

Music and Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

Freud's attitude towards music was very ambivalent. For him the risk was, with the music of losing rational control that he had set himself as purpose. After a critical reading of his work, psychoanalysts have examined the links between psychoanalysis and music, discovering that there is a specific modality of psychic inscription belonging to the pre-verbal period: music would be the representation of the affect. According to current data on intrauterine and postnatal life, we know that the mother's vocal sounds, emitted and listened to, are accompanied by many effects, inscribed in the memory of the body. The changing and discontinuous feelings that weave the child's psychic life can be translated into musical metaphors. From a psychoanalytic point of view, music and opera are considered sublimation activities.

Key words: music, affect, child, sublimation

“Life without music is a mistake, a grunting task, an exile.”
(letter from F.Nietzsche to P.Gast of 15-1-1888)

“Music often takes me like a sea!
To my pale star,
Under a ceiling of mist or in a vast ether,
I'm putting on the veil.”

(Ch. Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, Spleen et Idéal)

Freud and music

Freud, as we know, asserted himself “ganz unmusikalisch”, totally non-musician. He wrote, probably to Ernest Bloch (1881-1959), a Swiss-American (1) composer: “Having no musical sense, so to speak diminished in this area of sensibility, (I am) just still able to enjoy some sweet Mozart melodies..... Mozart.... K. R.Eissler writes about Freud's judgment of himself: “But it was probably a denial because Freud had good musical sense. ”(2)

Elsewhere, Freud said: “But works of art make a strong impression on me, especially literary works and plastic works, more rarely paintings. I have thus been led, on favourable occasions, to contemplate them at length in order to understand them in my own way, that is to say to grasp where they produce effect. When I can't do that, for example for music, I'm almost unable to enjoy it.

A rationalist disposition, or perhaps analytical, fights in me against emotion when I cannot know why I am moved, nor what hugs me. (3) Freud shows us, in this text, the protection provided for him by rationality and analysis against the overflow of emotion, arising by sound break-in.

There was too great or too contradictory potential for feelings awakened by music: the auditor first reminded him of the warm and present motherly voice, which had to surround “this first-born favourite” with a protective sound bath, in a relationship from which the father, much older, was excluded. This young mother “very musician” (4), as she has been described, must have been even more seductive when she sang melodies or lullabies. In addition to the motherly voice, Freud also had to hear Nannie's voice, which sang lullabies to the children in his language, Czech. Freud compares the unconscious to a foreign language. He was also sensitive to another familiar voice, that of Emmaline, his maternal grandmother, evoked by his son, Martin. (5) Later, Freud rejected Czech, as well as maternal and grandmaternal voices. He defined himself as a “visual” and defied feeling. He invented the psychoanalytic listening that he wanted purified of the emotionally sensitive maternal and based on the paternal legal, language.

Theodor Reik (1888-1969)

Historically, the confrontation of music and psychoanalysis appeared for the first time in Reik, notably in *Writings on Music* (1953). Reik takes up the theme of “haunting melody” in *the Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1916) to show, unlike Freud, who was only interested in text, that musical structure can represent feelings. For Reik, air is a translation of emotion much more appropriate than words.

Music and affect

Music will be rediscovered in its links with psychoanalysis through affect. Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) is interested in voice as an impulse object (1973), as well as Didier Anzieu (1923-1999) writes a remarkable article on *The Sound Envelope of the Self* (1976). Neither of them will speak specifically about music.

André Green, in 1973, distinguished himself from Lacan in *The Living Speech*: “I had no trouble discovering that lacanian theory was based on an exclusion, an “oblivion” of affect.” (6) He considers affect as a meta-psychological category: “... .. We will therefore refer by affect to a categorical term grouping all qualitative subjective aspects of emotional life in the broadest sense.” (7) The affect represents for him the inner side of the discharge, in which perceptions remain mostly global, confused, the opposite of external perceptions. However, music summons us for an intimate discharge, because it takes us by a bodily emotion: “Music often takes me like a sea,” Baudelaire writes, translating this

breath of music that takes us with the wind on a journey with our affects and stretches our body like the sail of a boat:

“I feel all the passions in me
From a ship that is suffering;
The good wind, the storm and its convulsions

On the huge chasm
I'm rocking. Other times, flat calm, big mirror
Of my desperation! ”

(Music, Flowers of Evil)

