

ARTICLE

Music, spirituality and wellbeing: Experiences of trans-subjective-participation in Guided Imagery and Music (GIM)

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ABSTRACT

In this theoretical article I discuss case examples from Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), a music-centred form of psychotherapy. In GIM, the client's imagery experience evolves whilst listening to a sequence of pre-recorded music in an altered or non-ordinary state of consciousness. In the article I explore spiritual experience in GIM as it relates to the trans-subjective-participation in which I believe clients' personal experience to be grounded. This is at a level of consciousness which transcends individual existence, time and space, and even death. I illustrate my thinking with examples from work in palliative and bereavement care where clients have been able to experience the bonds with their loved ones being maintained beyond death, for instance. Such experiences of connectedness at a spiritual level can be very real for clients, even though they may be imagined. They are real-illusions, as I discuss, putting clients authentically in touch with the spiritual dimension, even though the latter as thing-in-itself remains utterly beyond imagining. Other case examples illustrate the collective dimension of trans-subjective-participation in GIM as this relates to trauma and its healing.

KEYWORDS

The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), imagery, spiritual experience, altered states of consciousness, palliative care, bereavement, trans-subjective-participation, real-illusion

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INTRODUCTION

Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is a music-centred form of psychotherapy developed by American musician, music therapist and researcher Helen Bonny in the 1970s¹. The process in GIM involves the client imaging whilst listening to 30 to 45 minute programmes of recorded music in a deeply relaxed state. This is in an altered or non-ordinary state of consciousness. The therapist provides non-directive verbal support, supporting the client to become as fully engaged in the experience as possible, open to the music and what it may bring. Imagery experiences in GIM can be those in every sensory modality

¹ GIM in contemporary practice is best understood as a spectrum of GIM and simpler Music and Imagery (MI) methods (Grocke & Moe, 2015), though a further elaboration of this is beyond the scope of this article. The case examples in the article come from individual GIM as originally developed by Bonny.

and include body-based experiences, feelings, memories and the experience of the music itself. Spiritual experiences often feature and are the focus of this article, which is illustrated with case examples from work in palliative and bereavement care.

I describe how spiritual experiences in GIM, whilst they may be imaginary, can yet be experienced to be very real in their own way. An experience of presence may be generated by the music in particular, which can have both personal and collective resonances. Through the imagery experience, this presence may be intimated to be one that continues beyond death. Although experiences of suffering and pain may sometimes be involved, the music-centred process in GIM has the potential to be transformative, bringing healing and peace. Developing a transpersonal theoretical perspective, I discuss how music as transformative presence can be associated with experiences of the trans-subjective-participation in which I consider clients to be grounded at an ineffable level, which transcends the bounds of individual existence, time and space, and even death (Lawes, 2016, 2017).

THE MUSIC IN GIM

In GIM, carefully sequenced programmes of 2-7 pieces of classical (and sometimes other) music are used². These are designed with different areas of psychological, emotional and spiritual exploration in mind, the therapist encouraging the client to “let the music take you where you need to go”. The imagery process evolves as a manifestation of the client’s inner process in response to the music. The therapist’s role is to provide non-directive verbal support³ to help the client engage as fully as possible in the experience, open to the music and what it may bring. On this basis the process itself in GIM is likely to be able to do the rest (Bruscia, 2015).

The music has many roles to play. It can contain the client’s experience, is a catalyst for tension and release, and stimulates the flow and movement of the imagery. The music can induce shifts in consciousness, stimulate multi-modal imagery and generate body responses. It can act as a projection screen, helping clients to experience their feelings more fully and work through emotional conflict. The music can promote the exploration of relationships and of past and projected future experience. It facilitates creativity and problem-solving, transpersonal and spiritual opening, and can bring experiences of healing, transformation and integration (Bonny, 2002; Bruscia, 2015; Clark, 2014; Goldberg, 2002; Grocke, 1999).

Whilst recorded music may not in reality respond to the client’s needs, this is not necessarily true of the subjective experience of the music in GIM from the client’s perspective. The music effectively functions as intersubjective participant in the client’s imagery process (Lawes, 2016). In an uncannily fitting way, the music often seems to provide what the client needs, when it is needed, almost as if adapting to the client (Clark, 2014). Partly because of this, the music is traditionally considered to be the co-therapist in GIM. According to Bruscia (2015), the music in fact just as often functions as the primary therapist. This is when:

² Classical music has characteristics that make it especially suitable for use in individual GIM (Grocke, 1999; Lawes, 2017). Other genres of music are also used, however, most especially in Music and Imagery (MI) (Grocke & Moe, 2015).

