

Rosemarie Töpker

Listening to Music as ‘Gestalt’

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1. Listening to Music as a Field of Research in Music Psychology

With the writings of Carl Stumpf¹ (1883, 1890, 1911) and Hermann von Helmholtz (1863) at the end of the 19th century inquiries into the phenomenon of listening to music opened up the new field of music psychology and remain one of its central topics until today.

In music psychology the term ‘reception of music’ is understood as „the kenning and mental grasping of a piece of music” (Gembris 1999, 25). At first emphasis was put on the attempts to classify a typology of listeners (Besseler 1926, Wellek 1930/31, Adorno 1962). This increasingly led to the question of musical preference and the effect of music (which was dealt with less judgemental)². In addition there were inquiries into the ability to differentiate and the capability of musical hearing.

Systematic musicology as the superordinate field deals with questions of the perception of musical phenomenon under psycho – acoustic and physiological aspects; it also deals with sociological, cultural and historical factors.

A clear separation between the different fields of systematic musicology does not seem to be possible nor worthwhile. From the beginning we find a wide variety of approaches, scientific and those based on humane discipline, experimental test set-ups alongside gestalt psychological, psychoanalytical and cultural scientific discourses. Quantitative and qualitative methods of research of all kinds are being applied.

Besides musicology, researchers of other disciplines have been and still are interested in this subject. A separate discourse of psycho – analytical authors can be pointed out which has only rudimentary been taken in by musicology (see Oberhoff 2002a, b and 2003).

¹ Concerning ‘Gestalt’ psychology Stumpf is of interest as the teacher of Gestalt psychologists Wolfgang Köhler, Kurt Koffka, Max Wertheimer, Kurt Lewin .

² A review on perception and reception of music from a music -psychological point of view is offered by the annual „Musikpsychologie“ Volume 14.

Recently a scientific discipline has evolved under the keyword *sound design*: based on research and ideas of the Canadian composer and researcher Schafer (in German 1988), one finds - in a kind of scientific "*crossover*" - an interdisciplinary group which covers everything from composing to commercial applications, from technical gadgets to serious research which could be of interest for music therapy.

Within musicological research into the reception of music, it is not only the applied methods that are multi – layered, but also the leading research questions, as well as the applicability of the results in pedagogical, therapeutic and commercial contexts. In a historical overview one may clearly observe a growing -if not always consistent- differentiation of views and approaches.

Initially the effects of music were seen as biological reactions³ and as an anthropological constant; musical preferences were dealt with as characteristics. Newer research, for example, stresses the historical and cultural conditionality of experiencing music (Kötter 1996, Reizlik 2001), its situational location (Lehmann 1994, Behne 1984, Gembris 1990, Müller 1990, 2000) or the aspect of the development of listening to music (Schwarzer 2000, Troué/Bruhn 2000). A similar differentiation is shown in some music psychological explorations being relevant for music therapy. For example, Karow/Rötter (2000) examine the increase of tolerating pain through music - not like the effect of a remedy independent from a subject – but dependent on certain factors like hearing strategies and how one approaches and turns the attention to music. However Gembris rightly criticizes the "one-sided prevalence of research approaches which is just experimental and only based on cognitive theories" and the often lacking relevance of findings. Thus he advocates a diversity of methods and a "parting of the general principle of experimental natural science" (Gembris 1999, 24). Some new approaches seem to be continuative exceeding the classical musicological scope of *composition – interpretation – reception* (de la Motte-Haber/Kopiez 1995). They reach up to the vision of partial fields of musicology merging into an inter-disciplinary "systemic musicology" (Fricke 1989, Fricke 2003).

2. Listening to Music as a psycho – logical Entity

If we want to understand 'listening to music' as a gestalt in a psychological sense, we are talking about an entity "*listening to music*" being in our experience and behaviour, which is confined as a wholeness and can be characterised as something particular. This can be separated from an approach which acts on the assumption of a work entity "*piece of music*" and asks *from there* how a human being receives it: how s/he sees, accepts and conceives it. The latter perception looks at two enclosed entities (music on one side, listener on the other side) and is asking for the impact of the former on the latter. Here we should fathom for once, which facts come into view when we consider "*listening to music*" as the gestalt forming entity that can be researched psychologically as an efficacious psychological occurrence.

