1: Musical moments of "one in the third" and "third in the one"

Emerging musical recognition: Approaching "one in the third"

Hadar and Amir (2021) identified two types of primary musical invitations of the therapist, namely, *Moments of listening and attuning to the client's being*, and *Transforming the moment: utilising the temporal dimension in joint improvisation to lay a basis for meaningful moments to arise*, which were labelled as primal moments in joint improvisation. Whereas *Moments of listening and attuning* represented moments in which therapists were carefully matching their clients' sounds and attuning to their movements and behaviours in the room using musical approaches, *Transforming the moments* subscribed to various musical techniques used by music therapists to adapt the temporal musical structures in ways that would encourage clients' musical and non-musical responses. Such techniques included the use of harmonic repetitions and the inclusion of pauses within a given musical structure.

A comparable clinical approach was illustrated by Foubert et al. (2021), who presented an improvisational frame for supporting people with personality disorder (PD) in developing a sense of trust within a relationship. Similar to Hadar and Amir (2021), Foubert et al. identified a developmental sequence, moving between four stages of the improvisational relationship. The first and second stages of their improvisational frame, i.e., *inter-corporal listening* and *emergence of shared pulsation*, comport with Hadar and Amir's (2021) *primal moments*. While moments of *inter-corporal listening* illustrated moments when the therapist became receptive to the audible silence in the room, listening to how it influences the client's state, and awaiting first opportunities to make initial contact, moments of *emergence of shared pulsation* were composed of short episodes of shared pulse between client and therapist (Foubert et al., 2021).

Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant (2019), who identified different vocalisation trends in music therapy sessions with Autistic children, also pointed to such a preliminary stage, when highlighting the vocal technique of *exact vocal resonance*. Comporting with Hadar and Amir (2021) and Foubert et al. (2021), Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant discussed the developmental relation between two vocal interventions: the more fundamental *exact vocal resonance* versus the more intricate *vocal resonance with changes*. Furthermore, Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant (2019) emphasised that primary stages of therapy are characterised by vocalisations of low communicative nature, which supported clients' reaching a state of regulation and self-stimulation.

Hadar (2024) studied the temporal aspect of Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins' clinical improvisations. Based on an analysis of music therapy sessions with children that Nordoff and Robbins worked with, Hadar (2024) formed a developmental time model which describes four temporal phrases. Hadar's first temporal phase (*Augmented time frame*) subscribed to therapists' careful attunement and incorporation of many musical rests within the musical intervention. The author showed how the use of interspersed musical pauses allowed clients enough time to process the musical invitations and occasionally to respond to it, while being contained within a musical structure composed by the therapist. The author's third time phase (*Emotional time*) presented moments in which Nordoff was repeating a musical motif for many times, while the client was free to explore and discover their inner musical selves. It seems that both time phases emphasise pre-communicative qualities whereby initial responses were evoked and initial consciousness on behalf of the client was awakened. Resonating with the pre-communicative nature of Salomon-Gimmon's and Elefant's (2019) *Moments of exact resonance*, and with Hadar and Amir's (2021) and Foubert et al. (2021) primary stages of the improvisational interaction, such moments seem to support an emerging sense of thirdness, namely "one in the third" (Aron, 2006).

Situated within a psychodynamic orientation, Warner (2014) utilised a participatory action research approach for an in-depth, post-hoc investigation of the musical intervention within a music therapy group for adults with learning disabilities and severe challenging behaviours. In cycle 1 of Warner's reflective description, the therapist is described as attuning closely to the sound quality (i.e., register and volume) of the group members and gradually, similar to Foubert et al.'s (2019) portrayal of this stage, forming a preliminary pulsation between them. Moreover, the therapist is described as responding mainly to the gestural content of the participants, to their vitality contours (Stern, 2000; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000). Corresponding with Hadar (2024), Warner highlighted the sense of timelessness inherent to this primary stage of therapy and pointed to the therapist's role in tying together the fragmented and somewhat disconnected sounds present in the room by creating a sense of holding and containment of the musical space. Another quality mentioned by Warner relates to a sense of detachment and opponency among clients' play, illustrated by bursts of crescendo and throwing instruments, or even leaving the room. Such moments posit even a greater challenge on behalf of the therapist to invite an opportunity for establishing thirdness.