³ The therapist does not guide the experience by suggesting what the client should imagine. Rather the therapist asks open questions intended to support the imagery to evolve spontaneously as an expression of the client’s inner process in response to the music.

The imager steps into the structures and processes unfolding in the music from moment to moment and begins to live within them, generating images and inner experiences that arise directly out of the music. And by living within these musical structures and processes as they continually transform themselves, the experiencer and the experience are similarly transformed. The entire phenomenon is intrinsically musical in nature, and similarly ineffable; and this seems to hold true, even when the imager tries to describe the experience verbally, using non-musical referents (e.g. images of an animal, person, situation, etc.). In fact, often the non-musical images and the verbal reports of them seem like mere artifacts of an essentially musical experience. (Bruscia, 2002, p. 44)

Bruscia describes here the music-centred nature of GIM, where the process is often the most fruitful for clients when they are deeply engaged in the imagery experience, and very connected, if not merged, with the music (Bruscia, 2015; Lawes, 2016). Though a piece of music or music programme may have a certain identifiable imagery potential in the work, the experience of the music can nevertheless be endlessly varied – even when the same music is used with the same client on different occasions (Lawes, 2016). A music programme can be thought of as representing a universal story of human experience, which the client personalises (Bruscia, 1999). The client unconsciously creates the experience of the music needed on a particular occasion, even creating the music itself, in a sense (Lawes, 2016).

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES IN GIM

Experiences of healing and transformation are common in GIM, with psychological and spiritual development often proceeding hand in hand (Goldberg, 2002). Spiritual experiences are indeed extensively documented in the GIM literature (Abrams 2002, 2015; Clarkson, 2017; Dahlstrom 1991; Hintz, 1995; Kasayka, 1991; Lewis, 1998-1999; Mårtenson Blom, 2014; Shaw, 1995; Stokes-Stearns et al., 1998). A number of music programmes have in fact been developed with the aim of generating spiritual experiences, though in practice any music can potentially be the catalyst for such experiences. Spiritual or transpersonal⁴ imagery recorded in the literature includes:

profound experiences of light; extraordinarily powerful or otherworldly physical sensations; deeply felt positive emotion; identity metamorphoses; collective experiences, or those involving a profound sense of identification with a community, culture, or all humanity; and unitive experiences, or those involving a sense of oneness. Other transpersonal experiences include encounters with sacred spaces, such as religious buildings, heavenly realms, or other transcendent domains; special objects possessing sacred power, wisdom, or healing potential; and supernormal presences or religious guide figures who impart wisdom, blessings, or love. In addition, some of these cases contain accounts of transpersonal experience explicitly described in terms of the music itself (in various ways). It is worthy of note that not all transpersonal experiences

⁴ The terms 'transpersonal' and 'spiritual' are often used interchangeably (Abrams, 2002).

in these cases are described as positive or pleasant, as some involved pain, fear, hellish visions, or a profound sense of lacking. Furthermore, certain cases convey the struggles of clients and guides in attempting to identify and describe transpersonal experiences, due to their characteristic elusiveness and ineffability. In certain instances, logically paradoxical language is employed as an attempt to express the verbally inexpressible. (Abrams, 2002, pp.105-106)

Whilst spirituality and religion may be closely tied, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, in my exploration of music, spirituality and wellbeing, I take a secular approach to spirituality which does not adhere to any specific religion. I consider religious and spiritual ideas, definitions, stories and images to 'point towards' an ultimate reality that is completely ineffable, and as thing-in-itself beyond what can be grasped with words and images. Whilst it is beyond music too, music may also be uniquely suited to putting the individual in contact with spiritual reality, which can be understood to be imminent within and around him as the normally hidden (transcendent) essence of his experience of being and becoming (Grotstein, 2007; Lawes, 2013, 2016, 2017).