Starting from the basic principles of 'gestalt psychology' and 'morphological psychology' (Salber 1991) here we shall ask continuously for the psycho – logic of the gestalt "listening to music". That means that other questions like those for sound propagation and musical acoustics, the physiological prerequisites of listening, sonic-

3 Of course this kind of research still exists. The fact that from checking blood – pressure (Dogiel 1980) to EEG (Petsche 1987) up to magnetic resonance imaging (Janata et. al. 2002) the newest arsenal of investigation is being applied, sometimes the suspicion of a rather extrinsic interest in research is being pointed to.

processing in the brain or the effect on heartbeat or immunological status, are not being looked at. Of course this does not mean a denegation of those phenomena, but can be understood as a delimitation of the formation of the scientific object ("Gegenstandsbildung"). "Listening to music" is – immanent in its term - characterised as an object of investigation that cannot be thought of without the listening human being.

Following Straus we could add: It is the human being listening to music, not the ear or the brain (compare Straus 1956, 112 ff). This is based on a notion of music that does not try to describe music by itself, but as an immanent cultural phenomenon, thus a shape that comes into being between and only for human beings. "It (music) is a configuration and it is being configured (...). It is happening inbetween the space of humans relating, between player and listener, composer and interpreter, two or more players (...). It allows the creation of a 'space of relating' and helps to internalise relationships as structures and to connect different >inner spaces< with each other" (Tüpker, 2002, 100). That means as well that 'listening to music' cannot be described as an ahistorical phenomenon: many of the phenomena which are going to be described are dependent, for example, on the existence of sound storage medium and thus the completely new availability of music. Moreover it means that we have to be aware that different kinds of listening to music are connected with certain cultural, social and economic prerequisites. This is why the following realisations only apply for a certain cultural environment.

In our perception and experience a gestalt is something that can be holistically - (forming an entity) - silhouetted as something specific against something else. We can differentiate the gestalt "listening to music" from the related gestalt "making music" or – relating to the routine of the day – differentiate the gestalt "learning" before and the entity "going to bed" afterwards. The gestalt 'listening to music' belongs to those entities which can be understood and explained out of an actual event. We denominate those entities "Handlungseinheiten" – 'entities of action' – and distinguish them from long-lived psychological entities like "character", "personality" or "neurosis" which signify a continuous structure of a person. A third sort of entity would be even more enfolding entities going beyond the personal like "family", "institution", "society"; these ones being denominated "Wirkungseinheiten" – "entities of interacting/coacting". In terms of a classification of those different psychological entities we can state that listening to music belongs to a self configuring gestalt. This means – following up a term of Sanders (1927) – a gestalt formation in which the here and now of an activity defines its character, its 'form development' and its effect; while something else, like the character, the personality, the musical preparatory training of the listener does have an influence, but only secondary, as a personal "refraction" or a certain way of listening. The morphologist Salber calls those 'entities of action' (Handlungseinheiten) 'worlds of an hour' ("Stundenwelten") (1989): something which is limited to smaller time entities like an hour defines our experience and action and thus forms a completed gestalt ("world") which is psychologically describable: in its 'form development' and effect, its conditions and limitations, in its variations and its transition to something else.

Listening to music creates such a certain and ascertainable context of experiencing and acting which differs from other 'worlds of an hour' like learning, cleaning up, cooking, playing the piano or painting, gardening or driving a car.

3. Listening to Music at the Centre of Experience

Asking for different situations in which we are listening to music we can firstly think of two different combinations. We're listening to music "live" which means musicians and listeners are in the same place at the same time. And we're listening to music from different sound storage mediums: The musicians are not at the same place, usually their playing belongs to the past, often it did not even happen in the same time continuum. Thirdly there are all of those situations where we do something different and are listening to music *as well, alongside something else*: music in the background. At first we want to look at those situations where listening to music is in the foreground, at the centre of experience.⁴

Music reaches our ear. We turn our attention to it and leave behind what we were occupied with before. We are sitting *expectantly, excitedly* in a concert hall or we *have made ourselves comfortable*, everything is *adjusted*, we have *chosen the right moment*, the *remote control is arranged in order to witness the beginning consciously*.