Similarly, Smetana et al. (2023) described a spectrum of relatedness in non-clinical improvisation between adult participants and trained music therapists. The authors specified three

categories² that resonate with Hadar and Amir's (2021) *primal moments*, i.e., *relating qualities*, *self-focused qualities*, *intra-/interpersonal phenomena*, all pertaining to initial stages of relatedness within clinical (or clinical-informed) musical improvisation. Hadar and Amir specified that such moments resemble mother-infant interaction and the emergence of reciprocity.

Employing a relational standpoint, and specifically Benjamin's theorising regarding "one in the third", I argue that all of the *moments* described in this section, reflect musical interventions which structured the possibility of creating moments of *thirdness* between the client and therapist in music therapy. Benjamin's *one in the third* pertains to moments when client and therapist are already celebrating a shared, co-created experience.

However, parallel moments in the music therapy context seem to depict a more subtle phase where the client is only awakening towards the possibility of *sharing*, while the therapist is holding, musically, the possibility of actual *oneness*. In this sense, it seems that *musical thirdness* allows a distinct, preliminary opportunity for inviting a client to connect.

Recognition of musical separateness: Reaching "third in the one"

In their concept of *Mature moments*, Hadar and Amir (2021) presented a stage within the client-therapist dyadic improvisation involving free and authentic dialogues, ones that could tolerate discrepancies in musical elements: e.g., rhythm, tempo, harmony, and melody. Moreover, an essential part of such moments entailed the dyad's capability to contain musical conflicts and disagreements. In "Music time & self" (Hadar, 2024), the author highlighted not only moments capturing the therapist's initiating different tempi and musical directions, but moments in which *clients* took the lead to differentiate themselves from the therapist's tempo and musical expression. Similarly, Foubert et al.'s (2021) third and fourth stages of their improvisational framework entailed moments of polyphonic flow and interpersonal trust. The word *polyphony* not only conveys the rich musical textures of the improvisation, but also points to the independent quality illustrated in the distinct paths chosen by each part of the dyad.

Among the 16 types of vocal interventions in music therapy with Autistic children, Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant (2019) highlighted the vocal technique *vocal resonance with changes*, which represented developmental growth and signified more complex relationships between client and therapist. According to the authors, *vocal resonance with changes* resembles advanced types of parent-infant communicative patterns, in which the parent feels confident enough to allow variations and diversions from the infant's original sounds. In agreement with Hadar, Warner (2014) emphasised the significance of moments in which the client made a clear musical statement of differentiating themselves from the therapist's musical expression by choosing a different beat for example. Warner also highlighted the spectrum stretched between a destructive differentiation and a healthy and constructive differentiation.

Smetana et al. (2023) specified the significance of feelings of separation as crucial for the emergence of an intersubjective musical space. They highlighted the existence of a more complex

² All three categories included specific subthemes which further strengthen their connections to Benjamin's conceptualization of "one in the third" (see Smetana et al., 2023).

relational stage, which includes unpleasant feelings, conflict, and autonomy. This does not necessarily ascribe to one of the dyad's members needing to create distance in the musical relationship, but rather as needing to allow for self-differentiation within the relationship.

From an intersubjective point of view, such musical communication may imply the client and therapist reaching a more complexed and advanced position of *thirdness*, while being able to express their authentic musical voice in dialogue with another, i.e., the "third in the one" position. Benjamin (2004, 2018) describes the nature of the "third in the one" position as asymmetrical, emphasising how it enables the therapist and client to communicate within a symbolic realm, which involves interpretations and multiple world views, and creates the grounds for insights to take place in therapy (Aron, 2006). In that sense, the theme *moments of insights through joint improvisation* represents moments when dyadic improvisation enabled moments of contained separateness, when clients could perform an inner mental movement or when the therapist was able to share their viewpoints (Hadar, 2018).

