

## Time continuity and discontinuity in organizations. A reflexive case on Lecoquian pedagogy

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### Abstract

For organization literature, time is a key concept in distinguishing improvisation from composition as organizational practices. In improvisation, generation and execution response(s) converge in time. In composition, these are disconnected and there's a clear temporal separation between the creative process and its outcomes. From the emphasis on the time variable, this paper develops a study around continuity and discontinuity as a point of view onto organizational practices. First, it compares organization literature and performing arts literature, detecting in time continuity and discontinuity the constructs around which improvisation and composition can be defined. The paper then questions traditional assumptions of neatly separating improvisation and composition, exploring the issue of time continuity and discontinuity at the Ecole Lecoq, Paris for theatre. Drawing from empirical materials gathered through observational participation by one of the authors in this school's activity, the article shows how improvisation and composition are intertwined, while continuity and temporal discontinuity continuously overlap. In light of this consideration, the paper argues that time management in organizations is affected by theoretical and practical understandings of time within artistic practices. Those practices, in fact, should not be considered as mere tools or metaphors for management, but as sources of organizational knowledge.

### 1. Introduction

Organization literature has deeply analysed improvisation as a creative process (Fisher and Amabile, 2009), as an innovation process (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001), or as a learning process (Vendelø, 2009), firmly based on previous knowledge, consolidated routines, experience, and intuition (Crossan, Lane and White, 1999).

Literature has shown great interest in defining improvisation in organizations through artistic practices (Weick, 1993; Frost and Yarrow, 1990; Barrett, 1998) particularly viewing jazz as a metaphor for organizational improvisation. Contrariwise, this paper considers artistic and corporal and creative practices to be intrinsically meaningful, a source for organizational knowledge.

Thus, this research uses the international school of physical theatre founded by Jacques Lecoq [hereafter Ecole Lecoq] in 1956 in Paris as a case study to investigate how artistic practice may explain managerial definition of improvisation and composition. One of the pillars of the Lecoq acting method consists in having actors share improvisational techniques among themselves, so that they may realize how composition and improvisation are tightly connected to each other.

From the case study, run in a narrative perspective (Czarniawska, 2004), the paper engages with improvisation “in practice” to find elements that can improve the theory of management. Our research question is: how can the Lecoq pedagogy contribute to our understanding of improvisation practices within and beyond management?

The starting point to analyse improvisation, in this work, is the description proposed by Vendelø (2009), focusing on two main aspects. The first is the concept of time which literature has identified as a key in distinguishing improvisation from composition; the second is expertise, as necessary background for improvisation. Time has been considered a factor in distinguishing composition from improvisation, treating it as an “objective” construct through which one may identify the distinct moments when different actions take place. Going further with this idea, this paper aims to understand the implications of “subjective” temporal assumptions on composition and improvisation.

To this end, we started from a very widespread idea, presented by Ciborra (1999: 86):

improvisation does not belong to a regular chronology where each ‘now’ lies on a continuum between the ‘already been’ and the ‘not yet now’, in a linear sequence of events. Indeed, according to modern composer Pierre Boulez, improvisation is ‘Einbruch’, *i.e.* irruption. The idea of ‘Einbruch’ includes the images of surprise and breaking of plans. Let us consider these characteristics more closely. Improvisation, with its character of irrupting surprise, has very little to do with such a quantitative idea of time and the relevant methods to manage it: improvisation defies measurement and method. It surfaces and vanishes ‘on the spur of the moment’.

From what has just been said, improvisation is generally related to a “continuity” view of time, while “discontinuity” is seen as the perspective of the composition. In this paper we contest these traditional assumptions of neat separation between improvisation and composition, as our empirical materials show how time continuity and discontinuity overlap all the time. After we review literature on improvisation and on composition and on continuity and discontinuity, we present our empirical case and address possible interpretations. Likewise, we discuss practical implications for an organization in experiencing continuity and discontinuity in time management. We argue that time management in organizations is affected by theoretical and practical understandings of time within artistic practices. These practices, we hold, should not be considered as mere tools or metaphors for management, but as sources of organizational knowledge.

