

FOR PLEASURE

A sound/musical associative process

Édith Lecourt

Abstract: This text reflects a very special group experience, centered on sound, music, relationship, in a functioning of free association. It focuses on musical practice and its pleasure, in groups. This experience, still relevant, has actually lasted for 17 years, she questions what "holds" such a group. The reflection also focuses on the transition from physique pleasure to spiritual pleasure, and on the resonance, in the sound, from below to beyond language.

Keywords: sound relationship, pleasure, group, music, improvisation, free association

It's been going on for 17 years... "This" is the monthly meeting of several musicians, a small group: the GLAM, Group of Free Musical Association. This group was born in 2003 from a music therapy symposium on "Body and Music", organized by the French Association of Music Therapy. Among the speakers, an osteopath, specialized in intervention with musicians, Lionel. It was during a meal, when I was talking about my wish, never realized, to form a small musical group (problems of availability of friends), that Lionel offered his participation ... if a group ever set up. How to create a group? After this meeting I told myself that it was time for me to take action and that, finally, I would even agree to start a group of two... I proposed dates and the experiment began with three participants. I thought it wouldn't last long, and so that we had to make the most of it... Indeed, the few rules put in place seemed very weak to "hold a group" over time.

The first rule: have fun. It was agreed that as soon as the pleasure was no longer there, it would be a reason for the participant or even the group to stop.

This first point led Lionel to clarify that there was no question of partition for him... But he wanted to improvise with his trombone. He was heard; even if I had to give up some of the developments I had thought of.

The second rule was that it was for the participants to associate one sound with another sound, listening to what is happening...

This rule joins my work on sound and group, and on the method of "sound communication" in groups that I developed for group analytical music therapy. It is an improvisation, of course, but, more precisely, a "free association of sound and music" in a group, an adaptation of the free verbal association in groups. This rule is fundamental. It opens up to total freedom of expression in sound, to the freedom of choice of sounds (noises, musical sounds), instruments or voices used - no technical indication, musical structure, given (unlike professional musical improvisations). But

this rule actually includes a strong constraint on listening, its total availability, its quality, in the group.

A ritual...

Faced with the usual initial inhibition to this kind of experience, despite our very strong motivations, we added to these two fundamental rules, an early session ritual. Subscribed to a review of the fine arts, I bring to each session the issue of the month, and each participant is invited to choose a page, photos of works in general (but it is understood that everything can be used, as an advertisement for example, there will be no value judgment). It is therefore a material support for a production that is yet to be invented. The one who makes the choice is also the one who produces the first sounds to initiate the sound association. This one, it is important, does not have to attach to the image, it remains free and can therefore go in very different directions from the atmosphere suggested by the image. So it's a pretext support. Since the start-up, other members of the group can provide this support. Sometimes we improvise without any support.

Of course everyone is invited to come with his/her instruments, the voice being part of it.

The group meets once a month for two hours of improvisation, in several sequences that usually last between five and fifteen minutes, depending on the inspiration!

During the first years we used this group as a research group on this particular associative process and, as such, we were able to organize our meetings within the framework of the university, in the room dedicated to music therapy, with a piano (most often out of tune!) and other instruments. Note here that it is rare that we seek to tune our instruments beforehand (as is done for any musical performance), the tuning being done, from sound to sound, by listening to the other, whatever the sound produced. We were influenced by our beginnings with a piano untuned!

Since 2011, we now rent a room, clear, spacious, and equipped with a good piano, in an associative local.

Two rules, a ritual, a regularity, this is all that structures this activity. This is what always surprises me so much: this small group that seemed to be able to hold only three or four sessions (without any contribution or development proposed), is always functional, it enters its eighteenth year!

Of course there were departures, arrivals, I stay alone from the beginning. In the meantime, the duration of the sessions has increased from one and a half hours to two hours. Each session gives way to an average of five or six improvisations. From the beginning they are all recorded (now on smartphone), just to keep track, to be able to eventually return to it.

The freedom given means that, in this context, all its product takes on a value for the group, even if it "sounds untuned" to a very musical ear. Because it is indeed a group associative listening. And it works even though participants don't know the group analysis. Only one member, Isabelle, had experienced group analysis, unfortunately

she had to leave the group due to serious health problems. Besides the osteopath (who has now also left the group following a move), there are psychologists, music therapists, and therefore relationship-oriented professions. And all, of course, love music and practice it on very variable levels.

In all these years the GLAM operated between two and eight participants, with an average around three, four.

When at the end of each year I ask the participants about the continuation (for the rental of the room), I am still surprised by their willingness to maintain this activity. Their arguments are the pleasure, the benefits felt by these sessions, and also, for some, the instrumental or vocal discoveries that this very free operation promotes.

The pleasure was manifested in a very special, unforeseen way, during a first "experiment". A medical doctor friend and painter invited me to the inauguration of the exhibition of his works in his hospital. At that moment came to me the whimsical idea of a musical accompaniment of the exhibition. Very unwisely I told him ... He immediately agreed. So I found myself "at the foot of the wall." I had never had that kind of experience and, most importantly, I had no idea how the band would react. Moreover, it was clear that this "fantasy" was not based on any competence, personal or group equivalent to this type of task. The informed group responded enthusiastically, ready to follow me! I had no idea how to do it. We found ourselves at the exhibition. Once the instruments came out (trombone, flute, clarinet, voice), my comrades looked at me... It was up to me to take out the first sound, from my clarinet ... I was standing in front of the champagne bottles that had already been exposed! I felt like I was facing "my madness"! After the first sound, I physically engaged in the exhibition letting the following sounds come, fortunately relayed by the group. This musical journey of the exhibition quickly turned into a game, with wacky rules like "we play this painting upside down!" And this musical game, groupal, reached some of the visitors of the exhibition who joined their voices in echo!