Let me tell you [...] there is something very odd indeed about this music of yours. A manifestation of the highest energy - not at all abstract, but without an object, energy in a void; in pure ether - where else in the universe does such a thing appear? . . . But here you have it, such music is energy itself; yet not as idea, rather in its actuality. I call your attention to the fact that this is almost the definition of God. (Mann, 1996, p. 43)

REAL-ILLUSION

I continue with a series of case vignettes illustrating various aspects of music and spirituality in GIM that I consider to be of especial importance, beginning with the way in which spiritual experience can be considered to be both real and imaginary.

Case vignette 1⁵

Mrs F, a client living with cancer, was listening in a GIM session to a piece of unaccompanied choral music, *The Joy of Those Who Mourn*, from an album of Russian Chant for Vespers. The imagery she reported involved being in a vast church. The experience of the music, she explained, was "very spiritual", with grace being bestowed upon her. She said she felt accepted and at peace – no longer judged as she had been feeling, the experience healing and transformative.

Music generated experiences of this type are common in GIM. Mrs F's experience was typical in the way it involved contact with spiritual depth that was both nurturing and transformative. Whilst

⁵ In GIM, the client reports his or her experience directly to the therapist who, as the experience continues to unfold, writes a transcript using the client's own words. The transcript is given to the client to take away afterwards. The imagery experiences described in the case vignettes are as reported by the clients, extracted from session transcripts.

such experiences may be imaginary, i.e., generated in the inner world of the imagination, they can be felt to be as real as everyday life experiences are. And this they may indeed be in the way they put the client authentically in touch with the spiritual dimension which as thing-in-itself is beyond what can be known directly. GIM experiences in this sense are real-illusions which provide mediated contact with the ultimate reality of human experience (Lawes, 2016)⁶.

MUSIC AS HEALING SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

For Mrs F, the music seemed to be experienced as a healing presence which responded to her need at a deeply felt level. Work with Mrs V, a bereaved client, illustrates how the experience of music as presence may be associated with loved ones who have died.

Case vignette 2

Mrs V had lost both parents in close succession. Whilst listening to Chesnokov's *Salvation is Created*, another piece of unaccompanied choral music from the Russian Orthodox tradition, she at first reported being in the presence of angels. These turned out to be her parents, who Mrs V explained had come to reassure her that they would continue to support her as she journeyed on in her life. Mrs H explained that this not only brought great comfort, but made her feel safe again. (see also Lawes, 2016)

For Mrs V, her imagery, which can be understood to be a manifestation of her experience of the music as healing presence, was at once highly personal (reconnecting with her parents) and at the same time transpersonal, the latter in the sense that she reconnected with her late parents in an imagined spiritual dimension beyond death, where they initially appeared as angels. In a later session, she connected not only with her parents but also with her ancestors. She experienced being deeply connected, indeed identified with them. In another session, she imaged her mother being healed beyond death and then becoming all-present at a spiritual level:

Case vignette 3

Mrs V had been deeply troubled witnessing the suffering her mother experienced towards the end of her life. The music helped Mrs V to image her mother being healed in the afterlife which Mrs V explained was healing for her too. Mrs V then reached up through the earth's atmosphere where she described her mother had become an all-present cosmic ether. Mrs V reported connecting with her mother at this level to be an experience of profound peace.

For Mrs V and Mrs F, the experience of music as healing or spiritual presence was closely associated with visual imagery. Mr C, a palliative care client with a brain tumour, described how at a purely musical level the music was a presence which held him deeply and transformed his anxiety. He seemed to anticipate that it would be able to do so even beyond his death:

⁶ Experiences in the arts and religion generally are real-illusions in the sense being discussed here (Lawes, 2016).

Case vignette 4

Whilst listening to music in a deeply relaxed state, Mr C often told me “I am absorbed in the music, the music is absorbed in me”. He described how the music took away his anxiety as nothing else did. This was especially important for him as his brain tumour began to affect his ability to communicate verbally. He found himself taking “gibberish” to his wife as he described it which was frightening. Before we finished our work together, I asked Mr C to compile a list of his favourite music so that his wife and the health professionals working with him would know what music to put on for him as his condition deteriorated. When he gave me the list, he described it as the list of his “eternal friends”. His wife later reported that he died peacefully listening to one of these eternal friends, with no terminal agitation as his specialist palliative care nurse had predicted there may be.