## 2. Time for improvising and time for composing

Organization literature has shown an interest in understanding the role of time stimuli in improvisation and composition (Fisher and Amabile, 2009; Vendelø, 2009; Ciborra, 1999). Fisher and Amabile (2009) remark that even if composition and improvisation produce novel outcomes, composition reveals a clear temporal separation between generating a response and executing it, while in improvisation “the composition and execution of an action converge in time” (Moorman and Miner 1998: 698). The relationship that involves improvisation, composition and time is also present in several definitions within organization studies. Among others, Weick (1993: 334) defines improvisation as: “there is no split between the composition and performance; no split between creator and interpreter; and no split between design and production”. In this definition, the word “split” also includes a temporal separation. Perry (1991) defines improvisation as something composed while performed, once more focusing on the idea of a temporal separation between composition and improvisation.

Improvisation, among different definitions, in organization literature is described as a creative process to obtain a novel outcome (Miner *et al.*, 2001; Cunha *et al.*, 2007), through spontaneity and extemporaneity, whose process is characterized by the real time of the action (Cunha *et al.*, 1999; Vera and Crossan, 2004).

On the other hand, with regards to composition and its relationship with time, we start from a definition by Larson on composition in music (2005: 241):

Composition is traditionally regarded as a process in which a composer, with pen and paper, outside of the “real time”, uses revision and hard work to eliminate or avoid mistakes; the composition builds on tradition, imposes constraints, and relies on training in a time-consuming process that involves rational reflection and intellectual calculation to create complex, sophisticated relationship.

The revision process mentioned here is described as taking place in a ‘discontinuous time’ that seems very different from the ‘real time’ to which improvisation is usually related. In this account of ‘discontinuous’ time, intuitions can be revised before the output is produced, thus interrupting or even reversing the linear flow of time. Using the *via negativa* (*negative way*) about what Weick (1993) wrote in describing improvisation, this account of composition presents a clear temporal separation between the creative process and its outcomes – which resembles the temporal separation we see in classical music between composing the score and executing it in live performance.

## 3. Building expertise to improvise

In everyday language, improvisation is often viewed as a synonym for ‘arranging’, something which is done in a casual way and without foundations.

By contrast, Berliner (1994: 241), as quoted by Weick (1998: 544) and Vendelø (2009: 450), argues: “Improvisation involves reworking pre-composed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation”.

This means that, to improvise, a set of knowledge must be acquired first, which may then be deconstructed and reconstructed in the improvisation process. Thus, background material is

transformed and used in further improvised performances (Berliner, 1994). This action of recruiting previous knowledge to create a novel output through the improvisation process (Fisher and Amabile, 2009) is connected to the conceptual dimension of the intentionality of the process, which has a relevant role in organizational literature (Giustiniano *et al.*, 2016; Cunha *et al.*, 1999). With reference to this idea, improvisation has been also defined as an intentional process, involving consciousness of action and a deviation from established practices (Garud and Karnøe, 2001) since it includes the deliberate decision of using previous knowledge to act contrary to something planned or in the absence of planning (Giustiniano *et al.*, 2016). Moorman and Miner (1998a) delve further to argue the importance of memory in improvisation. Their focus is on procedural memory, which comprises the set of things people can do and becomes automatic or unconsciously accessible. Thus, in an improvisation process, people use past knowledge to create novelties. In their analysis, Moorman and Miner (1998a: 709) find that “the greater the procedural memory level, the greater the possibility that improvisation will produce coherent actions”. Through the procedural memory theme, we are led to think that the features of this background must be understood in addition to the need for a set of previous knowledge.

Sawyer (2008) proposes some characteristics of the knowledge background, needed to start the improvisation process. More specifically, this author analyses four features: deep conceptual understanding, which means not just knowing a set of things, but also creating an embedded conceptual framework among them; integrated knowledge, that occurs when parts of knowledge interconnect to others; adaptive expertise, in the sense of knowing that past solutions can work in present problems and situations; collaborative skills, which consist in not creating boundaries between people’s activities.

#### 4. Continuous time and discontinuous time

One of the most widespread methods of considering variables in connection with time in organization studies is through the continuous versus discontinuous time dichotomy. A general definition of a continuous and discontinuous variable can be proposed as follows: a variable is continuous if it contains infinite elements with no empty spaces in-between, while it is discontinuous (or discrete) if its elements are either isolated or not contiguous to each other.

The reference to time can be explicit or implicit. In some studies (Dougherty, 2013; Orlikowsky and Yates, 2002), the concept of continuity and discontinuity is directly referred to time, while other studies (Lynn, 2005; Munir and Jones, 2004) describe the frequency of certain events through continuity and discontinuity, considering, therefore, an implicit relation with time.