It is understandable that this experience, a true "group illusion" (D.Anzieu), was the foundation of our group. Since then, once or twice a year, we still accompany exhibitions of friends.

Pleasure, play, group, these are many key words to talk about music, the only art we "play".

Once free of words, a sound invites another sound, a sound obstructs another sound, a sound is not heard, a silence sets in ...

Our sessions are always sound recorded (on smartphone). I have often thought that a musical work could be enriching, taking up moments of very creative sessions, instrumental "finds", rare harmonies, moments of "grace" ... I made several compilations on CDs or USB sticks. All of these initiatives have had no echo among my comrades. On the other hand, they are always attentive that the recording can be done, and frustrated when a technical problem deprives us of it. This recording marks the value attributed, in this context, to all sound, any production. And the microphone

is also our only audience, or almost, since there are always a few people present in this local association (not in the room). Finally, this memory confirms the impression felt in each session of the great diversity of these productions. One could say, from the "crazy" to the wisest, through all possible atmospheres! For my part, I have heard an implicit rule in this group, which is to limit any resumption and any attempt at verbal "translation."

Pleasure, the present moment, are therefore watchwords of this groupal functioning. During the last few years, the group had to be open to the renewal of its members. So sometimes a guest is introduced. Some are immediately tuned to this functioning, others will not return. Because, indeed, this functioning can be scary. It requires a great deal of confidence, of let go, for acting below/ beyond verbal language.

It's a matter of fun...

It should be noted that at the origin of this group, there is a couple, and in this call/response (to make a group), a form of seduction. Although sensitive to it, personally, I really wanted to experience the musical group. I immediately perceived the risk of bringing back this beautiful momentum (that's how I felt it) to a sexual experience, a real disappointment! As if waiting for a more fun whose path would be group music. So in the form that the answer might take I heard a misunderstanding (or an opportunity, missed!). At the base of this group there is therefore a renunciation of immediate physical pleasure in anticipation of more pleasure that would pass through the band and the music. This situation, one imagines, was not without tension. But I was fortunate to see this will, even not really accepted, respected. There is therefore, at the beginning, a tension between couple and group, but never explained in the group. More precisely, tension between sexual pleasure and a representation of group musical pleasure, idealized. The first rule, the rule of "pleasure" finds there all its strength! And it has worked so far.

What about this particular groupal associative process?

To begin with I would say that there are a number of concepts of group analysis that are directly echoed in this experience. These are the "groupal illusion" of D.Anzieu, at the foundation of the Groupal Psychic Device of R.Kaës (base of our groupal psychic functioning), and also the concepts of D.W.Winnicott's "transitional phenomenon" and W.R.Bion's "protomental".

Combining sounds rather than words, undoubtedly leaves a greater freedom, below/beyond words and therefore also languages, openness. This experience is, for the adult, surprising, very new, sometimes even disconcerting. If at least it were to "make music" we would have a representation of it. But no, it is asked to "associate sounds", the result can be perceived as musical, as not at all!

In addition, it happens in a group, in small groups. It is therefore a question of launching into the unknown while listening to others, double constraint.

Yet, is it really that new?

This situation echoes, resonating, with that of the young child discovering the sounds of his environment, and his own sounds, body and vocal productions. We recognize here the period of babbling, before words are imposed, even before "music" formalizes (just/false, harmonious/laid...). It is thus an echo of a state of symbiosis with the environment (not yet well differentiated from oneself), in the pleasure of inter-action (motor pleasure); first connected with the body, objects, people, atmospheres. Here I think of the "protomental" of Bion ...

This exercise would be a form of renewal, a formulation that corresponds to the few "reasons" given for the continuation of the experiment (whose "weakness" in view of the strength of motivation, is remarkable!)

On this path no verbal translation, therefore, no interpretation either, but an investment of the play for itself, of the "musical play" also, humor is never far away. It would be like the action-resonance of our physical, psychic, spiritual presences, in a group envelope. The group - in its present composition, but also in its representation, its "tradition" - would constitute, for each of its members, a presentification of an originating environment welcoming, nourishing, supporting. This would be the frame (more or less colorful of the story of each participant), on which would be placed the improvisations. The latter, at the conscious level, alternates, precise relationships with the sounds of a particular member of the group, moments centered on oneself, times "lost" in group production, moments of solo position ... all this in a spontaneous game, truly "transitional" in the sense of D.W.Winnicott.

And, when "grace" there is, intensity of a groupal feeling, it is perhaps the listening to the conjunction of a below-language with a beyond language...?

In the Indian philosophical tradition, sound is first, originating, it is the essence of the verb (Sanskrit is first sounds), it is the expectation of all meditation; There is a yoga of sound, and music is considered a form of yoga.

I now wonder if these creative experiences of "sound communication" - the result of an attempt to bring together musical experience and group psychoanalysis -, would not join this perspective in a group approach (absent in the Indian approach)? What "holds" this group so well would be of this order? This perhaps sheds light on my own "reason" to continue the experiment...?

In yoga, there is also a strong tension between sexual pleasure and spirituality, a tension particularly present in tantrism. Our group would be part of the groupal psychic work necessary for this transition from the physical to the spiritual, from the below to the beyond language.

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