TRANS-SUBJECTIVE-PARTICIPATION: PART 1

In therapeutic work, the intersubjectivity of the encounter between client and therapist is key. This is where, as I conceive of it, intersubjective relating involves being simultaneously one with and separate from the other (Lawes, 2013, 2016). There is an intimacy of felt connectedness that can have both conscious and unconscious dimensions. The music in GIM, in its functioning as co-therapist, even at times primary therapist, can be experienced as if it were an intersubjective participant in the client’s process, responding to the client’s need in the moment (Clark, 2014). All the case examples above involved such intersubjective experience of the music.

At a deeper level of connection, presence and identification, the experience of the music is potentially one of trans-subjective-participation (Lawes, 2016), as is also illustrated by the case examples. Trans-subjective-participation underpins intersubjective relating and involves the intimation of a level of interconnectedness, and ultimately of oneness, which transcends individual existence, time, space and even death. Work with another client, Mr X, illustrates the different level of relating.

Case vignette 5

Listening to the climactic section of the first movement of Vaughan Williams *5th Symphony*, Mr X imaged dying as becoming light. Then, looking down on the world from above, he was not only able to imagine sending rays of love to his wife to support her as she grieved, but also see her with a new partner glowing in light and come to terms with this. He later imaged her dying and merging with him as light before they danced together in a hall with many others. This was whilst he was listening to Pachelbel’s *Canon* (see also Lawes, 2016).

In his imagery experiences, Mr X experienced being merged with his wife in love at various times. This was ultimately as the light in which they were no longer differentiated beyond death. Where such experiences of trans-subjective-participation involve being ‘one with’ at a deep level of unconscious identification, intersubjectivity involves a more differentiated level of interaction – of being simultaneously one and separate (Lawes, 2016). The image of Mr X dancing together with his wife is

suggestive of the latter, for instance. The images of being merged as light and of dancing together can thus be thought of as representing different levels of relationship, with the more differentiated level grounded in the transpersonal or spiritual level. The image of his wife meeting another partner after his death reflects the dynamics of relating experienced at a still more differentiated level. Here the deeper oneness of their loving bond is present at a more hidden, implicate level. This is as his wife leads a separate existence bound in love to another, before Mr X and she are united again after she eventually dies.

Mrs V's experience of being reconnected with her late parents at a spiritual level, where they first seemed to be angels, was also an experience of intersubjectivity and at a deeper level one of trans-subjective-participation. The intimation of her mother being healed in the afterlife and becoming omnipresent at an ethereal level can also be interpreted to be an experience of trans-subjective-participation. Similarly her experience of connecting with her ancestors.

These experiences were as real for Mrs V as those of Mr X were for him. Mr X in fact told me that his experiences in GIM were almost more real than his everyday life experiences were. He also explained that he realised the afterlife may not be quite as he imagined, implying that he understood the nature of his experiences as real-illusions. This realization seemed in no sense to take away from what he experienced or the impact on his wellbeing.

The experiences of these clients, as real-illusions, clearly illustrate the inevitably limited power of the creative imagination in attempting to grasp transcendent realities. The truth may indeed be as much masked as revealed by imagery of this type (Lawes, 2016). This is perhaps as inevitable as it is necessary if there is to be an authentic but at the same time manageable encounter with the spiritual dimension and the mysteries of what may or may not happen after death. For the clients, what was important was that the experiences were meaningful for them and felt real. It was this that seemed to result in the impact on their wellbeing.

In GIM, the clients who most benefit from the process are often those able to image sometimes very closely with the music and sometimes more independently from it, as is most conducive to what they need to experience from moment to moment (Bruscia et al., 2005). In other words, the client is sometimes more at one with the music and sometimes more separate from it, as reflects the dynamic nature of intersubjective relating. Experiences of trans-subjective-participation are typically those that involve the client being more deeply merged with the music. Mr X's powerful experience of dying as becoming light, for instance, involved him opening deeply, even surrendering to the music at its climactic point, with my encouragement (Lawes, 2016). He became one with the music, stepping into and being transformed by it in its functioning as primary therapist (Bruscia, 2002).