The discharge of the affect occurs in the periphery of the body, especially with regard to musical patterns of tension and relaxation, pleasure and displeasure, spatiality (growth or decrease in volume of sound, melodic gestures). Music is *movement* and *bond*: “It all depends on Eros, the binding force that can, at the Level of the Id, make the unifying tendency of life impulses prevail over the disorganizing tendency of the impulses of destruction. ” (8) Music is on the side of life, even when it tells us about death. “Music transports and holds the musician in a kind of eternal present where death no longer counts; better, it is a way of living the unlivable of eternity. Music, even when it seems funereal, like Chopin's, doesn't really speak to me about death; music only talks about music. (...) Like poetry, enchanted word, and like painting itself, music is all positivity; music is a word that says yes: it is a conquest over silence and nothingness. Isn't charm vitality? In the music is expressed the power of charm, which gives the taste to live and love. (...) Is it not often a little more exalted than reason, to be happy without cause, is this not a sweet inebriation that we owe to music?” Jankélévitch writes.(9) For his part, the great Italian conductor, Carlo-Maria Giulini, gives us his thoughts: “Art in general and music in particular express two great fundamental feelings: goodness and hope. I don't know of any real music where there is no goodness and hope. Of course music expresses suffering in the same way as joy, but there is no piece of music, great music, without the love of life but also the love of suffering and joy, essential feelings of the human being.”(10)

In his beautiful book, *Real Presences*, G. Steiner writes: “The energy of music makes us feel the energy that is life; it puts us in a relationship of immediate experience with the ineffable, by the abstract or the verbal, but no less tangible, the first of being. ”(11)

So the music tells us nothing except our affects. Jankélévitch states: “Between conflicting feelings, music is not obliged to choose, and it composes with them, in defiance of the alternative, a unique state of mind, an ambivalent and always indefinable state of mind.”(12) This is what he calls “inexpressive *espressivo*.”

This in distinction explains, on the listener's side, the pluralism of tastes and the infinity of reactions, even if there are common patterns (Mr. Imberly).

Music and the object

The music makes our feelings resonate and vibrate thanks to the sound mirror it offers us. Just as the child *sees himself* in his mother's eyes, we feel ourselves in the musical mirror. Music touches on the original affects in everyone: "The original affects are irretrievably lost with the objects of our childhood. Only the disappointment of their loss, the disillusionment to which we will seek indefinite consolation, is relived. Music (13) provides us with this unexpected consolation, which love passion can also bring to life in its burning moments.

There is a step now that we can take: *the affect would be an anticipation of the subject's body with the encounter of another imaginary body, erotic or aggressive*. "The original affects are related to the mother's body, as secondary affects are related to the Father's Law". The affect is always caught between body and law. (14) In music, it is indeed an encounter always hoped for with the *imaginary body of the mother*, even if the analysis of the theme and the musical style refer us to the father's *code* of essence.

Indeed, the relationship is *first*. Affect is defined as a relationship to the other that passes through the mother tongue, different from the language. Wagner writes: "What the musical language can express is made up only of feelings and impressions: it expresses above all in absolute fullness the sentimental content of the human language, freed from our verbal language which has become a mere organ of understanding...(.) This music that I had entirely in me, in which I expressed myself as in a mother tongue." (15)

Each language signals the emotional reality of sounds that are early emotional expressions. It's a magical exchange that affects the body. It is the daydream that gives an emotional dimension: the regression of the affect goes hand in hand with the regression of the *dream*. The sound of the child is transformed by the mother's daydreaming: the mother gives the child her voice.. In music, affect has become a structure that generates affect.. The affect creates the object and creates the affect. There is a music of the phrase, because the conventions of music are not arbitrary. In music, the affect has become structure. Music gives us back an object to cling to; as if it were a return to the primary object. *The musical form offers us a structure of fiction, an object - decoy*.

The affect is a sucker of cathartic theory. Because the affect is a process of discharge, the effects of music extend into the sphere of the body. (in this sense, it is different from other art forms). *The affect is induced by the reactions of the other and is inducing the reactions of the other*. Thus, music is associated with rhythm and dance. It refers to the elementary temporality of rhythm and scansion. If music brings us, from rocking to trance or dance, it transforms us emotionally, physically and allows us to play with these feelings. It borrows its

materials from the acoustic traces of before the speech and the sensory-motor traces of before the walk. The musical play is similar to the maternal environment as described by Winnicott. It finds its particular specificities for each, provided that a personal space-time allows this reunion in confidence.

Music and the Self

The Self should not be conceived as a complete and homogeneous entity. Moving from the first topic to the second Freud went from an optimistic vision of the Self and consciousness, bound indissolubly in the taming of unconscious forces, to a much more tragic conception where the Self is the servant of several masters whose tyranny he does not control. With the 2nd theory of impulses, the Self is referred not only to Eros but also to death impulses. What about the Self in music?