Music *puts us under its spell, takes us in, carries us away* and thus away from everyday life, away from what was just important and restricting, away from other obsessions and entanglements. Music sort of "unhinges" us out of these other realities. It *relaxes* us while taking us into its tensions, into its *skillful* and *ideal* change of tension and solution. We allow the music *to enchant* us. We *immerse* ourselves in the forms and movements it is offering us. Somehow this is always active and passive at the same time: music *carries us away* and we *let ourselves be carried away*: this can't be separated. Of course, we can if we choose, work against this happening and resist surrendering to the music.

When we do engage with music, we often avert our eyes unnoticed, away from the world, just looking in front of us or closing our eyes. By factoring out the visual, the gestalt of 'listening to music' is being intensified. *Music isn't outside of us anymore*, at the same time it *resonates in us* – or *are we in it*? Those determinations seem to be obsolete and futile. We avert our eyes, away from the world and yet we feel innermost connected with it, with the musicians, the sounds and what they stand for. We give ourselves to the arches and lines of the music, allow our experience to be put into rhythm and form by what we hear; we entrust ourselves with its enhancements and escalations, its solutions and twists which seem to be our own at the same time. When listening is successful, we ourselves *are all music; we are what we hear*. This can be *inebriant, overwhelming, thrilling, shaking, stirring, or still, comforting, resolving, inspiring or uplifting*. It depends on the music and on the listener. Often it brings up a conflicting experience for the listener: *painful and yet comforting, sad and consolatory at the same time, vehement and relieving, suspenseful and relaxing*. In addition it does something to us physically: we get goose bumps, there is a shudder, a throbbing of the heart, afterwards the pain is gone or we feel hungry.

But yet, at the same time there is more: images arise, memories, things long forgotten or something which has never been there, things unreal or utterly trivial. Music *shifts* and moves us into a different time or space, into a kind of dreamy state, into a landscape, into scenes and moods, exciting or uplifting, contemplative or sensuous. Feelings and sentiments emerge, may be those we believed to have forgotten or those we did not assume to have. Finally we *can weep* or *we have to move*, we want to dance or tap with our foot, we *automatically start fidgeting* or rap

⁴ The following describing texts are unified resumés which are based on descriptions of experiences of listening to music. Characteristic phrasing of the texts are italicised. The reader might review the accordance of those descriptions with her/his own experiences, naturally only parts of the descriptions may apply.

out the rhythm. Preferably we would now like to sing along or to conduct – and we do, if the situation allows us to. Or: We realize that we have been thinking of something different for a while, something completely unimportant and ordinary. Just through a surprising turn the music retrieves us. Where have we been? In ourselves, in the music, or somewhere completely different? Or we are annoyed: the movement has already come to an end. Why did we not listen “more thoroughly”? But this is only “bad” for the idealising images of a “good listener” we might have in our head. The gestalt of ‘listening to music’ endures those “distractions” without breaking apart: the very next moment the music has got us back. Already the next movement takes us in again. Music is not resentful. It’s the opposite: music seems to have taken those “distractions” into good hands. Music has transformed it. Not only do we follow the music, but the music itself seems to contain our own experience, our current condition or our present situation in life. *We feel understood by it: as if it was written for us and as if we had invented it just now.* The music carries us away, we let go, but then *we find ourselves in it again.* When we leave the gestalt of listening to music, we “somehow” *feel understood or consoled, animated or pacified, appeased or appalled, stimulated or composed:* transformed and having arrived at ourselves.

Variation: Not everyone listens to music alike

Of course there are different “types” of listeners: while one swears that she listens *to a complete opera with her eyes closed*, the other one prefers a place where she has a good view or where she can look at the pianists fingers. In a live situation – while opening and closing our eyes to our own taste - we can move back and forth between two conditions: With open eyes we experience the “gesamtkunstwerk” –the total work of art- stronger, we hear and see how the musicians play, how they express something through their gesture and facial expression as well. When that what we see and hear, coincides, our experience is intensified and our pleasure increased; then it feels *ideal, wonderful, just perfect, how she plays.* When it is *the person that pushes herself more into the foreground who is absurdly fooling around, with continuously exaggerated gestures, or standing there so rigidly*, then this will more likely disturb the impression of listening.

Not only are there different types of listeners, but also different types of listening where one attunes to the characteristics of a particular situation of listening and adapts them to the individual preferences. Sometimes we close our eyes unnoticeable when the music is growing more dramatical, more heartfelt, more complex or more mellow and nothing new seems to happen on stage. Or we open our eyes because a new voice comes along and we want to know who is entering the stage. Or we want to see – for example with New Music – how this special sound is created which is brought to our ear for the first time.