EVOLVING ENCOUNTER WITH THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Goldberg (2002) discusses how psychological and spiritual growth need to proceed hand in hand in GIM with clients sometimes moving in and out of spiritual states in the midst of other types of work. She also discusses how clients sometimes seek spiritual transcendence in GIM without wanting to work on their everyday psychological issues. The problem here is that there needs to be sufficient ego development before there can be ego transcendence (Goldberg, 2002). The spiritual dimension of experience may indeed be challenging to assimilate. Spiritual emergencies (Grof & Grof, 1989), for

instance, are experiences that may seem to be manifestations of mental illness, even psychosis, but are also potentially experiences of spiritual emergence and growth. That is if they can be successfully assimilated, which requires sufficient ego maturity and sometimes specialist support (Goldberg, 2002).

Often in GIM, work may need to be done before the client is ready to open fully to the spiritual dimension. The next case example is a condensed account of Mr C's imagery process as it evolved over the course of the 11 GIM sessions he attended. The spiritual dimension of experience, with its close association with death, which Mr C was reluctant to discuss openly, seemed to threaten at first:

Case vignette 5

Early in his GIM process, Mr C found himself beside some woods which he said looked both endless and dark. He decided not to go into them. The woods seemed to represent his first intimation of death and potentially of transcendence. This was as something threatening which he was not yet ready to face.

Several sessions later, as he became used to the process and where the music took him, Mr C found himself walking through some woods. When I asked him about this, he reported that it was a pleasant experience. This is typical of the way that in GIM, an initially threatening image can be engaged with when the client is ready, and can cease to be a threat. As Mr C continued to traverse the woods with Chesnokov's *Salvation is Created* playing, he explained that there was a choir above him. It was "not of the human realm" he said. He was not able to say any more about it and did not seem ready to engage more directly with the image.

A few sessions later, I selected a music programme featuring similar choral music, this time from the Rachmaninov *Vespers*. Mr C said that the non-human choir was above him once again and that he could merge with it. I encouraged this. Mr C let go of the feelings which he had been bottling up and wept. He later described the experience as a "letting go of the spirit" which involved floating up above the earth. This seemed to be a way of practicing dying, anticipating what it may be like, as many palliative care clients do in my experience in GIM, whether in a similar or in a slightly different way (Lawes, 2016). Mr C explained afterwards that the experience had not only been very emotional, but also very helpful. It had relieved him of a great deal of the burden of anxiety which he had been carrying.

In the following sessions, Mr C found himself easily able to repeat the experience as he floated above the earth, looking down on it. In this liminal space 'between worlds', he completed a number of important tasks. Most especially, he reviewed his life and marriage in imagined conversations with his wife which afterwards became real conversations with her. He also imagined that he would continue to be able to look down on his wife from above after his death and look after her.

Soon Mr C began to sense angels supporting him as he floated above the earth. In what turned out to be his final session, he reported that the angels had become huge. Then something made Mr C look upward, which he had not done before. He explained "that is where God is – where I am going – my wife will

follow later". At the end of the session Mr C hugged me as he had not done before. I think we both sensed that our work together was completed. Mr C later died listening to one of his "eternal friends" as discussed above.

Mr C's wife wrote to me afterwards, explaining that she felt it was the GIM which most helped Mr C come to terms with death and dying. The initial dark and threatening vastness of transcendence gave way to an intimation of a heavenly choir with which he could merge in an experience of trans-subjective-participation. This required an emotional 'letting go', which he was initially not ready for. Once he was, the spiritual dimension became something benevolent and even welcoming as he moved towards death with support provided by the angels and the music.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Whilst the experience of the music seemed always to be a positive one for Mr C, the music can in fact be apprehended in many different ways in GIM, even the same music on different occasions. The next case example illustrates how, for Mrs F, the first client discussed above, the experience of the music changed over time. Whilst she sometimes found the music disturbing when we began the work, probably influenced by the ongoing impact of childhood trauma, it was also the music that brought healing, transformation and an opening to the spiritual dimension.

Case vignette 6

In her first GIM session, I asked Mrs F about her experience of the slow movement from Beethoven's *5th Piano Concerto* at one point, the music she was listening to in an altered state of consciousness. Mrs F told me that the music was loud, dissonant and overwhelming. This was during a fairly quiet passage near the end of the movement played at low volume - the music of a type that might otherwise be considered to have a supportive profile (Bonde & Warja, 2014).

