

The goal as process: music and the search for the Self

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Abstract: This paper explores and compares the processes of music and analysis from the author's experience as a musician, piano teacher and analyst. It explains how the use of music improvisation in analysis (with simple percussion instruments) can powerfully enhance the dialogue between the unconscious and conscious psyche, as well as deepen the relationship between analyst and analysand. This is connected theoretically to Jung's active imagination and Winnicott's concept of play within the analytic encounter. Finally, the question is raised whether analytic trainings could do more to expose trainees to the possibility of using music within the analytic encounter. This touches on the more basic and controversial issue (which often separates analytical psychology and psychoanalysis) of whether expressive therapy should be used in analysis at all.

Key words: active imagination, analytical music therapy, improvisation, individuation process, music, piano lessons.

Describing the individuation process, Jung wrote: 'The goal is important only as an idea; the essential thing is the *opus* which leads to the goal: *that* is the goal of a lifetime' (Jung 1946/1993, para. 400). These words of Jung could just as easily apply to the process of music. A piece of music undergoes an individuation process in the mind of a performer, in that musicians often work on a particular 'opus' for a lifetime, continually renewing and refining their expression of its essence. I remember Arthur Rubinstein saying, in a documentary filmed late in his life, that he had been playing a certain Chopin Etude for fifty years and was now just beginning to understand it and 'play all the notes'. As he had changed and matured, so had his relationship to this work of Chopin. The process of learning a musical composition requires a dialogue between conscious and unconscious processes very much like the process of individuation. A performer needs his conscious functions to control the myriad facets of learning the work and to master the technical side of it. But he must also open a channel to his unconscious if he is to give more than a technically faithful rendition of the piece.

It is somewhat natural for me to write about music and individuation since I have been a Jungian analyst for the last ten years and a musician all of my life. I started playing the piano at the age of three and violin at eight, and grew

up in a musical family where we all played instruments or sang. I later received two degrees in music and taught piano professionally. My experiences as a student and a teacher of music (primarily of piano) seem in retrospect a natural prelude to becoming an analyst, but playing music continues to be an important part of my daily life.

I will never forget a marvellous piano teacher I once had, who opened our first lesson with the remark, 'I must tell you that I do not do therapy; I am a *piano* teacher and it is my responsibility to give you some insights into the *music* during your lesson'. It was obvious that this kind, warm-hearted man had probably said this to remind *himself* to stick to the business of teaching rather than become emotionally involved with his students. But even though he kept his word and concentrated on the music during my lessons, being in the atmosphere of his warmth and acceptance had a tremendously therapeutic and individuating effect on me. Jung said that he preferred to 'look at man in the light of what in him is healthy and sound' rather than in the light of his defects (Jung 1933/1970, para. 774).

This piano teacher definitely looked at my playing in the light of what was healthy and sound, and mentioned, but did not concentrate on, my mistakes. This enabled me to adopt a less perfectionistic attitude and 'ease up' on myself, permitting a clearer inner pathway to the unconscious archetypal possibilities inherent in the music. This process was a lot like becoming attuned to the needs of the Self through the dialectical process of analysis. Although I was playing for him, my teacher was equally involved as he listened, and had usually worked on the same piece sometime in the past. Jung stressed that the analyst cannot take his analysand any farther than he himself has been able to go in the process of self-realization:

Many times I have had the opportunity of seeing that the analyst is successful with his treatment just so far as he has succeeded in his own moral development.

(Ibid., para. 587)

As we know, the analyst cannot simply use his authority to effect change because, as Jung pointed out, he is in the treatment just as much as the analysand. Similarly, if my teacher suggested something musically, he would invariably back this up by playing it, which showed me the *sense* of his conception, and more importantly, that he could do it: he had 'lived through it'. If he had not been able to do this, I would have been more reluctant to accept his ideas. One might remark that struggling with a musical passage is not the same as 'moral development', but any performer will readily tell you that learning a challenging piece of music develops character. At the very least, it requires the ability to stay with the physical process of learning the work until the musical goals are met.

