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The Role and Significance of Sound Design *in Dramatherapy*
Rola i znaczenie sound designu *w dramaterapii*

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the article is to explore and understand the significance of using sound desing in drama therapy.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The main research question is: How is sound desing used in dramatherapy, and what role does it play? To answer this question, the study employs hermeneutical analysis of theoretical and cognitive materials, combined with observation methods to examine the practical applications of sound desing.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The choice of this topic stems from my personal academic interests and the notable gap in existing literature. The collection of theoretical material and observations of sound desing applications in dramatherapy enriched the hermeneutical inquiry and enabled a novel contribution to the field of art therapy.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The analysis examines the creative and therapeutic roles of an original, innovative approach to sound desing in dramatherapy.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF THE RESEARCH: The implementation of sound desing in dramatherapy, which enhances the creative process for individuals, is innovative, interdisciplinary, and therapeutic. An additional contribution is the introduction of the research category of interactive symbolism, in which symbols create interactive and relational spaces. This research paves the way for further interdisciplinary study and analysis.

→ **KEYWORDS:** SOUND DESIGN, DRAMATHERAPY, ART THERAPY, CREATIVITY, INTERACTIVE SYMBOLISM

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem naukowym artykułu jest poznanie i zrozumienie znaczenia zastosowania *sound desingu* w dramaterapii.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Problem badawczy zawiera się w pytaniu: Jak przedstawia się wykorzystanie *sound desingu* w dramaterapii, jaką odgrywa on rolę? Metodami badawczymi

zastosowanymi w celu udzielenia odpowiedzi na postawione pytanie jest analiza hermeneutyczna zgromadzonego materiału teoriopoznawczego oraz obserwacja wydobywająca wymiar praktyczny nowatorskiego zastosowania *sound desingu*.

PROCES WYWODU: Podjęcie się poruszanej tematyki artykułu wynikające z zainteresowań własnych oraz braku literatury w tym zakresie zainspirowało mnie do prowadzenia badań dotyczących tejże problematyki. Zgromadzony materiał teoretyczny oraz obserwacja wdrożenia *sound desingu* do dramaterapii pogłębiły hermeneutyczny wymiar dociekań naukowych, co też umożliwiło udzielenie odpowiedzi na postawiony problem, wnosząc *novum* do dyscypliny naukowej, jaką jest arteterapia.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Wynikiem analizy naukowej jest wskazanie roli twórczej i terapeutycznej zastosowanej własnej, nowatorskiej koncepcji *sound desingu* w dramaterapii.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Wdrożenie *sound desingu* do dramaterapii ma charakter innowacyjny, interdyscyplinarny i terapeutyczny oraz pogłębia proces twórczy człowieka. Jako dodatkowy innowacyjny element w tym procesie pojawiła się kategoria badawcza symbolizmu interakcyjnego, gdzie symbol buduje przestrzeń interakcyjną i intrarelacyjną. Prowadzone badania wymagają dalszej eksploracji obejmującej wielowymiarowość interdyscyplinarną.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** SOUND DESIGN, DRAMATERAPIA, ARTETERAPIA, TWÓRCZOŚĆ, SYMBOLIZM INTERAKCYJNY

Introduction

The study of the topic outlined in this essay stems from the author's personal interests as well as a notable lack of sufficient literature in the field. The author's original concept of sound desing, both as a method supporting therapeutic processes and as a tool boosting creativity, will be presented both in its theoretical foundations and practical applications. Accordingly, the goal of this article is to elucidate the role and significance of the sound desing concept in dramatherapy.

The British Association of Dramatherapists defines dramatherapy as follows:

> Dramatherapy is a form of psychological therapy in which all of the performance arts are utilized within the therapeutic relationship. Dramatherapists are both artists and clinicians and draw on their training in theatre / drama and therapy to create methods to engage clients in effecting psychological, emotional and social changes (The British Association of Dramatherapists, n.d.).

This definition provides the basis for the central research question: What is the role and importance of incorporating sound desing into the dramatherapeutic process? Answering this question requires specific research methods, including hermeneutic analysis of theoretical elements and observation of creative development workshops. The concept of interactional symbolism, combined with Tony Buzan's mind mapping techniques

and the practical application of sound desing, helps make the therapeutic process more engaging and creative. These elements, which fall under the umbrella of art therapy, offer new ways to support self-expression and personal growth.