Mrs F explained that as an 80-year-old woman she felt lost, alone and fearful. She had no family, and as a child had been frightened of her "cruel" mother when growing up during the Second World War. The impact of her parents separating when she was three seemed to have been especially traumatic. She described having felt a sense of malevolent presence during her childhood years which she said she still experienced at times. This had Nazi and other associations for her. Mrs F also suffered from eczema. She described the itching of her skin to be something that tormented her day and night.

Whilst at first the music sometimes seemed to carry her trauma, it was also the music that became the agent of transformation for her. Whilst listening to the second movement of Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* in an early session, for instance, Mrs F found herself in a dark place. The music, she explained, was not only sad but also incredibly beautiful as she began to feel its transformative presence with her in her isolation and fear. After this, the Adagio from Boccherini's *Cello Concerto* had a deeply healing affect. In her imagery, Mrs F described how someone had applied balm to her skin so that the tormenting

symptoms of her eczema disappeared completely. Then whilst listening to a Russian Folk Song *O, the sweet night steppes*, she described the solo voice to be a strong woman enfolding her.

Mrs F described on many occasions how very angry she felt about being let down, rejected and misunderstood by others. Sometimes, she seemed to be stuck in the repetitive negative thought patterns associated with this, completely unable to perceive anything more positive about her life. GIM seemed to be especially useful in helping her move beyond this, the music always having a key role to play. The image of the man applying balm to her skin, the disappearance of the symptoms of her eczema, at least temporarily, and the voice enfolding her, suggest that the music then came to function as a psychological 'skin' for her. Given that Mrs F remembered so very few experiences of being held and nurtured, the music provided something that was much needed. It gave her access to inner resources that she could not easily connect with otherwise. It also later transpired that it was in the music's functioning as a transformative, holding presence that its potential to open her to the spiritual dimension lay.

PERSONAL, COLLECTIVE AND SPIRITUAL

As the work with Mrs F continued to evolve, a pattern emerged in which she quite often described the music to be overwhelming at some point, associated with traumatic memories, her eczema, or both. This was, however, never overwhelming in an unmanageable way. The experience could always be productively worked through as psychological, emotional and spiritual meaning became attributed to it. It was this that led to transformation, healing, peace and positive spiritual opening, with the music always central to the experience.

Music's containment of the experience of grief, both personal and collective, often featured. In one session, there was an especially traumatic collective experience of dying, as Mrs F described it, which had spiritual connotations. The following is an account of the second half of her music and imagery experience during that session, the final part of which is included in case vignette 1 above:

Case vignette 7

As Mrs F was listening to the *Adagio* from Boccherini's *Cello Concerto* (which had been so healing before), the symptoms of her eczema intensified. She felt as if her skin was burning and that she was being punished, even that the music was angry with her – "what have I done wrong: I need healing". Mrs F had already told me about an experience of what she identified to be past-life regression. This had occurred some years previously during a hypnotherapy session. The experience was of being burnt to death as one of a group of religious heretics in the Middle Ages with whom she identified spiritually. Mrs F told me that the burning sensation on her skin, which she reported during the session being described here, involved her re-experiencing this traumatic past-life event which was also a collective one.

The experience was worked through and its intensity lessened. Then whilst listening to *The Joy of Those Who Mourn* from the album of Russian Chant for

Vespers, Mrs F experienced what she felt to be the mass mourning of women who had lost loved ones in the First and Second World Wars, her mother being one. She described the music as beautiful but sad, the women expressing their deepest feelings. In spite of the sadness, there was a still, calm atmosphere. Mrs F explained that she was receiving healing with the burning sensation on her skin completely gone. I repeated the music five times in a row, encouraging Mrs F to open to the experience as fully as possible, so as to help her deepen and consolidate the experience. It was during the midst of this that Mrs F told me that she was receiving grace. This was as part of what she described to be a “very spiritual” experience. She said she felt deeply at peace within herself, no longer judged and finally fully accepted for who she was.

In subsequent sessions, Mrs F experienced similar narratives of transformation and healing, the music always being at the centre of these. Significantly, she never reported the music to be overwhelming again. She imaged the “stairway to heaven” bathed in light and began to be able to anticipate dying as a journey into light, rather than into hellish torment and punishment associated with personal or collective trauma.