In my piano teaching, many of my students were adults who were returning to the piano after studying it as children. The decision to confront the instrument again after many years of not playing often symbolized the facing of

an important aspect of themselves which had been neglected. Often, I saw that the actual, physical process of playing the piano was a potent catalyst to facing long-repressed feelings from childhood. For many people whom I taught, their earliest experiences of playing an instrument had been severely contaminated, their original joy and playfulness nearly destroyed by technical and performance demands imposed on them by parents and teachers. But somehow, later in life, their original desire to make music had returned. Now it was necessary to do this with someone who could hold their attempts with love, and in the spirit of play. In this connection, it is important to remember that finding the right music is crucial. Music contains the opposites: it not only potentially lifts our souls to heaven but can also throw them into hell when we are forced to listen to or learn a piece of music we do not like. I took special care to encourage my students to play music they really loved, not just the 'standard repertoire'. I found that an attraction to certain types of music may indicate what is lying dormant in the unconscious, or what aspects of the personality are in need of balance.

In many cases, my students seemed to prefer music which exhibited *complementary* qualities to what appeared to be their dominant conscious attitude or characteristics. This is similar to what Jung had to say about the dream: the first question we should ask, in interpreting a dream, is 'What conscious attitude does it compensate?' It is interesting in this context that Duke Ellington, when asked about his music, said that what he played wasn't music, it was 'dreaming' (quoted in a BBC2 programme, 'Jazz: pure pleasure', aired on 4th July, 2001).

While training to become an analyst, I wondered about the possibilities of enriching analysis with some aspect of the musical process which had informed my own personality and life experience. In my research, I naturally first looked for what Jung had to say about music, and found disappointingly little (there are only a handful of references to music in the *Collected Works*). Interestingly, though, I discovered that he had met, late in his life (1956), the concert pianist and music therapist Margaret Tilly, who for many years was Head Music Therapist at the Langley Porter Clinic in San Francisco. Prior to her trip to Switzerland, Tilly had sent some of her case histories to Jung, and he was so impressed with them that he invited her to his home to discuss her work. As Tilly describes their meeting, Jung told her that he had always thought music therapy was sentimental and superficial, but that her papers were 'entirely different'. Jung asked her to treat him as if he were one of her own patients, and as she alternately played and related case histories, Jung was more and more deeply moved, finally saying:

This opens up whole new avenues of research I'd never even dreamed of. Because of what you've shown me this afternoon – not just what you've said, but what I have actually felt and experienced – I feel that from now on music should be an essential part of every analysis. This reaches the deep archetypal material that we can only sometimes reach in our analytical work with patients. This is most remarkable.

(Tilly 1956/1977, p. 275)

Since we only have Tilly's account of their meeting and nothing written independently by Jung about the experience, we certainly cannot use this quotation as a justification for making music a 'part of every analysis'. Nevertheless, given what we know about Jung's enthusiasm for other forms of expressive therapy, Tilly's report of his reactions seems plausible. Six years before her visit, Jung had been asked to write an article about the role of music in the collective unconscious. He had declined the request on the grounds of 'age and health', but what he says in his letter is worth noting:

Music expresses, in some way, the movement of the feelings (or emotional values) that cling to the unconscious processes ... music represents the movement, development, and transformation of the motifs of the collective unconscious.

(Jung 1973, p. 542)

Notice how Jung emphasizes the idea of 'movement' in this passage, using the word twice along with the action words 'development' and 'transformation'. In contrast, he speaks of emotional values that 'cling' to unconscious processes. Of course, music literally *is* movement (as sound is vibration) and the unique feature of the musical experience is that it takes place *in time*. 'Emotional values' would seem to be something more fixed, and we could imagine that they might sometimes be in conflict with feelings which want to 'move, develop, and transform'. So, if listening to music initially connects us to our unconscious processes, it can do so because its inner workings, expressed in melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, and overall form, are archetypal in nature, and connect us to the deep archetypal strata in our own natures.

Jung probably realized music's kinship to his concept of active imagination during his meeting with Margaret Tilly. Perhaps if he had been exposed to her work earlier in his life, he would have experimented with its possibilities in the same way he encouraged patients to draw and paint their fantasies. However, he does say that active imagination '... could be done in any number of ways, dramatic, dialectic, visual, acoustic, or in the form of dancing, painting, drawing, or modeling' (Jung 1954/1969, para. 400). Jung assumed that the healing power of active imagination resided in the unconscious contents being engaged by the conscious mind in creative activity. The forms of expression that he saw emerging with himself and his patients had archetypal elements: circles, squares, the union of opposites in a third, light and dark, etc. (*ibid.*, para. 401). Jung noticed that when he and his patients consciously worked with these abstract principles coming out of the unconscious, the activity produced a self-organizing effect in their personal lives. We could say that, in active imagination, psychic space for new patterns of thinking emerges, and also that the conscious mind is somehow 'tuned' by giving outer form to material that comes out of the deep structural layers of the unconscious.