Given the broad scope of the subject matter, this article will provide an overview that includes defining key concepts such as sound, sound desing, interactional symbolism, and diegesis. Additionally, it delineates the stages involved in implementing the sound desing concept in therapeutic processes under observational study. These investigations have the potential to advance the field of art therapy, while their broader analysis may have implications for other scholarly disciplines.

Sound Design in Dramatherapy

Although sound is both intangible and imperceptible to the eye, it exists in an undeniably concrete way. In its natural state, sound comes into being only at the moment of its creation in a specific place and time, with air acting as its conduit. It cannot exist in a vacuum, though it can be transmitted via radio waves after undergoing conversion and subsequent decoding. Frederick Alton Everest explains the nature of sound as follows:

> Sound can be defined as a wave motion in air or other elastic media (stimulus) or as that excitation of the hearing mechanism that results in the perception of sound (sensation). Which definition applies depends on whether the approach is physical or psychophysical. The type of problem dictates the approach to sound. If the interest is in the disturbance in air created by a loudspeaker, it is a problem in physics (2001, p. 1).

Both definitions of sound are relevant in this discussion, as the function of sound – central to the concept of sound desing employed in dramatherapy – covers not only the identification of its nature and methods of production and modification but also its impact on human perception. Considering the first of these areas, sound can be viewed as a carrier of vast amounts of information within its environment. For example, an analysis of recorded footsteps can reveal the direction and speed of movement, the type of footwear, the type of the surface being traversed, and even the walker's gender. Such encoded and decoded information offers fertile ground for exploring sound as a therapeutic tool.

Simultaneously, sound plays an integral role in multimedia applications, such as film and video games. Here, it performs one of its most crucial functions: creating immersive experiences that enhance the perception of alternate realities. As Paulina Bielesz notes in the context of video games:

> [Immersion] involves plunging the player into a virtual world and making them forget they are in an artificial environment. Sound effects, dialogues, and music add realism to gameplay and help orient the player within the action. The auditory environment immediately situates the player within the character's world. All virtual world sounds mirror the impressions

of the real world. Narration, whether through dialogue or voice-over, drives the story, while sound effects act as cues for the player. For example, certain sounds, such as the growls of characters (or monsters), can warn the player of impending danger (2017, p. 110).

This demonstrates that, despite being visually intangible, sound transforms reality that significantly influences human perception. Its application in therapy, according to Peter Hess:

> can strengthen the entire body by stimulating lymphocyte production through vibration. This enhances verbal and non-verbal communication, improves perception, broadens interests, boosts creative abilities, and positively affects the quality of human experiences. These benefits can contribute to an individual's overall well-being, facilitating a "return to oneself" through its prophylactic and therapeutic applications (Kataryńczuk-Mania, 2020, p. 159).

As such, sound is key to supporting therapeutic processes. At this point, it is also worth considering sound's most prominent counterpart – silence. Attempting to define silence often leads to questioning its very existence. John Cage, the acclaimed American composer of contemporary music, famously dismissed the idea of absolute silence after entering an anechoic chamber – a soundproof, echo-free space. In the absence of external sounds, Cage noted, one becomes acutely aware of the noises emanating from within their own body: "we hear the rustling, throbbing, whooshing of our bodies, as well as incidental buzzings, ringings, and squeakings" (Ackerman, 1990, p. 191). For the purposes of this discussion, Cage's observation may remain a thought-provoking entry point for contemplating the inspiring power of silence in the sonic realm of human experience.

Beyond these properties and uses, there exists a dimension where sound is harnessed creatively. This dimension includes a novel concept developed by the author of this text, titled "Sound Design as a Tool for Fostering Creativity." Its main objective is to explore, understand, and enhance creativity as a means of supporting the therapeutic process, particularly in dramatherapy. Integrating this concept into drama sessions – where sound is integral to identifying problems and crafting solutions – involves four stages: an introduction, a theoretical component, practical exercises, and a concluding stage of discussion and reflection.