A concept which has been largely analysed through continuity and discontinuity is change. Among others, Lynn (2005) describes the relationship between firm buffering and environmental changes: he argues that while continuous changes are related to “variation around a norm, such as fluctuations in demand for a product or in the supply of raw materials” (Lynn, 2005: 39), discontinuous changes are more radical as they suggest that there will be a shift in the rule.

Following a similar idea, Munir and Jones (2004) use the concept of discontinuity to describe technological innovation, arguing that in most industries, “radical change is brought about

through radical technological changes or ‘discontinuities’ (variations)”. Those discontinuous variations can manifest as improvement of a product or as a complete change in the technological paradigm. In this second case, discontinuity is followed by a period of ferment in which the novelties are elaborated and connected with existing technologies. After this period, a standard emerges (Munir and Jones, 2004).

Writing about organizational learning, Berends and Lammers (2010: 1048), argue that “a discontinuity occurs where one of the four learning processes [as described by Crossan *et al.*, 1999] is interrupted or where learning does not flow from level to level”. Thus, they point to discontinuity in learning as the absence of a unique flow.

As mentioned earlier, from these definitions an idea emerges of discontinuity based on the analysis of isolated moments succeeding one another of their own accord over time.

From a different perspective, continuity and discontinuity have been also used to distinguish clock-time and event time (Dougherty *et al.*, 2013; Starkey, 1989; Orlikowsky and Yates, 2002). Clock-time or Kronos is time as displayed on clocks and chronometers: it is a number of moments in succession and clock-time allows to distinguish the present from the past and the future, making it possible to identify phenomena as isolable entities (Reineke and Ansari, 2017). Dougherty *et al.* (2013) propose that clock-time refers to continuous time, in which each moment carries the same significance as the previous or the next.

On the other hand, event-time (*Kairos*), refers to a qualitative perspective on time which is not perceived as an independent flow in which events are set. Therefore, in event-time, the meaning attached to occurrences shapes time flow, regardless of the clock-time in which they are set. In event-time, discontinuity refers to the moment, considered in its qualitative aspect.

These definitions associate the concept of discontinuity to the concept of discrete time. In this perspective, things happen in certain moments placed in a disconnected way along the timeline. What is missed however is the fact that nothing stops in-between these moments: a condition that allows a multi-layered temporality that can “step back to isolate, reflect upon, and possibly revise any given moment” (Sarath, 1996: 3). With reference to composition, it doesn’t stop when “notation or some form of iteration or reflection takes place” (Sarath, 1996: 2).

## 5. Methodology

To gain more knowledge on the theory, we have developed a case study relying on the context and the processes (Flyvbjerg, 2011) of Lecoq theatre pedagogy for our analysis. Our single case study is also revelatory since it includes a professional actor who is on the authorial team of this paper. In fact, from 10th October 2021 till 17th December 2022, he attended the first year’s program at the Ecole Lecoq after having successfully auditioned, a necessary step that enabled him to access the courses and consequentially all of us to develop the case study.

The possibility of participating in the lessons let the author run an “observant participation” (Bassetti, 2009; Wacquant, 2000), in which the action has a more important role if compared to the “participant observation” (Corbetta, 1999), to have a look from the inside of the phenomenon immersing ourselves in the context we wanted to investigate (De Bruin, 2018; Sicca, 2000).

So while the author who attended the course was still learning “how to do”, as the rest of the team, we studied improvisation and composition practices with an approach that allowed us to reflect on the practice. This approach, which we built reading Sparti (2005), allowed us to understand the genesis of improvisation, as an embodied skill, thanks to the experience of the author (Sparti, 2005). In fact, we considered Lecoq’s theatre pedagogy not as a metaphor of improvisation in organization but as a source of organizational knowledge. Thus, studying theatre improvisation at the Paris school mentioned has been a source of different perspectives on a practice common to theatre and organizations.

We selected the Ecole Lecoq as our case study for the importance it gives to improvisation within theatre pedagogy, which is itself considered one of the strongest acting methods in Europe. Well-known Lecoq alumni include: Geoffrey Rush (actor); Avner Eiseberg (clown); Philippe Gaulier (clown and founder of Ecole Gaulier); Giuliano Peparini (dancer and choreographer); Ariane Mnouchkine (director and founder of Theatre du Soleil).