DISCUSSION

From musical resistance to emerging pulsation: A micro-analytic view of the "one in the third"

All studies included in the meta-analysis utilised a developmental model for understanding processes of change within clinical improvisation (Foubert et al., 2021; Hadar, 2024; Hadar & Amir, 2021; Salomon-Gimon & Elefant, 2019; Smetana et al., 2023; Warner, 2014). All the aforementioned studies described a preliminary stage of dyadic (or group, see Warner, 2014) improvisation, which included only emerging dialogues or even at a more fundamental stage, such as entailing a possible transition from a stage of disconnection between client and therapist to establishing initial rapport, due to one or more reasons: (1) clients' initial resistance to engage in the therapeutic process (Hadar & Amir, 2021; Hadar, 2024; Smetana et al., 2023; Warner, 2014) or (2) clients' initial unawareness of the therapist (Foubert et al., 2021; Salomon-Gimon & Elefant, 2019). Overall, this initial stage was illustrated by all studies as incorporating careful listening and attunement between client and therapist, as well as therapists' musical adherence to clients' sounds and suggestion of emerging pulsation, i.e., establishing "one in the third". Therapists in this stage were described as taking almost full responsibility over establishing musical contact, until reaching a point whereby initial signs of clients' responses emerged.

Melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic participatory discrepancies: Utilising the musical relationship for stepping into separateness

Nevertheless, all studies included in the meta-analysis described also a more advanced musical and relational step, which was predominated by clients' and therapists' mutual recognition of each other's musical separateness and otherness, and was manifested in participatory discrepancies between therapist and client in the temporal (Foubert et al., 2019; Hadar, 2024; Hadar & Amir, 2021; Warner,

2014), harmonic (Hadar, 2024), or melodic (Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant, 2019) realms. In such moments, the client and therapist were able to freely make their own musical choices and to initiate their separate being, i.e., “third in the one.”

A dialectic movement between musical disconnection to musical negotiation

Benjamin discusses a constant dialectic movement between two positions of thirdness as well as between moments of thirdness and moments of twoness (Aron, 2006; Benjamin, 2004, 2018). Similarly, as portrayed in Figure 2, this dialectic movement was also manifested within the musical improvisational relationship, stretching between moments of resistance in clinical improvisation to temporal, harmonic, and melodic discrepancies. In other words, this meta-analysis showed that there is a constant tension between resisting a relationship, making contact, and being able to form a differentiated self within a relationship, all of which taking place within the musical interaction. It appears that dyadic improvisation enabled progressive processes emerging from moments of cautious pauses and careful listening to the client's being, to moments in which the therapist and client both surrendered to each other's realities (Benjamin, 2004) and negotiated their individual existence in time, harmony, and melody. In those precious moments of recognition of each other's otherness, I argue that therapists and presumably clients were embracing the position of ‘*third in the one*’ (Benjamin, 2004). Salomon-Gimmon and Elefant (2019) emphasised the simultaneous occurrence of different stages in therapy (i.e., moment of *exact vocal resonance* and moment of *resonance with change*), thus creating a more complex view of child development, which resonate with the idea of “the third in the one.” In this regard, it seems that the acknowledgment in one's *otherness* is a momentarily achievement, which has to be continuously approached within the musical relationship in a spiral manner.