The first stage involves introducing the participants, learning about their interests and passions, and discussing their understanding of sound desing. The session also provides an overview of the course structure. The main goal of this stage is to establish a rapport between the instructor and the participants. Additionally, it helps pinpoint areas for creative work, as the instructor gathers valuable insights about the participants, which can guide the creative process. Relaxation and concentration exercises are also part of this stage. As Kamila Witerska explains:

> […] such exercises have two purposes: to reduce the psychological and physical tension of the participants and to help them focus on the task at hand. Furthermore, they help create a supportive and collaborative environment, often referred to as the group's optimal working climate (Witerska, 2011, p. 18).

Preparing participants to engage with abstract ideas, take on dramatic roles, or experiment with improvisation is key to achieving this goal. Once the exercises are completed, participants are introduced to their first creative task: contemplating the nature of sound desing and defining it through a mind map of spontaneously written associations. Incorporating Tony Buzan's method at the start of the session supports the creative process by enabling efficient access to and updates of information within the mind map as the session progresses.

In education, mind maps

> eliminate the stress and unhappiness caused by disorganisation, fear of failure and "writer's block". They free your associative "grappling hooks" to take in new information and ideas, thus enhancing creativity and originality […] They put you in continuous control of the analytical and creative process (Buzan & Buzan, 2014, p. 181).

This process will also classify the various elements necessary for identifying problems that arise during the session, set clear objectives, and map out the steps to achieving them.

The second part of the session involves a theoretical review of sound desing in its various dimensions. The first aspect focuses on understanding the definition of sound desing, which describes it as

> […] the technical and creative process that goes into creating a sound mix. In film and television this includes combining diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and music effects to enhance the impact and meaning of the visuals. Many of the elements that combine in the final mix have to be sourced or created in post-production (Chandler & Munday, 2024).

This stage also explains the concept of diegesis. Derived from the Greek word meaning "narration," diegesis, as J. Ostaszewski explains:

> […] in the rhetorical tradition that began with Plato (*The Republic*) and Aristotle (*Poetics*), diegesis was contrasted with mimesis, or "imitation." Diegesis was seen as narrating events through storytelling with words, rather than representing them visually through imitation. […] In film, diegetic sound includes character dialogue visible on screen or music coming from an on-screen or implied source (e.g., the car radio in *American Graffiti*), while non-diegetic sound refers to background music that accompanies the action and characters (2010, p. 104).

This definition helps participants understand the multi-dimensional nature of drama enhanced by sound and encourages them to view sound from different angles.

Getting acquainted with the concepts discussed above opens the door to a deeper appreciation of sound design and sets the stage for participants to immerse themselves in the auditory world of the theoretical section. This part of the program includes curated audiovisual examples, such as snippets of contemporary classical music in which composers weave elements of sound design into their work as a complementary technique. Additionally, the program features documentary films that illustrate the craft and legacy of acclaimed sound designers working in multimedia and digital spaces.

The journey continues with a hands-on introduction to the art of capturing, preserving, and transforming sonic material. Participants are shown the tools used for recording, taught the value of categorizing, organizing and naming collected sound samples, and guided through software that allows them to reach new levels of abstraction as they prepare for upcoming projects. Updating mind maps throughout this stage is showcased as a key practice that sharpens the creative processes. The theoretical segment concludes with a summary and a brief discussion, which ushers the participants toward the next stage of the program.

The third stage, the practical component, is the most extensive and immersive part of the program that draws all participants into an engaging creative process. It begins with stimulating the imagination – a key first step. The examples of sound design applications in interdisciplinary projects, introduced earlier in the theoretical segment, naturally act as sources of inspiration. As Scott Barry Kaufman explains,

> Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility, and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities. […] as recent research shows, inspiration can be activated, captured, and manipulated, and it has a major effect on important life outcomes (2011).

The transformation participants undergo after working with these examples can significantly enhance the creative process, shifting their focus from technical and workshop-oriented concerns toward uncovering the heart of dramatic performance. The path to this discovery requires stepping into roles that challenge participants to reimagine themselves and their relationship to the surrounding world. As Kamila Witerska remarks:

> Drama […] can act as a mirror, giving us the chance to discover who we are and to better understand our qualities. It holds immense power in helping us unveil and construct our identity. This process of self-discovery occurs actively – through action, reflecting on that action, and reinterpreting it. Drama compels us to act, to respond emotionally to situations and the people involved in them, and then invites us to analyze these actions and emotions, name them, and experiment with alternative responses and behaviors (2014, p. 19).