Starting from the field notes collected during the observant participation, we developed a self-narration using a daily journal that the author kept during his Paris stay.

Data have been analysed through a narrative analysis of the collected material, using a phenomenological approach, based on an individual perspective (Czarniawska, 2004; Boje, 2001).

The purpose of this narrative method is to analyse not just the process of improvisation in a coherent and scientific way, but also to understand from the inside the interpretative model of the process of composing and improvising (Czarniawska, 2014), both in its formal and informal elements.

To broaden our understanding of the case study, in addition to attending the courses, we also studied online video interviews featuring Lecoq where he focused on his teaching method and improvising. Likewise, we viewed various documentaries on his life and his pedagogy which showed several talented alumni (actors, directors, or writers) or his close collaborators.

## **6. Data: The historical context: birth and growth of a non-improvised pedagogy**

Jacques Lecoq, born in 1921 in Paris, created a theatre pedagogy that involves mime, physical theatre and movement analysis. As a young professional, he initially taught physical education and then worked as a physical trainer in different theatrical companies. Through Jean Dasté, Lecoq was introduced to the world of masks. In 1948, he moved to Italy where he worked with Giorgio Strehler, Paolo Grassi, Dario Fo. There, he also met mask maker Amleto Sartori, with whom he developed his neutral mask, adding features to the one he had been using since his experience with Dasté (Lecoq, 2016). Jacques Lecoq returned to Paris in 1956 and founded his school, with the idea of creating a young-creative theatre.

The Lecoq acting method is based on the “*negative way*”. During the lessons, teachers neither demonstrate performances to students nor do they give indications on what is right. After students’ performances, teachers provide feedback about the worst aspects, without preventing them from making mistakes, but solely correcting what they do.

This teaching strategy creates conditions in which students are free to experiment and discover their creativity. Thanks to this focus on personal creativity, the Lecoq acting method has been studied by several performers in very different areas of the performing arts.

After Lecoq's demise in 1999, his daughter took over as director of the school. All of the current teachers are school alumni. Thus, they maintain the original pedagogy adding some personal features to the courses.

### **6.1. The neutral mask: the core of the first term at the Ecole Lecoq**

The neutral mask was developed by Lecoq and Amleto Sartori and it is described by Lecoq as "a face, a neutral face, in balance, which proposes the physical dimension of calm" (Lecoq, 2016: 63). The mask is made of leather; it has no character and no particular expression; two holes are designed for the eyes and a smaller one over the mouth to facilitate the actor's breathing. The mask prevents all other facial expressions from being detected just as it does not allow speaking. The mask is for ever in the present and so it is every single time acting for the first time. This lack of past or future for the mask enhances a state of continuous discovery of what is around it. The intention of every action is to discover the one to follow much more than longing for the previous. When actors put the mask on, each and every gesture is delegated, it is for the body as a whole to express. Their heads become their eyes and their bodies become their face. As a result, after working with a neutral mask, the body becomes more available to act (Lecoq, 2016). There are several benefits in working with the mask. First, movements become accurate because actors may only communicate through their body; to achieve this goal, their task is to rid themselves of movements that comment the action and solely perform it. For instance, if actors want to show sadness, they won't cry or put their head down; instead, they will entrust it to the rhythm of their action or to their breath.

Masks are for improvisation classes only. At the beginning of lessons, the teacher takes the masks from a bag and lines them up on a bench. At each improvisation, students are to use one and then put it back for others to use it. As a means of keeping the audience focused on the body, during improvisation with the mask, where black clothing is strongly advised, no bracelets, necklaces or earrings are to be worn since in this pedagogy they are viewed as distracting factors.

### **6.2. An illustrative case of continuity and discontinuity in organization**

The Ecole has been at 57, rue du Faubourg Saint Denis in the 10eme arrondissement since its foundation in 1956. Each year about 70 new students walk in a structure that, prior to 1956, used to host boxing matches as its original architecture still shows. On the first day of courses, two groups of 35 students each are formed; our author was in group A. Each lesson is repeated twice a day, one per group. The two groups only meet at the end of each week, during *autocourse* presentations (prepared in small group independently of teachers).