As my analytic training neared its conclusion and I continued to struggle with the music and analysis question, I discovered a technique of music therapy

based on analytic principles known as Analytic Music Therapy (hereafter 'AMT'). Formulated in London in the 1970s by Mary Priestley, Peter Wright, and Marjorie Wardle, it is based on the analytic principles of Freud, Jung and Klein, and can be broadly defined as the use of words and symbolic music improvisations to explore the patient's inner life and facilitate growth. Mary Priestley is primarily responsible for clinically testing and refining the method, and I later trained with her in London. AMT uses improvisation with simple percussion instruments (the main criteria being that they need no skill to play!) and can be practised with individuals or in a small group setting.¹

After my training in AMT, I put together a collection of these percussion instruments, which I keep in a corner bookshelf in my analytic consulting room. I also have art materials in the same part of the room which are available for spontaneous drawing during sessions. In both cases I would not normally initiate the use of these forms of expressive therapy unless the patient expressed an interest, beyond simply stating that these options are available if it becomes appropriate in our work. How a patient actually comes to the experience of using the instruments during a session is a very individual thing. Sometimes an analysand may simply ask to try the instruments, in which case we may set aside some time to explore them during a session. While trying them out, the patient may feel an emotional connection to a particular instrument, or a sound may constellate a memory. After the initial exploration, I usually conclude by inviting the patient to feel free to return to the instruments, should the right moment within a session arise. At other times the desire to use the instruments may arise from a dream image that the patient would like to 'try in sound'. Or it may simply be a feeling state that they want to express in sound.

While only a small minority of my patients elect to try the instruments, those who do usually find the first time much more formidable than drawing. Many are afraid that they will make 'bad' sounds, even though none of the instruments takes any skill to play. We all know that a bad sound is much worse than a bad picture – the sound literally hits us with an acoustic impact, while we can choose not to look at a picture. However, it has been my experience that once an analysand gets beyond the initial fear of playing badly, the benefit from this means of expression in terms of accessing unconscious material is substantial. For example, just the sound of a particular instrument can constellate a repressed memory or forgotten state of mind. Many analysands seem to intuitively choose instruments which enable them to return to or enact a repressed aspect of themselves. If it seems appropriate and they agree, I might also play another instrument in dialogue with the person. When this works well, the analysand may not necessarily be aware of my playing at all,

¹ For a fuller description of Analytical Music Therapy, see: Priestley, M. (1975). *Music Therapy in Action*. With a Foreword by Dr. E. G. Wooster. London: Constable (rev. ed. 1985, St. Louis: Magnamusic-Baton), or Priestley, M. (1994). *Essays on Analytical Music Therapy*, Phoenixville, PA: Barcelona Publishers.

but senses it as supporting the rhythmical or tonal journey on which they find themselves. Often they emerge from this journey much closer to the core of the problem, with their emotional energy more at their disposal. This can be like arising out of the lethargy of a depression, where vital energy has disappeared into the unconscious. Playing the instruments seems to be a catalyst to letting these disorganized feelings emerge into sounds and rhythms which reflect the nature of the problem. Also, many times the sound of an instrument will immediately constellate an image in the person's mind which opens out the current psychic situation.

For example, one patient had begun characterizing a part of himself (which obviously contained a lot of childhood energy) as a small boy who resided in the corner of the room. This boy, while quite shy, was also arrogant – he could not be bothered to enter into our discussions. As we talked about the small boy, the patient said that he would like to try playing him, and would I also play with him? He chose the decadrum, a slit-drum with ten different pitches. I chose the alto xylophone. The patient started to play quietly on the decadrum, with an erratic rhythm which suggested anxiety. I began playing with him, striking a Bb-A (semitone) combination on the lower part of the xylophone. The image of the child hiding in the corner of the room seemed to emerge between us. I then began playing the semitone combination E-F on the upper part of the xylophone, defining another tonal space. (Semitones are dissonant intervals since they share no primary overtones in common. This connects for most people to a feeling of anxiety.) As we played together, the patient's drumming gradually became more assertive and covered a larger section of the drum, producing more variety of drumtones. Slowly, I also started filling in the notes between the low and high semitones that I had initially defined. The improvisation seemed to grow in space and expressive dynamic content, coming to a natural end about ten minutes later. Afterwards, the patient said that the little boy had come out of the corner and, though shy at first, had entered into what seemed like a group celebration. He said that he had felt heard and contained, and that now it might be easier to bring the little boy into our discussions. As the analysis progressed, the little boy indeed seemed to be more accessible, especially in the patient's awareness of when the tight, defensive side of his wounded child-self re-emerged in our discussions, or when he felt particularly stagnant in the analytic process. When this happened, he would often suggest another improvisation, alone or with me, and this would inevitably open up the flow of emotions which had become blocked. Playing the instruments always seemed to revitalize him, and led to reminiscences about how the experience of learning the piano as a child had been just the opposite: isolating and alienating. He remembered feeling primarily alone in that early experience, struggling to learn pieces which would then have to be performed in front of family and friends. The experience of playing the simple percussion instruments in the hour was a revelation to him – the 'little boy' finally felt safe to participate, and it was actually fun!