One wants to hear the music *just with her ears*, the other one loves *the feet and belly to vibrate with the music.* One hears music more intense when it is live or is then more *tolerant concerning styles of music, mistakes or imperfections*, because the vitality of live music is considered to be more crucial. Others feel disturbed by the too many distractions of a concert situation, the many people, the experience of being amongst others. Thus they enjoy listening to a CD at home much more which enables them to feel at ease with themselves and to experience a greater intensity. One *hears in images*, the other one does not have images surfacing with the music. One might suffer listening to rhythmical music when the situation does not allow the listener *to rock with it*, someone else might prefer sitting quietly or *even better lying down* with the possibility to fall asleep. General idiosyncrasies of temperament, for

example, being extrovert or introvert, rational or emotional etc. can be found in the way people listen to music, there they find their expression - or their balance.

Variation: Sometimes I listen like this, at other times like that

As we have seen before, such variations of listening to music are only partly individual idiosyncrasies. Individual people do not listen to music the same way everytime and most people listen to different styles of music differently. At times music has an animating effect, at other times we prefer to listen motionless, preferring instead *to go inward*. We might prefer to listen to classical music live while with rock music we would rather remain the *master of the volume control*. Although we actually prefer live music because there we feel a stronger vitality and liveliness, we can appreciate that with a CD we *become the prince* who can decide: "Now I want this piece of music!" – "The beginning once again please!" – "The same piece again but with a different singer." – "I rather have the last movement another time." – "With headphones even in the middle of the night at full volume."

There is a significant difference as to whether or not we have heard the music before. To listen to something for the first time might *open up a whole new world*. Gradually of course, this depends on how new this music is compared to our previous aural experiences; and it depends on in which life situation this is happening to us. The experiences with *music that we have never listened to before*, a new style, music from a different culture are often considered to be important turning points in life. For that the point in time has to be just right. But even if it is not as significant as that: a new piece of music, a new song, an unknown phrase, a sound never heard before can still become a very special experience. Listening to music for the first time brings us to a point where it becomes possible for us to be moved internally free from aim and purpose; being open for each (musical) turn we tune into a frame of mind of *astute calmness, floating attentiveness* where we are *being taken by the music*. If we are listening to a piece of music more often, this is always about *finding and remembering something again*. Sometimes we are listening to some music for so long that we have *entirely internalised* it, until we *are full* or we *are all of a sudden tired of it*. Psychologically this is, at the same time, not only the piece of music we have taken in completely, but it is a whole complex of emotions, tensions, afflictions, joys and conflicts which gains its form through listening to it again and again and can finally find its closure (gestalt closure): Now we own it. We cannot loose it anymore. It is solved, collected or, as Bion would put it, "contained" (Tüpker 2003, 109 ff). Now it can remain as it is. We are free for something else.

When we haven't listened to a certain music for a long time or we deliberately choose to listen to it we thus *prove our memory, our emotions, the consistency of our inner world*. We check what we have kept or retained of it. Why do we *now of all things want to listen to this music, this interpreter?* With the music we choose to listen to, we search to retrieve and restore something in us again and to bring it back into our experience. Not always consciously – we want to put ourselves into a certain mood. Sometimes this does not work out: the formerly *happy time, the music comes from*, does not want to arise again and this rather creates sadness. This is why any repeated listening is at the same time new listening, it is *rewriting* the former experience and nevertheless it contributes to its stabilisation (Tüpker 2002).

Variation: Biographies of listening to Music

Listening to music takes place as a current event, but each of us has his or her own listening biography. There are the first listening experiences which opened up our ears and which we tend to save as *innermost* experiences, or which have to be revitalised first so that we can recall them. If we encounter them surprisingly this can evoke a *flash-like reviving* of an over-all atmosphere; odours can evoke something similar.

Most people can describe different phases of listening to music in their life. Often the time of growing up is an important phase in which we search and find our identity and where listening to music supports us in that process: during that time listening to music is a *hunger for something new, exciting, moving, a search for identification, a desire for home which can be found and chosen by oneself, a stabilisation of one's own*. Music is found as something that *my friends and I savour* and my parents don't, something the parents do not want to listen to or at least not as often and not as loud. Especially concerning today's youth, Kühn describes the role of music as "furthering identity" being a mainspring of listening to, production and exchange of music: "In the mirror of being affected by music I recognise the other one and feel recognised by him (her)" (Kühn 2001, 85 f).