The course comprises three lessons a day, in different order. The movement class is a technical lesson to analyse daily different kinds of movements. As Lecoq explains in his book, during his lessons he wants to develop an analytic expression of the body, which involves separately each part of the body: head, foot, legs, arms, hands (Lecoq, 2016). In the Lecoq pedagogy, the analytic study of movement is just a preliminary part of the approach, as in his

opinion: “on stage, doing a movement is never a mechanical action, the movement should be justified” (Lecoq, 2016: 105). Following the idea that movements are transposed into action and moods, during the course students are asked to do different exercises. Some are designed to allow students to experience feelings or states that they will try to recreate in improvisation classes. For instance, one of the most sought after is the movement class for the seven levels of tension. In it, students try to recreate seven different levels of muscle tension, to experience what each level can communicate. The fourth level, the so called state of alert (*état d’alerte*) involves using the neutral mask, which allows actors to acquire a greater bodily presence on stage. Other lessons are more connected to movement analysis; among other things, first year includes teaching 20 movements which Lecoq himself invented, including: climbing walls, body closing and opening, pushing and pulling.

In improvisation class, students are given themes and do exactly that, improvise. Themes may regard a child bedroom, a waiting room, a swimming pool, a neutral mask in the forest, using this mask for goodbyes or for hunting, three trees that meet on a bench, and others. Moreover, as part of improvisation, they are neither informed of the theme in advance, nor do teachers show their own improvisations. So, having no schemes to imitate, students perform freely and creatively.

At the beginning of the lesson, students come in the classroom and sit on benches arranged on the side of the room. Once the teacher announces the theme, students voluntarily decide who improvises what. Teachers may ask students to do the improvisation individually or in groups.

As mentioned, an *autocourse* is mainly run by the students. Every week students put together a scene (5-10 minutes long although length is not fixed). They do so in small groups which they freely create (teacher provides details on group size at the end of the previous week). They meet daily for 90 minutes to organize and prepare the performance. At the end of the week, each group presents the work done to teachers and students alike and receives teachers’ feedback. At the end of each performance, teachers give the next theme. As a general rule, themes follow the scope and that is to have students feel as free as possible in their creative activity. Among the themes, there is: “one place, one action”; “the invisible man”; “neutral mask in a hurricane”; “a square in a crowded city”.

The first-year program at the Ecole has three courses. The first, a three-weeks course, is an introduction to play. In it students are asked to play normal life situations so that they may begin developing their acting skills, working alone and with other actors.

The second, a four-weeks course, focuses on the neutral mask: its scope is for actors to develop presence on stage, precision in movements and the capability of managing the space on stage.

After the neutral mask, there is a three-weeks course for work on identifications: actors start playing the four elements (earth, wind, water, fire) and different materials (glass, rubber band, oil, sponge and so on). The objective here is to have actors understand how each material differs in dynamics, rhythms and characteristics and then transpose them in their own movement. The three courses are structured in the same way. Lessons run from 9 a. m. to 1 p. m. with no breaks. The daily program plans for three lessons: movement, improvisation; and, *autocourse*.

### 6.3. Setting and space



The movement class is held in the *grand salle*, a big space with a parquet floor and several objects (benches, chairs, carpet for acrobats and some furniture) along the walls for lesson purposes. Students are usually allowed to use this furniture during the *autocourse* as well. During the movement class the whole room is used, and students are often asked to mind the space and keep the right distance from one another. For *autocourse* presentations, a closed curtain divides the room (except for some which use the full room) to create a stage space as in theatres.

Improvisation lessons, instead, take place in the *salle verte*, named after this room's green linoleum floor. Smaller than the *grand salle*, in it there are no objects since these are solely mimicked in improvisation. During these lessons, teachers ask students to touch neither the walls nor the floor because actors must give the impression of being in a place whose characteristics are not those of the *salle verte*. For the same reason, it is smaller than the *grand salle*: the actor is to imagine a different space (sometimes much bigger, as it happens when teachers ask students to perform in the forest, in the sea, on a mountain) and try to perform it in a small space. In the Lecoq pedagogy, this is important to educate actors in imagining and managing the space.

As far as *autocourse* is concerned, groups may take turns in meeting in the *grand salle* or in the *salle verte*. As the final performance is held each week in the *grand salle*, it is important for groups to have some rehearsals in it, because of the spatial organization of the performance.