This immersive, hands-on approach brings participants closer to their inner creativity while guiding them toward both artistic and personal introspective discovery.

To illustrate how this concept works in practice, let me share a personal experience: in 2024, I conducted sound desing workshops at a music school for both elementary and advanced students. After completing the previously outlined stages, I introduced participants to an abstract exercise using dramatic techniques. I asked them to imagine themselves as their own musical instruments and fully embody these instruments as though they were absent from their human forms.

The first task was for participants to describe themselves as instruments, in as much detail as possible. Then, after a moment of reflection, they were asked to express the difficulties and frustrations they faced in musical performance, all while remaining in

character. This process opened the door to a conversation about a problem that, as it later turned out, was shared across the entire group. Most participants were grappling with technical obstacles during practice sessions, and struggles with motivation and consistency in their routines.

One notable outcome was how dramatically their shyness diminished. While earlier stages of the workshop revealed apprehension and fear of public speaking, adopting dramatic roles liberated them from those anxieties. It sparked a strong sense of community and collective engagement. Once the group had defined their shared problems, they began working together to devise solutions. During an energetic brainstorming session, participants suggested ideas such as building self-confidence, developing effective time-management strategies, and cutting back on passive activities.

The final step was translating these solutions into more sophisticated creative work. Participants moved into musical and sound-based activities that drew on regularly updated mind maps for guidance. In this setting, the role of symbols became particularly important. As Witerska emphasizes:

> The problems explored in drama, and the symbols it employs, must be grounded in a cultural context familiar to students. If teachers fail to account for socio-cultural factors when designing drama-based activities, the symbols or situations may lack meaning for the participants or even become incomprehensible (2014, p. 47).

During the workshop, the group reached a consensus: the sound that would symbolize their solution was the tone of "G." Each participant found their own personal way to develop this musical phrase. As the activity progressed, and after analyzing the group's abilities, the facilitator suggested exploring either classical or contemporary harmony to enhance the soundscape. The group chose the latter, agreeing that its mysterious and abstract quality was most suited to resolving their problem.

This demonstrates that dramatic action – stepping into dramatic roles – plays a key role in the creative process, not only in sound design but also in social interaction. All recorded sounds from the exercise were processed by the facilitator using editing software, in accordance with the participants' ideas. Interestingly, when given options for sound processors, the group consistently gravitated toward more abstract approaches. The entire creative process was imbued with what the author defines as "interactive symbolism" – a novel concept in creative endeavors and community-building. The author explains this term as follows:

> Interactive symbolism refers to the idea that a symbol creates a space for social interaction while also holding an intrarelational quality – a self-referential relationship. Unlike symbolic interactionism, which posits that society is built upon symbols, in interactive this premise is reversed: it is the symbol that constructs the community (Author, September 19, 2024).

This concept is highly relevant for contextualizing the significance of the workshop.

In the final stage, participants stepped out of their dramatic roles and reviewed the results of their work, particularly the sonic impression they had created. During the discussion, they were asked thought-provoking questions:

- Is our imagination limited?
- How important is teamwork?
- What does this experience contribute to my work and passions?

Their responses revealed an understanding of three interconnected relationships: between a performer and their instrument, between a teacher and a performer, and among members of a musical ensemble. Moreover, they placed themselves within these relationships and explored ways to apply what they had learned to their personal and professional lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, moving through the key stages – introduction, theoretical discussion, practical exploration, conclusions, and reflections – has revealed the value of sound desing as a therapeutic technique in drama-based processes. The practical case study demonstrates how sound desing, as a tool for enhancing creativity, can extend beyond music into other areas of human activity. As John Cage famously said, absolute silence does not exist. When combined with Tony Buzan's mind-mapping concept and the author's proposed theory of interactive symbolism, sound desing could become a powerful catalyst for creativity in therapy. Therefore, its role in drama therapy emerges as valuable and promising. This study introduces two new perspectives: the author's concept of sound desing in therapeutic processes and the notion of "interactive symbolism." The observational method employed in analyzing the creative process within drama therapy offers fertile ground for further interdisciplinary research and may significantly contribute to the development of art therapy as a scientific discipline.

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