But also later transition periods are often characterised by a change in the manner of listening to music: One listens *excessively* and the listening itself is especially intense and is remembered lastingly. A new phase of life often means a different kind of music and a different kind of listening to it. This might be connected with an adjustment of identity in and through a new group one feels related to and which is listening to a different kind of music. Different phases of life *can be read by the record collection*. This is why we can use such aural biographies in music therapy as a means to establish contact to someone and to reinforce memories.

Musicians sometimes describe the interrelation between the different phases of listening to (and making) music and other parts of life as converse: It is not music following life, but *music has always determined showing oneself the ropes*. *Firstly there was a leap, a radical turn, a widening of the horizon brought about during the experience of music*. And after this turning point there came other more tangible changes brought about by life circumstances. It is hard to define either what came first or what in fact was more important, the new friend or the music s/he was playing. Sometimes it is actually the new experience of music *that remains of a certain time*.

4. Listening to Music in the Background

Psychologically we can differentiate between a gestalt where listening to music is at the centre of the psychological context forming an entity. And then there are those where different events are in the foreground like driving a car, ironing, cleaning up, learning, cooking, eating and music is heard *as well*. Sometimes this kind of listening to music in the background is omnipresent and only in a private space it is self adjustable. For those who do not wish this, this is a serious problem because music that pushes itself into the foreground of one's experience, then being a disturbance, it cannot consciously be pushed back into the background (this is similar when experiencing pain that cannot be pushed into the background as well). Indeed music was used in the designing of a background in former times as musical entertainment as well, at deployments and processions, as so called "promenade" and "garden concerts", in church and at court and later as parlour music in middle class society. In these situations equal emphasis was given to both the main events and atmosphere of a specific occasion thus achieving an expression of festiveness, luxury and abundance. Today there is of course the possibility of listening to music *without the*

musicians being present. We have the option of receiving the experience of music without the trappings of an occasion. Without the distraction of extra sensory input music can come to us in an uncluttered way and the stillness and simplicity of this experience has become a kind of luxury in itself.

From the ‘Musique d’Ameublement’ to ‘Muzak’ and ‘Sounddesign’

An example of a case of background music being used to its extreme is where it becomes omnipresent. The unnoticed “effect” of such music - especially the commercial version ‘Muzak’ - was probably highly overestimated, by those who applied it with hope and those who felt exposed to it with some misgivings and a certain reluctance. Results of investigations increasingly show that the desired effect -like the increase of productivity or the disposition to buy – is difficult to determine (compare Behne 1999, 7 ff).

However these inquiries do not support the reverse, that this kind of musical background does not take effect at all. In fact we create our own background music for everyday life through the choice of our personal CD collection or tuning into a radio station which “supplies” us with an uncertain sequence of pieces of music (often with a well dosed change between music and reports). The well known problem of the ‘Muzak’ inquiries, which show a decrease of effect through habituation, is met by every radio station with an appropriate proportion of new and well known pieces of music. This is how *our* radio station *entertains* us the whole blessed day. The double meaning of the German word “to entertain” (to pay alimony, to nourish / to enjoy oneself, to amuse) mirrors the aspect of a successful psychological “accommodation”. This is inexpensive and effortless like nothing else in life. Music which continuously *moves along* in the background, which is *always* there without us having to deal with it, demands little if anything from us. We can psychologically understand the preference of this kind of music because it offers us an animate and inhabited atmosphere, an atmosphere of not-being-alone-in-the-world. In this way it is an experience of the *primary substance* (to quote Balint 1973, 79 f) which only in its absence do we become aware of. This is why the reverse becomes understandable: If that which continuously pours into us, differs too much from that which we need and like, it soon becomes *unbearable* and turns into a *poisonous substance* we cannot withdraw from.