It can be said that in music the forces of life confront the forces of destruction within the musical composition. Musical sublimation is the site of a confrontation. The time of classical and romantic music would be the time of Eros (union of assemblages), while the time of some contemporary music would be a fragmented time closer to Thanatos (dissolution of the assemblages). Music is a symbolic object, halfway between a narcissistic position and an objectic position, a symbolic object that we can assimilate to the object of the depressive position. In music, aggression and hatred can be overcome. Dissonance, noise, arrhythmia can be overcome within a form that reconciles them and gives them a happy resolution. The composer must be able to live a successful mourning, restoring his own internal objects in a completed and integrated form. Through music, love and hatred can be played without vital risk: life triumphs, as the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch notes. The subject's self can thus enjoy an experience of the time when music transcends the hatred originating from the object. This is why Music gives the Self a rare opportunity to open up and acquiesce. There is a *yes* to the enchantment of the world that can be said in music. *“Isn't Music a kind of enchanted temporality? An idealized nostalgia, reassured, purged of any precise anxiety?”* Jankélévitch writes.(16)

The Self that is sensitive to the musical experience is the body self. This one is close to what Anzieu defined as “the skin self”, whose sound envelope is one of the original constituents. Its energy comes from the narcissistic libido, sublimated here in Music. The Self is the seat of unconscious affects that sign precisely the rooting of the Self in the body. Music is on the side of the life drive, as we have pointed out above.

Music and time

Music is the art of time. More specifically, music is the writing of inner life and each musical style is a symbolic writing of time: “Music is a speculation about

time, inseparable from lived time. ” writes Gisèle Brelet.(17) What the child does in his work with the transitional object is a taming of time. The transitional object passes through the time of his love and hatred, his memory and his expectation without too much damage: it resists time, like music. This is repair and represents the climax of the destiny of the transitional object. “Music is the art of passage, ” as Wagner writes to Mathilde Wesendonck.

The enemy of lasting satisfaction is time, finitude. From the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus to Proust's novels, happiness is linked to the recapture of time. Only remembrance provides joy without the anguish born of the ephemeral nature of joy. Music helps us to reconquer time in the subtle connection it operates between memory and expectation, within a form closed on itself and indefinitely reproducible: “Music is the happy mirage of a duration subtracted from approval and hatred, desire and regret, where one senses a promise, the announcement of a return, the end of the separated existence.”(18) Danièle Sallenave writes.

The musical pleasure comes from the fact that it takes us from the clock time, to the time of everyday life, to give us access to a kind of eternity: “So much so that by listening to the music and while we listen to it, we attain a kind of immortality,” writes Claude Lévi-Strauss.(19) Thus, music is the imaginary reference of The Levi-Strauss's work devoted to myths. Myths repair, it's their function, but “when myth dies, music becomes mythical in the same way that works of art, when religion dies, cease to be simply beautiful to become sacred.”(20) Elsewhere, Levi-Strauss continues: “Basically, what is deeply common between myth and music is an attitude towards time... Music is in time but at the same time it abolishes time, since the work, we need to perceive it as a whole.”

In music, we also experience silence. Music cannot be born until the outside world has disappeared with its noises and space, as well as at the beginning of life or at the approach of death. For death is the very figure of non-separation, as Tristan and Isolde sing in their incandescent passion. Musical silence is less rupture than bonding and brings us back to the primary object: “Maternal silence is the alpha and the omega, that is, the original silence from which all music proceeds and terminal silence from which all music returns, as the rivers return to the sea after completing the cosmic cycle, ” writes Jankélévitch.(21)

Voice music

Vocal music has a special place in music. The voice plays an eminent role in the music since it is she who creates the melody: “The melody is the deep song and the solitary duration of a consciousness, leaning over itself and listening to itself live, ” writes Gisèle Brelet.(22) The melody of the voice sums up musical time, as do instruments that are extensions of the human voice. It is in the phrasing that the song of the instrument resides: “The expression is always an imitation of

the song, and the great artist recognizes that in the music everything is singing, even the airy lightness of a stroke, which is light only by the very flexibility of its phrasing. The voice, a subtle and delicate gesture, is moving because in it come to translate all the activities of being.” (G. Brelet).(23)

“Music is precisely the adventure of a ritournelle,” writes the philosopher Gilles Deleuze.(24) Here we are back to the vocalizations of the early days of life, those that Winnicott stored in transitional phenomena. The object of nostalgia is the melody of the mother's voice with its inflections: “It can be argued that the mother's voice is the first model of auditory pleasure and that music finds its roots and nostalgia in an original atmosphere, ” as Guy Rosolato puts it.(25)

Daniel Stern notes: “If I repeat what philosophers said more than a hundred years ago, we can say that music is the perfect analog symptom for affects and there are no others. (...) Because the affect arises from the temporal unfolding of events and I am convinced that this is how the child experiences the lessons of experience with his mother.”(26) The music unfolds in the same way as the child's emotional scenarios. The elements of the plot follow one another in a temporal way on a dramatic line, in emotional life as in music: Allegro perennial, Andante, Moderato cantabile, Presto etc...