D. W. Winnicott pioneered the idea in psychoanalysis that play is important in the emotional development of the person, and that the psychotherapy process can also be seen as a playground in which to experience, in the present, that which was lost or missed out in the past.² For this patient, and for others who have used the instruments in this way, the improvisations opened out the dimension of play in the analytic space in a real, physical way. Playing the instruments, like active imagination in general, could also be seen as a 'waking dream'. The music produces the emotional dynamic stimulus that helps to unfold the situation which the unconscious wishes to reveal to the conscious mind. This frees the energy formerly bound up in the unconscious symbols and makes it available for conscious use. The process begins with the inner realization of the symbol and then is given the musical expression. After the feelings and physical sensations have been experienced through the music, words are often more readily accessible. I have found the instruments also quite useful in acting out situations from a dream, especially when the patient is split off from the emotional content, or from parts of the psyche inherent in the dream characters. Because emotions can be expressed directly through music without words, the analysand is freed from the guilt often associated with the use of words in, for example, expressing anger.

In looking at the difference between communicating in words and through music, we see that one of the main distinctions is that when we talk, we must take turns speaking. In music, there can be a more fluid, overlapping connection; we can hold or contain each other in the greater sound matrix. Words can conceal feelings and may also feel too explicit, pinning down an emotion into a narrow band of meaning. In music it is safe to let one's real feelings out; no specific content need be assigned to sound, and no one will be injured by the expression of an intense emotion. Finally, there is silence, before and after shared music, that is unlike the silence that surrounds a verbal interchange. The initial silence contains unconscious intuitions of the music to come and also holds the risk that both people feel of letting themselves go into spontaneous sound expression. When the musical dialogue is over, both again arrive at the silence of the beginning, but this time they have shared the 'third thing' – the archetypal dimension of the music. This shared bond is fruitful ground which gives much food for the work, and in my experience has also led to a deepening of trust between analyst and analysand.

An important point to mention here is that the analyst should have no goal or aim in the improvisational experience with a patient. This, of course, is crucial to the analytic process which Jung advocated:

Any interference on the part of the analyst, with the object of forcing the analysis to follow a systematic course, is a gross mistake in technique.

(Jung 1916/1985, para. 625)

² See Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications.

If I did not already know it from playing music myself, these experiences with my analysands have taught me the power of music to access the unconscious and put into accessible form, deep life experiences. (For more case examples, see Skar 1997.) The question remains whether the technique of using music within analysis is something which could be incorporated into analytic trainings, much like the use of sandplay and spontaneous drawing is currently taught in some courses. Would it be necessary for trainee analysts to have a musical background to consider adding this component to their analytic practice? My own feeling is that a musical background would be helpful, but not absolutely necessary, just as a background in art is not usually considered a requirement before using spontaneous drawing in one's work. The important thing in training would be the opportunity to experience the improvisational work oneself over a period of time with a trained music therapist, to evaluate whether one feels suited to the work or not. Here I would like to emphasize that the use of music within the analytic situation should never be seen as competing with a full music therapy experience, just as spontaneous drawing within analysis cannot be compared with art therapy. Each of these separate expressive therapies has its own parameters and is potentially just as facilitating – on its own – of the individuation process.