Even in pubs and shops the CD collection or chosen radio station has its source in the preferences of the innkeeper or shopkeeper, rather than in a purposeful choice according to ‘Muzak’ or according to more modern versions of sound designers’ workshop. However the subjective assortment is probably the best choice because – in all its indefiniteness and haziness – it still creates a certain atmosphere and thus meets what *entertains* in a double sense: as an aural characteristic it contributes to people who feel connected through a certain lifestyle, attitude, taste finding each other (and the proffered goods or supply of services) and thus at the same time mark-off other groupings. Here one could compare the function of background music with interior decoration, furnishing and decoration. For this reason it approaches an idea of Satie whose first and singular “performance” failed brilliantly and who, in my opinion, describes our contemporary exposure to background music accurately: In 1920 Erik Satie realised the idea of a ‘*Musique d’Ameublement*’ on the occasion of a theater soirée. The music wasn’t supposed “to have more meaning than a piece of furniture in a parlour”, “be part of the sound of the environment”, “soften the noise of fork and knife”, “furnish the burdensome silence between the guests”, “spare” the visitors “the usual banalities”. Satie thought it to be completely aimless as pure

“comfort” having the “same task as light and warmth”, “like an armchair in which one sits or not”, like “the pattern of a wallpaper” (quoted from Wehmeyer 1974, 227 f). On that said night the music which had been composed on that occasion by Satie and Milhaud was delivered in the performance hall during short breaks inbetween the scenes. The audience was prepared for the music with an (unintentional?) paradoxical instruction: “We urgently ask you to not attribute any meaning to the music. During the breaks do behave as if there was no music” (ibid.). This could only fail! Especially the emphasis on “urgently” forshadowes what Milhaud describes from memory of this “Performance of a Background Music”: “Completely against our intention however the audience flowed back to their seats in a hurry as soon as the music started. Without success Satie exclaimed: >Talk! Walk around! Do not listen!< Silently they listened to it. The whole effect was spoiled because Satie had not anticipated the charm of his music. This remained our only public experiment with this kind of music” (Milhaud 1962 quoted from Wehmeyer 1974, 227).

Under the category of ‘listening to music in the background of experience’, there are other psychological versions which can be worked out. Two other examples will be given here which do not claim to be exhaustive.

Listening to Music during Schoolwork or “Music helps me to concentrate”

Many students experience that doing their schoolwork is easier with music (Drewes/Schemion 1991, 46-66). With a Gestalt psychology approach we can understand that - on the background of music and with its help - a certain psychological condition of concentration is reached. Paradoxically music helps to maintain a psychological attachment to the accomplishing of a task. This is managed through music creating a condition which is full of relish and yet shields against other enticements, internal as well as external, like beautiful weather or particular inner impulses. Without the music the pressure alone (external or internalised) to finish the homework would not be enough to accomplish this. To put it differently again: Music helps to keep distracting impulses at bay, attaches them to itself and keeps them in the background. This condition is not stable though: If a favourite song is being played the student will most likely be enticed away from his or her homework. We say: “The music is distracting him/her.” Psychologically this means: the music comes into the foreground, the concentration and the experience find another focus point, the psychological condition “tilts” to the side which offers more relish, is more attractive. If it works out this is not necessarily a “problem”. The music allows the student a break, which will probably not extend three minutes considering the standard time of this kind of song. The student might lean back relaxed, breathe deeply, dream a little or may move a little with the music: then we can return to our task with renewed drive. If this *does not* work out, it only rarely has to do with the music. Most often there will be more serious reasons which might be a consequence of biography - a difficulty from daily life or a challenging learning situation. When a student chooses to listen to music whilst doing homework we can say in a sense that s/he is practising a kind of self regulation of his/her condition through music. It would therefore probably not be to the advantage of such a student to disallow the option of listening to music in the hope that s/he would thus do his/her homework better, without its distraction. A functioning “self treatment” with music comprises the knowledge that there is music which is less suited as a protective background and that there are tasks where one has to turn the radio off.

All in all the example of schoolwork stands for a certain “type” of listening to music which many adults use as well and which could be summarised as follows: “Music helps to concentrate”.

The term “type” is meant differently here than the “types” of listeners. Recapitulating it characterises a kind of listening to music which can be understood out of an actual context; it differs from other alternatives to listening and thus throws light on certain psychological idiosyncrasies from different angles. Everybody knows these forms, what differs is personal preference.