Vocal music unfolds in sacred works that chant important moments of existence (birth, life, love, war, glory, mourning, death) through Motets, Oratorios, Masses (such as the “Coronation”), *Te Deum*, Passions or *Requiem*.... There is also the whole *Requiem* lay repertoire: operas, oratorios, melodies, melodies, etc. Voice music unifies, in single temporality, two very different systems: language that isolates, distinguishes, counts, and music that expresses inner life, without being able to name it.

This is why the whole history of vocal music tells the story of the relationship between music and speech. It is a question of finding a balance between the linear aspect of the music (*recitative* chanted by words) and the lyrical expression (*aria*) that submits to the melodic and musical line. From this dilemma, Richard Strauss made the theme of his last opera, *Capriccio* (1940): the Countess will have to choose between Flemish, the composer of music and Olivier, the poet. When the Countess sings her last aria, she leaves the listener on a question mark: music or poetry? In the spirit of Italian music, there is no doubt: *Prima la musica et poi la parole* (*First the music and then the words*).

The *sonata of the motherly voice* (Pascal Quignard) invites the baby to hear both the melody of the voice and the scansion of the language to which she initiates it: to speak is to give up the original song to enter the world of socialized communication.

By way of conclusion

The Music lightens the overwhelming gravity of the *logos* and prevents man from identifying himself with the act of speaking. Vladimir Jankélévitch writes:

“Music testifies to the fact that the essential in all things is, I don't know what is elusive and ineffable; it reinforces in us the conviction that is that the most important thing in the world is precisely the one that cannot be said.”(27) She summons us to a reunion with the very early days of the Life “In the beginning was the Voice” ... By introducing symbolism, language has cut us off from the enjoyment of the first lost object, the motherly voice. Music gives it back to us and brings us back to the time of shared emotional happiness.

Notes

1. The facsimile of Freud's handwritten letter was found dated 18-1-1928.
2. Quoted by Erin J. and A., “Freud, absolutely not a musician,” *Psychoanalysis and music*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1982, p.108.
3. Freud S., *Applied psychoanalysis tests*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Ideas, 1976, p.9.
4. E.Jones, New, *The life and work of Freud*, Paris, PUF, 1970, tome I, p.20.
5. M. Freud, *Freud, my father*, Paris, Denoel, 1975.
6. Green A., *The living discourse*, Paris, PUF, 1973, p.6.
7. *ibid.*, p.20.
8. *ibid.* p.98.
9. Jankélévitch V. and Berlowitz B., *Somewhere in the unfinished*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, pp.263-4
10. Castarède M.F., Preface to C.M.Giulini, *The sound mirror*, Lyon, Césura, 1989, p.13.
11. Steiner G., *Real presences*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p.235
12. Jankélévitch V., *Music and the ineffable*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1983, p.95.
13. Green A., *ibid.*, p.289.
14. Green A., *ibid.*, p.212.
15. Wagner R., A communication to my friends, in *My works*, Paris, Corrèa, 1941, p.48 and follow.

16. Jankélévitch V., *Music and the ineffable*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1983, p.123.
17. Brelet G., *Musical time*, Paris, PUF, 1949, tome I, p.35
18. Sallenave, D., *The gates of Gubbio*, Paris, Hachette, 1980, p.60.
19. Levi-Strauss, C., *The raw and the cooked*, Paris, Plon, 1964, p.24
20. Levi-Strauss, C., *The naked man*, Paris, Plon, 1971, p.584
21. Jankélévitch (V.), *Debussy and the mystery*, Neuchâtel, Ed. of Baconnière, 1949, p.131
22. Brelet (G.), *ibid.*, p.126
23. Brelet (G.), *ibid.* ,p.238
24. Deleuze (G.), *A thousand trays*, Paris, Ed. of Midnight, 1980, p.370.
25. I think it is a good thing that the *The relationship of the unknown*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p.37
26. Stern (D.), What the baby understands, in Bourguignon (O.) and Bydlowski (Mr.), *Clinical research in psychopathology*, Paris, PUF, 1995, p.299
27. Jankélévitch (V.) and Berlowitz (B.), *Somewhere unfinished*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 247

Marie-France Castarède. After her state dissertation with Didier Anzieu in 1984, Marie-France Castarède writes *La voix et ses sortilèges*, (The voice and its spells) (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1987) where she talks about her ideas on Freud and music, on the voice, in particular through the relationships between mother and child, on the cultural forms of singing and on the voice in psychoanalytic care.

During the same period, she worked at the Alfred Binet Center with Serge Lebovici and became a therapist for children and adolescents and a member of the SPP and adult psychoanalyst. She is also an amateur part of the Paris orchestra choir created in 1976 by Daniel Barenboïm and Arthur Oldham and writes a book *Chantons en chœur* (Let's sing in chorus) (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2012), presented by the conductor Italian orchestra, Carlo Maria Giulini;

the experience was interrupted by the death of Arthur Oldham in 2002. She continued to sing in the choir of Hugues Reiner.

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