## 7. Data analysis

As data was collected in a free narration by one of the authors, a subsequent coding was necessary to develop a data interpretation. Thus, we analysed the self-narration through a thematic analysis. Each of us authors did the analysis separately and we then compared results (McAllum *et al.*, 2019). The analysis allowed us to focus on these topics:

- a. Improvisation and composition: truly opposite practices?
- b. Creation through improvisation and composition;
- c. Different time for improvising and composing.

### *a. Improvisation and composition: truly opposite practices?*

The time-based concept of separation between improvisation and composition (Fisher and Amabile, 2009) was experienced at the Ecole Lecoq on the bases of the differences between the creation process in improvisation classes and the one in the *autocourses*. In fact, in the improvisation course, teachers usually tell the class about the improvisation theme just before performances so as to reduce the time separation between the task generating response and its execution to a minimum. In the *autocourse*, instead, students have one week to prepare and present the scene to teachers, so the output of their work (response generation) is temporally separated from the execution.

From what has been described so far, placing improvisation and composition at two opposite extremes of a line seems not consistent. Although actors (organizational or artistic) do their performances by clearly distinguishing the two moments, in practice that distinction is much more blurred (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). From the narration by the author and from interviews on

the school's website, the Ecole Lecoq pedagogy confirms this idea, as it affirms that a clear separation between these practices can't be found. Thus, this led us to our second theme.

*b. creation through improvisation and composition*

During the *autocourse* preparation and rehearsals, starting from the theme given by teachers, actors decide to improvise to understand how other actors' reactions to improvised actions may serve as the base to compose the final performance. An example taken from our notes, written in week five, can better describe this practice. In week four, students were asked to recreate a crowded square of a city, being as accurate as possible in acting different job, people, age, trying to recreate the rhythms and dynamics at different times (morning, rush hour, lunch break, afternoon, evening, night). In 15 minutes, they had to sum up 24 hours on the square. The whole class took part in the scene (around 35 people). The theme, as usual, was announced on Friday, and students had the whole week to prepare the scene. In this *autocourse*, no scenography or furniture was allowed. The first three days were spent deciding roles, defining spaces (positioning bakery, subway, the fountain at the centre of the square and so on) and finding out how bodies behaved at different times of the day. Moreover, the scene needed to have events that potentially took place in the square; in other words, the scene needed stories to be told. Since coordinating 35 actors with no script was rather unmanageable, students started to improvise. Throughout it anyone with an idea, acted it freely which sparked reactions from others who, knowing they all were in an improvisational process, were waiting for that something so that they could start creating narrations.

*c. different time for improvising and composing*

The creative process during the *autocourse* was similar to any group improvising in the improvisation classes: time is continuous in that process, since spontaneous creation and performance are in a real time format, and reworking ideas is not possible (Sarath, 1996). Although students knew that the performance was not in that moment (in other words, the response generation and its execution did not converge in time), as the goal of the *autocourse* is to present the performance at the end of the week, they replicated the improvisational process using a continuous time, so much that when someone tried to stop the improvisation or did not actively participate, they were scolded for having stopped the creative process.

After those improvisations, the group met to discuss the events that had taken place during the improvisation: events deemed good were kept, adjusted and modified, such as creating different spaces, involving more actors, creating different reactions from other actors. This composition process involves a discontinuous time, as "the composer generates materials in one time frame and encodes them in a work in another" (Sarath, 1996: 2).

That way, the composition is made by a repeated process of creating something in real time (Pasmore, 1998).

From our case study, another perspective on time and improvisation emerges. As we described above, the goal of the movement class is for students to develop an awareness of their own body and movements, and thus allowing them to use their body in acting prior to doing so through speech. As lessons progress, students clearly start becoming more aware of their movement on stage, for instance refraining from useless movements, being clear in their physical communication, using a wider range in their movements to be more visible on stage,

managing space among actors and on stage in a clear way. This improvement in their skills is clear in improvisation classes and in the *autocourse*. An example of this construction of skills is the performance for improvisation class in week 4: “the neutral mask travel”. With the mask on, students perform being in a landscape: sea, beach, forest, mountain, river, plain. Utilizing elements and characteristics that are specific to any one of these places, actors perform it so that the audience may understand which they are in. Since the class is in the green room, no scenography or objects are involved in this improvisation.

The success or failure of this improvisation is connected to the development of skills learned during the movement class. This example shows how creating a knowledge-based background (Sawyer, 2018; Ciborra, 1999) is indispensable for a good improvisation. Moreover, with time and practice, students become more experienced at improvising using different skills learned during movement classes, so that their acting level increases. During movement classes, in fact, students do several exercises recreating imaginary spaces, miming the effort of moving things. The know-how learned is then applied during improvisation class.