Listening to Music while ironing or “With music everything works out better”

The previous type is related to others like listening to music while ironing, cleaning, cooking or washing dishes. They have in common that they ask us to stay with the activity and music can contribute to that process. They do not ask for a lot of concentration though. Far from it! Those activities count as *boring, monotonous, annoying*, they require repetitive actions and they *do not come to an end* (because it gets dirty again...). Psychologically these actions are about “worlds of an hour” (“Stundenwelten”) which do not absorb our inner life or psyche completely. They *do not fill* us and due to its redundancy leave *space for something else*: for daydreams, hatching on the “pickings of the day”, contemplating unsystematically or just listening to music. While daydreaming or pondering we rely on ourselves, we have to create out of our inner self and music can be of support here. This “type” of listening to music could address and effectively cater for too much “boredom” (which might feel threatening for different reasons) and what is experienced as too much “inner emptiness”. The not yet formed psychological space, in which other things could rush uncontrollably, is kept, as it were, to an appropriate size by the music. It still leaves enough space for “reverie” which is socialised with these activities like listening to music. Thus we have three things at the same time: We have time to listen to music with relish, in daydreams we complete the “pickings of the day” or we prepare the next essay and along the way it is clean and the dishes or ironing is done. Only the ‘brownies of Cologne’ could exceed this! If we look at it closely these three things are artfully interwoven: The cleaning can take up and transform different aspects of the music for example its drive, tempo and rhythmisation: One moment the music might accelerate the cleaning, another moment it allows us to daydream, letting us work thoroughly and slowly. This is why “everything works out better with music”. But is music really the reason we feel so much better afterwards? Or did the disregarded every day activities help us? With tidying up our thoughts and every day worries seem to sort itself out. Together with the dishes the accumulated trouble of the day has been cleaned up. With ironing our mood has been smoothed as well. To just sit down and listen to music could not – not just because of the missing brownies – replace those “Gesamtkunstwerke of everyday life”. A dissecting scientific perspective would indeed like to know who is actually helping whom? Does the music help the cleaning? Does the cleaning help with the listening to music? Is ironing helpful for affect attunement? Music against boredom? Those hybrid forms we create in our everyday life are artful and skillful. For many people listening to music has become an integral part in accomplishing many parts of their everyday life and is part of their ‘self treatment’. “Everyday life laughs” about those questions of a science which want it neat and unmixed, explicitly related and cleanly sorted. On a gestalt psychological level we can understand that the here operating gestalt is intertwined. The wholeness of “listening-to-music-while-cleaning-and-being-in thoughts” *is more and different* (Ehrenfels) than cleaning plus listening to music plus being in thoughts.

The question whether it would *only* work like that and not *differently as well* is only posed secondary. Only when it doesn't work, when we realise that it used to work differently somehow and that there are people who dislike background music, do we become aware that there is a possibility of it working differently – though without necessarily having any alternative ideas.

5. Miscellaneous in One

Listening to music in the fore- or background is only a first, rough approach to a diversity of forms in which we listen to music. Listening can be included in other activities or forms of experience; or states of abeyance of listening and something different come into being, as it is used in music therapy. Sometimes we also hear music without an actual external sound. We can hear something coming from inside as a catchy tune, a musical idea or memory: being awake as well as dreaming.

Listening to Music inclusive

Neither historically nor interculturally it is appropriate to always mark-off music. Sometimes music ethnologists find themselves in a paradoxical position when researching musical manifestations with musicological methods, finding out that the too self-evident conceptual classifications are somewhat arguable. This is because the object and concept formation – non immanent in the researched culture – deforms the researched object a priori. Something similar becomes obvious when one researches the occurrence of music in myths. Historically one can also discover that “music” has not always been clearly marked-off, that it has not been abstracted out of the diverse manifestations in which it is found, has not been representationally generalised (compare Tüpker 1999).