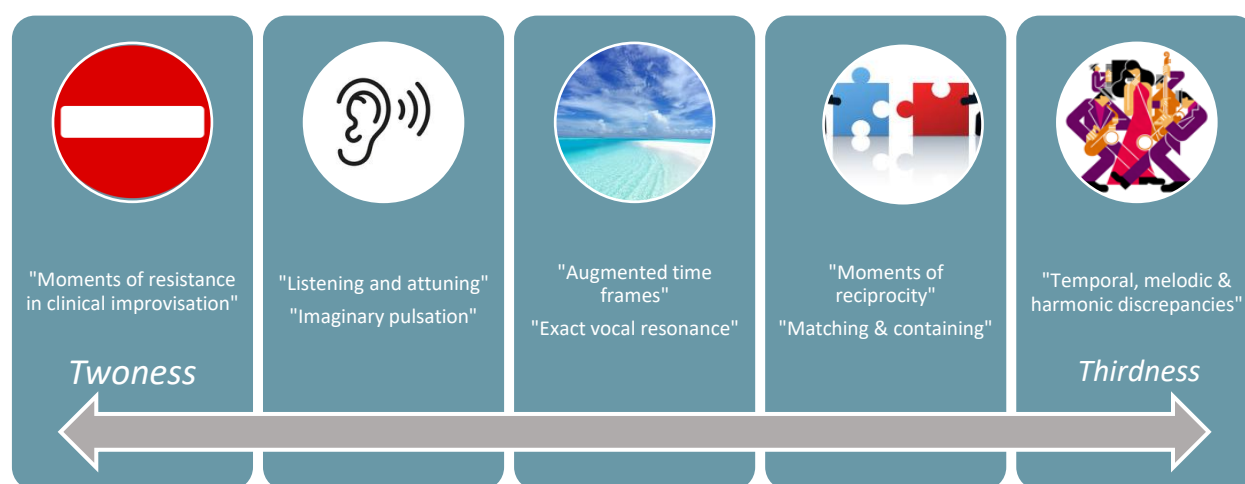


Figure 2: A dialectic movement from moments of musical disconnection (twoness) to moments of musical negotiation (thirdness) in clinical improvisation

The therapeutic relation as a multi-dimensional reality: Shifting between musical disconnection, emerging musical recognition, and recognition in musical separateness

Similar to earlier research dealing with intersubjectivity in music therapy (Birnbaum, 2014; Trondalen, 2016, 2019), this paper confirms the strong links between Trevarthen and Malloch's descriptions of parent-infant proto-conversations and of communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000), and the intersubjective nature of client-therapist musical interaction in music therapy. This paper further suggests that such delicate musical exchanges are instrumental for forming more complex relational patterns in advanced stages of the relationship. In alignment with Stern (2000), this paper highlights the baby's (and in this case – also client's) dual relational capacity to be *part of* and *separated from*, and for their need to practice such diverse relationality from the very beginning. In this sense, this paper provides a framework for unfolding intricate musical interactions between therapist and client by placing them within an intimate dance, which constantly shifts between *moments of (musical) disconnection*, *moments of emerging (musical) recognition*, and *moments of recognition of (musical) separateness* (see Figure 3).

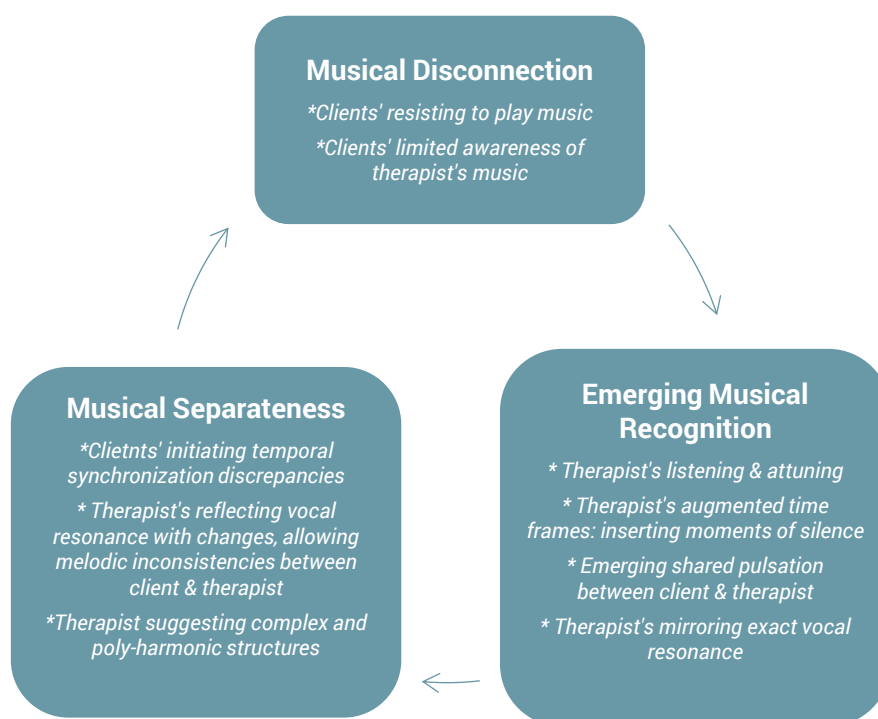


Figure 3: The client-therapist dance between moments of musical disconnection, moments of emerging musical recognition, and moments of recognition of musical separateness