There is much need for discussion of this issue, and because of the power of music and sound, there will be controversy about the release of this dimension within the analytic container, just as there is controversy about the use of expressive therapy at all within the analytic experience. Ultimately, this controversy centres around the question: Should analysis remain exclusively a 'talking cure'? This is one of the issues that has separated Jungian analysis from the psychoanalytic tradition, and is an ongoing problem in defining what it means to be Jungian. My opinion is that expressive therapy does have a place within analysis, but requires the analyst to have a firm grounding in adequate training and the sensitive application of its use. Expressive therapy, including improvisation with simple instruments as I have described, is definitely not for all patients and needs always to be understood within the ongoing and symbolic relationship (i.e., the transference and countertransference) between analyst and analysand. But when it is used appropriately, it can be a powerful form of communication, deepening the relationship between analyst and analysand and opening new pathways for the process of individuation within the analytic container.

TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

Cet article explore et compare les processus de la musique et de l'analyse dans le vécu de l'auteur en tant que musicienne, professeur de piano et analyste. Est montrée comment l'utilisation d'improvisation musicale dans l'analyse, (avec des instruments simples de percussion) peut améliorer de façon importante le dialogue entre le conscient et l'inconscient,

ainsi que la relation entre analyste et analysant. Est faite une relation théorique avec l'imagination active de Jung et les idées de Winnicott sur le jeu dans l'interaction analytique. Pour finir est interrogée la possibilité que les formations analytiques exposent plus les personnes en formation à l'utilisation éventuelle de la musique dans l'interaction analytique. Ceci touche à la question plus fondamentale et très controversée (qui sépare souvent la psychologie analytique et la psychanalyse) de savoir si des techniques actives devraient être utilisées ou pas.

Diese Arbeit untersucht und vergleicht den Prozeß in Musik und Analyse, sie nimmt ihren Ausgang von der Erfahrung der Autorin als Musikerin, Klavierlehrerin und Analytikerin. Es wird erklärt, wie der Gebrauch musikalischer Improvisation in der Analyse (mit einfachen Schlagzeug Instrumenten) den Dialog zwischen der bewußten und der unbewußten Psyche kraftvoll vermehren kann; auch ist dadurch eine Vertiefung der Beziehung zwischen Analytiker und Analysand möglich. Theoretisch ist dies verknüpft mit Jung's aktiver Imagination und Winnicott's Konzept vom Spiel in der analytischen Begegnung. Schließlich wird die Frage aufgebracht, ob innerhalb der analytischen Weiterbildungsgänge nicht mehr getan werden könnte, um Kandidaten der Möglichkeit auszusetzen, Musik innerhalb der analytischen Begegnung einzusetzen. Das berührt das grundlegendere und kontroverse Thema (das oft Analytische Psychologie und Psychoanalyse voneinander trennt), ob expressive Therapieformen in der Analyse überhaupt verwendet werden sollten.

Questo lavoro esplora e confronta i processi della musica e dell'analisi a partire dall'esperienza dell'autrice, musicista, insegnante di piano e analista. Viene spiegato come l'uso di un'improvvisazione musicale in analisi (Con semplici strumenti di percussione) può potentemente intensificare il dialogo tra la psiche conscia e quella inconscia e rendere più profonda la relazione tra analista e analizzando. Ciò si può connettere da un punto di vista teorico all'immaginazione attiva junghiana e al concetto di gioco all'interno dell'incontro analitico di Winnicott. Infine si pone la questione se gli analisti didatti non possano fare di più per aprire gli allievi alla possibilità di usare musica all'interno dell'incontro analitico. Ciò tocca anche il problema basilare e controverso (che spesso separa la psicologia analitica dalla psicoanalisi) se in analisi si possa utilizzare o no la terapia espressiva.

Este trabajo (disertación) explora y compara los procesos de la música y del análisis desde el punto de vista del autor, según su experiencia como músico, profesor de piano y analista. Explica cómo el uso, en el análisis, de la improvisación musical (con instrumentos sencillos de percusión) pueden enriquecer poderosamente el diálogo entre la psique conciente e inconciente, a la vez que profundizar la relación entre el analista y el analizando. Esto se conecta teóricamente a la imaginación activa de Jung y el concepto de Winnicott de juego dentro del encuentro analítico. Finalmente, surge la pregunta de si los entrenamientos analíticos pueden ampliar la exposición de los entrenando a la posibilidad de utilizar la música dentro del contexto del encuentro analítico. Esto toca la temática más básica y controversial (que a menudo separa la psicología analítica del psicoanálisis) de si la terapia expresiva debe o no ser utilizada durante el análisis.

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