This may lead one to consider that the act of listening to music could be “included” in a more comprehensive gestalt of experience. For example any kind of music making or composing certainly always comprises listening to music. It even belongs to dancing: whereby either the music or the movement might be in the foreground; in some circumstances it can be sufficient to listen only inwardly. In free dance there is an immediate transformation of ‘the listening to music’ into movement itself, in ballroom dancing it is more a case of dancing *to* music. Then it might depend on our practice or on our particular condition or shape whether we pay attention to the music or the dancing. Or both might recede into the background because we are talking inspiringly, the infatuation in the dancing partner is more exciting or the desired or feared impression on the observers at the edge of the dance floor is of concern. Dancing is may be that ‘form development’ where we most likely understand that psychologically music is not necessarily its *own* gestalt: we can understand dancing as an active form of listening to music: our movements show how we hear the music. Contrary we can understand music as an internalised form of dancing, the gesture as an incarnated melodic phrase, the musical phrase as an incorporated gesture. There are hints of different, merging ‘modes of senses’, also identified in newer infant research and described as ‘amodal perception’. Daniel Stern comes from the idea of a shared matrix of “gestalt forms” which differentiate further into modes of senses (1992, 74 ff). This concept sheds new light on the questions of synaesthesia: the experience is not explained through an additional link or a particular characteristic of an individual, but is explained through a recourse to a former mode of experience. It is common practise for music to be added to the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ opera and to most of the films we are watching. Even documentaries and news broadcast are

often accompanied with music. We only become aware of this when reflecting critically, for instance when the towers of the World – Trade – Centre collapsed or pictures of the war against Iraq were accompanied by background music. Research on score (music in films) shows how unconscious perception of music contributes to the effect and connotation of a scene. The music comments and interprets scenes, offering a substantiation or concretion of meaning.

Added music for example decides whether a gaze is an indication of threat or infatuation. There are yet other ways that music can give meaning to a scene this time involving our everyday life: listening to a walkman might put us in a condition where we suppress the *“background noise of reality”*. At the same time we let life float past us like in a film, its scenes being accompanied and emotionally commented by music.

Listening to Music in Abeyance

At the pivot point between foreground and background we can constitute a condition of experience where we move as if in a (decyphered) “hidden puzzle picture” (“Vexierbild”) between two focus points – now listening to the music, now focusing on something else. In a hidden puzzle picture a figure is “capsizing”, like the well-known duck/rabbit figure where the image of a duck capsizes into the image of a rabbit (and vice versa). We probably recognise what has been described here from our own experiences in a concert, listening to music at home, while driving a car, dancing or at the opera. When we observe and describe accurately what happens at these moments, we discover this particular abeyance: music comes into the foreground of our experience and at other times something else comes to the fore. In other words this particular abeyance could be called “tilting figure” or “inverse figure” –which is related to the “hidden puzzle picture”. This abeyance can be experienced as a relaxed change where our focus shifts gently between being-in-the-music and for instance inner images, body awareness, thoughts and memories; at times we listen attentively, then we occupy ourselves with something other than the music; sometimes it is more like a fast oscillating which creates that feeling that music and the other focus point work to keep each other in abeyance at the same time transferring us into it.

In our everyday forms of self treatment through music we do not consciously search for this condition, nevertheless it takes place on some level, without our knowing it. This is different in ‘Receptive Music Therapy’: in my opinion this is exactly the condition being searched for to set the psyche in motion, to animate concealed feelings, to allow that what has been repressed to emerge to a compatible degree. In *“Regulative music therapy”*⁵ (Schwabe) and other comparable music therapeutic relaxation methods the patient is invited to similarly accept the change between perceiving the music and relinquishing to body awareness, thoughts and emotions. In *‘Guided Imagery and Music’* (Bonny) there is an endeavour to bring inner images and music into an oscillating process of change. Additionally patient and therapist already talk with each other during the music so that the two experiences of listening to music and talking –whether as fore- or background – move against each other. Also in the practice of *‘Writing stories to music’* (Schiltz), *‘Psychodynamic movement’* (Priestley) or *‘Painting to music’* we hope for a condition that - in the space *between* the music and another media - searches for vestiges in the past, for things being

⁵ The music therapy methods being referred to in the following text are being described in this book more thoroughly. This is why references are being forgone here.

repressed and lost; this is like a search for a new turn, for other potentials so that the psyche can move into new directions.

Survey

Listening to music is a psychological gestalt with which we connect multifaceted experiences: everyday as extraordinary ones, irrelevant and trivial ones and some of outstanding and delightful quality. This gestalt is agile and alterable so that – once found – it survives, participates in and accompanies the vicissitudes of life. We use this gestalt in our self treatment: from everyday “*entertainment*” and background music, to conflict resolution in times of crises to the point of identity shaping and ensuring our continuity. This self treatment through listening to music probably forms the basic experience of ‘Receptive Music Therapy’; even though only some forms qualify for being integrated in clinical treatment.

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