CONCLUSIONS

This study proposed a conceptual link between clinical improvisation in music therapy and the idea of *thirdness* in intersubjective thought. Through portraying the gradual processes enabled via different kinds of moments in dyadic improvisation, the author showed the musical manifestations of varied positions of the client-therapist intersubjective relationship, i.e., “one in the third” and “third in the one”. Furthermore, this piece focused on tracing the musical paths stretching between several dimensions of the therapeutic relation: a complementary position of *twoness* to positions of *thirdness*, and between different types of thirdness. Results suggest that different kinds of musical moments and relations can reflect the level of intersubjectivity between client and therapist, and can imply the extent to which they can mutually recognise each other’s *otherness* yet remain authentically connected in a given moment. This type of conceptualisation can be useful in various clinical settings and assessments. For example, when a music therapist is reflecting on the type of moments they encountered within a session or when dealing with resistance and difficulties in establishing a relationship with clients. In both cases, collecting information about the type of moments emerging from a clinical improvisation might indicate the levels of intersubjectivity, and recognition of the *other* facilitated in the session, thus suggesting prospective therapeutic goals.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Στιγμές τριτότητας στη μουσικοθεραπεία: Μια ποιοτική μετα-ανάλυση βασισμένη στη διυποκειμενικότητα της Jessica Benjamin

Tamar Hadar

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Υπόβαθρο: Η μελέτη των διυποκειμενικών διαδικασιών είναι εμφανής σε διάφορες θεραπευτικές σχολές, μεταξύ των οποίων και η μουσικοθεραπεία. Πολλοί ερευνητές ασχολούνται με τα διυποκειμενικά νοήματα των μουσικών εμπειριών στη μουσικοθεραπεία. Εστιάζοντας στη διερεύνηση της διαμόρφωσης των διυποκειμενικών σχέσεων μέσω του δυαδικού αυτοσχεδιασμού, η παρούσα έρευνα επικεντρώθηκε σε έξι μελέτες μουσικοθεραπείας, οι οποίες περιλαμβάνουν εκτενείς περιγραφές κλινικών αυτοσχεδιασμών ή μουσικοθεραπευτικά ενημερωμένων (αλλά μη κλινικών) αυτοσχεδιασμών, οι οποίοι επίσης δίνουν έμφαση

σε σχεσιακές διαστάσεις. *Μέθοδος*: Ακολουθώντας μία αλληλουχία τεσσάρων βημάτων, πραγματοποιήθηκε μετα-ανάλυση των έξι μελετών. Μετά τον εντοπισμό του ερευνητικού ερωτήματος, η ερευνήτρια συνέλεξε σχετικές μελέτες ποιοτικής και μικτής μεθοδολογίας. Κρατώντας έξι μελέτες στην ανάλυση, διεξήχθη θεματική ανάλυση, για την κατανόηση των υποκείμενων νοημάτων που αντανakλούν τη διυποκειμενική ουσία του δυαδικού αυτοσχεδιασμού. Τέλος, η ερευνήτρια διαμόρφωσε μια εννοιολογική οργάνωση των διαφορετικών φάσεων της τριτότητας, όπως αυτές αντανakλώνται στον κλινικό αυτοσχεδιασμό, διαμορφώνοντας την ενότητα των αποτελεσμάτων. *Αποτελέσματα*: Μέσω της θεματικής ανάλυσης εντοπίστηκαν δύο κεντρικά θέματα, τα οποία ανέδειξαν διακριτές αναπτυξιακές φάσεις στον κλινικό αυτοσχεδιασμό και αντανakλούν τις διυποκειμενικές διαδικασίες, όπως περιγράφονται από την Jessica Benjamin: (1) Την αναδυόμενη μουσική αναγνώριση: προσεγγίζοντας «τον έναν στο τρίτο», και (2) την αναγνώριση του μουσικού διαχωρισμού: προσεγγίζοντας «τον τρίτο στον έναν». *Συζήτηση*: Βασισμένη στη διυποκειμενική θεωρία της Jessica Benjamin, η παρούσα μελέτη πραγματεύεται την σύνθετη έννοια της τριτότητας, και των πιθανών εκδηλώσεών της στον κλινικό αυτοσχεδιασμό. Αυτό το άρθρο δείχνει πώς οι αυτοσχεδιαστικές διαδικασίες επιτρέπουν το άνοιγμα ενός διυποκειμενικού χώρου μεταξύ πελάτη και θεραπευτή και καθιστούν δυνατή την αμοιβαία αναγνώριση της ετερότητας του άλλου.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

μουσικοθεραπεία, αυτοσχεδιασμός, διυποκειμενικότητα, τριτότητα, μετα-ανάλυση, Jessica Benjamin