TRANS-SUBJECTIVE-PARTICIPATION: PART 2

Mrs F’s experiences of collective identification can be accounted for in relation to the psychology of her inner experience at a purely personal level. Yet as real-illusions, her experiences may also in some very real sense have been what she felt them to be as experiences of trans-subjective-participation. As discussed, trans-subjective-participation involves a sense of participation in an experience of subjectivity and presence that, whilst it may have highly personal resonances, is yet grounded at a level of consciousness which transcends the bounds of an individual’s life, time and space as ordinarily experienced. The examples from the work with Mrs F bring out the collective dimension that such experience can have. It is important, I believe, to remain open to what such experiences may be ‘in reality’ and resist the temptation to explain them away too narrowly. A conventional psychological explanation may be perfectly credible and valid in its own way. At the same time, there may be more to these experiences that can be reductively accounted for by any one, inevitably limited, perspective.

A final example of trans-subjective-identification illustrates what appeared to be the tuning into a collective, even global-scale experience by Mrs V. This had a striking element of synchronicity.

Case vignette 8

At the end of an extended 50-minute GIM experience, whilst listening to the first movement of the Rouse *Flute concerto*, Mrs V imaged “souls passing”. The experience, which was a very emotional one, she described to be a “lament for souls”. Significantly, she had had no sense who these souls were – they seemed to have no personal connection with her. After the experience, she explained how the souls were both separate and one, with a light at the center of each which held the infinite. It was the spiritual atmosphere of the music, with its quasi-Celtic, ethereal flute melody and soft accompanying strings, that seemed to have brought the image. The experience was full of meaning and significance, Mrs V

describing what a privilege it was to experience things like this in GIM, even if the meaning and significance were not clear to her.

A couple of hours after the session, the Paris terror attacks began. This gave Mrs V's experience an entirely new dimension of potential significance as one of trans-subjective-participation. It appeared that Mrs V may have tuned into consciousness at a collective level, in anticipation of an event of global impact that was about to occur (see also Lawes, 2016).

Whilst I cannot claim with any degree of certainty that Mrs V's experience had a connection with the Paris terror attacks, what I have learned as a GIM practitioner in relation to client experiences such as hers is to keep a very open mind. This involves my needing to be able to accept and help clients explore the meanings which they may attribute to their spiritual experiences, which are reflective of belief systems which may be very different to mine. Mrs F's past-life experience, as she identified it (described above), is a good example of this.

Past-life experiences are also reported on by Clarkson (2017) in GIM work with a non-verbal autistic adult. The client told Clarkson using Facilitated Communication during the music listening that she, Clarkson, had not only played in Wagner's orchestra, but also that she had been the client's father in ancient Greece when he, the client, had no problems communicating and was a wise teacher and musician. Clarkson describes how important it was for her to be able to accept the client's spiritual insights about his and her past-life experience, which challenged her own belief system but also helped the client find meaning in his own current incarnation as someone with autism.

DISCUSSION

The music in GIM, as the examples illustrate, can generate experiences of trans-subjective-participation in a remarkable way, which can nurture psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. As real-illusions, these experiences are suggestive of the interpenetration, interconnectedness, and ultimately the unity of all people and things across time and space, as has long been proposed in the world's great religious and spiritual traditions. Interestingly, scientific research is beginning to be undertaken into the way that people may be connected in consciousness globally on occasions of great celebration or tragedy⁷. The Paris terror attacks are an example of the latter, with experiences similar to that of Mrs V reported in the GIM literature associated with 9/11, for instance (Creagh & Dimiceli-Mitran, 2018).

Experiences of trans-subjective-participation in GIM can also be understood to be those of quantum physicist Bohm's (1980) "implicate order". Bohm proposes this to be the common ground of both mind and matter at a level where everything and everyone is instantaneously connected in theory across all of time and space. Bohm believes music to be a direct experience of the "flowing undivided wholeness" of the implicate order. This I explore elsewhere, integrating Bohm's insights with perspectives from transpersonal psychology, psychoanalysis, music theory, and the pre-modern wisdom of the great yoga and meditation traditions (Lawes, 2017). Through this integration, I develop

⁷ See the work of the Global Consciousness Project: <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/>

a model of levels of consciousness which can be used to understand experiences in GIM, including those of trans-subjective-participation (Figure 1):