Thus, another relationship between time and improvisation emerges. In fact, the creation of this background is related to a discontinuous time: in each lesson they understand how to improve movements creating a “relationship between body and language” (Bourdieu, 1987).

Furthermore, we argue that the process of learning some movements and then using them during improvisation is a form of composition, as a process of composing knowledge and patterns which are the main structure for improvising.

## 8. Discussion

Starting from what Nicolini (2012) argued about practice being the site of knowledge, we think that improvisation at the Ecole Lecoq can contribute to understanding a practice that theatre pedagogy and organizations share.

Often, in everyday living as in research, improvisation has been considered as a tool to manage emergencies, while the decision-making process is to address planning, related to a discontinuous time so that one choice is made from the different alternatives analysed and compared. When something disruptive happens and produces an intense experience that can cause harm if wounds are not healed in time (Elcessor, 2022), improvisation is considered a way to manage these difficulties. Thus, the reason for improvising is connected to the disruptiveness and unpredictability of something negative happening.

Our idea is to analyse a different concept of improvisation, run in organizations where improvisation is not just a plan B in case of failure of planning (Leone, 2015, Lasala *et al.* 2021).

On the contrary we consider improvisation as a practice which drives decision making (Lasala, 2021), as people in organizations intentionally decide to improve some actions, while respecting boundaries (which they have drawn) within which the improvisation takes place (Leone, 2015). Thus, when driven by improvisation, the decision-making process is connected to a continuous time, as decisions are made in real time. In fact, the decision maker has no “control over the rate he has to make decisions” and he cannot rely on whenever he feels ready, as “the world will not stop and wait for him to make his decisions” (Brehmer, 1990: 263). This consideration leaves to future studies the question what if we were to consider continuity and

temporal discontinuity, in an intertwined rather than opposed perspective, how would this affect the improvisation of a decision?"

Literature provides different examples of organizations that include improvisation principles in their design. Crossan *et al.*, for instance, argue that SEMCO is an "improvising" organization, as "the company policy is to have no policies [...], there are no organization charts because managers believe that structures create hierarchy and hierarchy creates constraints" (Crossan *et al.*, 1996: 27). Moreover, Leone (2015: 57) argues that in Michelin starred kitchens, the creative process is conducted through improvisation and an "actor acts through an extemporaneous bricolage which is not planned. He starts from an extemporaneous intuition and a sensorial stimulus".

Theatre is familiar with improvisation as a part of the design in activities. For instance, the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* is an improvised performance based on a very simple and short story in which actors create gags and different improvised patterns. Frost and Yarrow (1990) argue how clowns and mimes are the first example of improvised performances.

These examples clearly point to how improvisation is a principle for organization design and show how improvisation can be thought as a practice and a skill to be developed in organizations, as is being done at the Lecoq. Therefore, a more nuanced conception of time – as the one we have observed in theatrical improvisation practices and their complex entanglement with composition – is of great importance for organizational behaviour.

## 9. Conclusion

Starting from organization literature about improvisation, composition and time, we analysed the Lecoquian pedagogy as a revelatory case study. This allowed us to understand the relationship among improvisation, composition and time continuity and discontinuity, and to propose a new perspective on the definitions, already strongly rooted in organization literature, which use time to distinguish improvisation and composition.

Our case study shows a different perspective on those definitions. In fact, even if those practices are generally considered as related to two opposite processes, students at the Ecole Lecoq learn how to compose through improvisation. Moreover, students understand how to create a knowledge background in discontinuous time to improvise, which is another way of rethinking time in improvisation.

Those two characteristics of the Lecoquian pedagogy allow us to define different kinds of temporality (continuous and discontinuous) to understand the importance of time management when facing improvisation and composition in organizations.

Further research could focus on time continuity and discontinuity in different organizations, trying to understand the relationship between creativity and time in different organizational contexts. In fact, as we analysed a theatre pedagogy, which, we believe to be a source of meanings for organizations, other organizations could differently manage time in improvisation and composition.

Going deeper, further research could analyse which human resource practices may be fruitful to manage continuity and discontinuity in organizational creative processes.

## Keywords

improvisation, composition, organizational knowledge, artistic practice, time

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