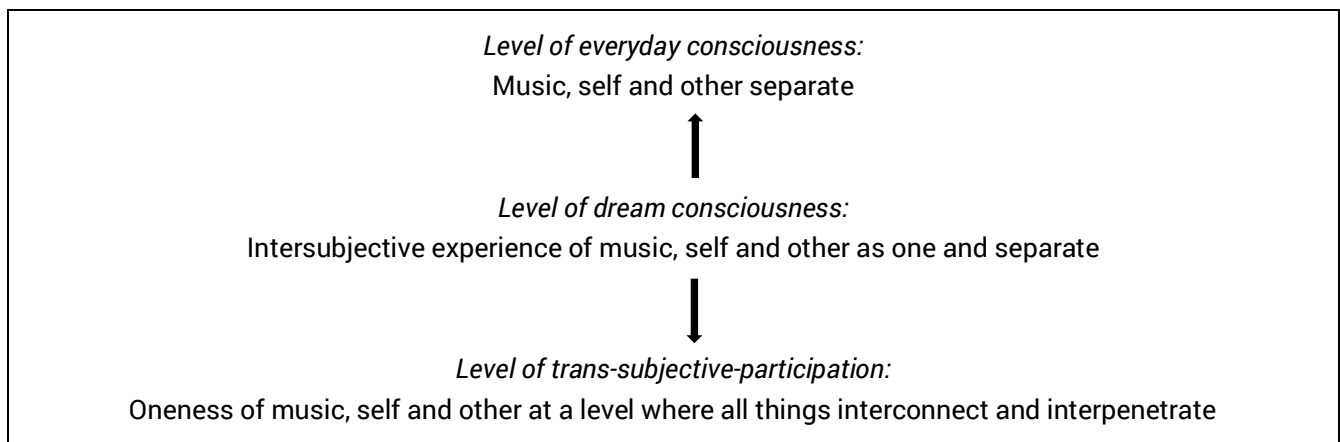


Figure 1: The experience of music, self and other at different levels of consciousness in GIM

In this model, dream consciousness mediates between everyday consciousness and the spiritual ground of consciousness within and beyond at the level of trans-subjective-participation. Mental and spiritual growth, and an individual's sense of wellbeing more generally, depend on a successfully mediated contact with this ineffable ground-of-being, contact with which would otherwise overwhelm (as in psychosis or trauma, for instance) (Grotstein, 2007; Lawes, 2013, 2016, 2017). It is in relation to this ground that dream experiences, which are sensory based and structured in space and time, and thus finite, cannot but be imaginary. They mediate that which as thing-in-itself is infinite and formless, non-sensual, timeless and spaceless, beyond all conventional forms of knowing. In this sense, dream experiences are irreducibly both real and imaginary. They are real-illusions which, especially in the case of music-based dreaming in GIM, allows a type of experiential resonance with the infinite to occur. This makes the experience of the infinite mentally palatable and meaningful as it would not otherwise be (Lawes, 2016). Thus, in GIM, both the music itself in its functioning as dream-form (Lawes, 2013, 2017), and the dream-like imagery experience generated in response, mediate between the finite and infinite dimensions of consciousness, with the deeper experiences being the more spiritual, or infinite ones.⁸

As the work with Mrs F illustrates, experiences in GIM can also be associated with pain and suffering, both individual and collective, as well as with the transformation and healing of suffering. The work with this client also demonstrates how personal and subjective the experience of music can be. This is even the case with the experience of the same music on different occasions. For Mrs F, at times the music initially seemed to carry the experience of trauma, as when in the first session she described it to be overwhelming and dissonant, for instance. This suggests that her traumatic experience was not dreamt, meaning that in relation to her trauma, the infinite dimensions of

⁸ Elsewhere I develop further a way to understand music's mediation of the infinite (Lawes, 2017). Drawing on Ehrenzweig's (1967) and Bohm's (1980) work, I discuss music to be governed by an inner necessity which can be understood to be a manifestation of the necessity governing the unfolding of the universe at large, with which the composer has attuned. Music in this sense can be considered to be a manifestation of spirit-in-action, with which the client attunes. This occurs as the necessity of his imagery process unfolds in alignment with the inner necessity which governs the music's unfolding.

consciousness were not successfully mediated. As her process evolved, it was the music that allowed states of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual distress to be worked through – that is, dreamt. The process involved her aesthetic experience of the music containing and transforming experiences of loss which were very deeply felt. This seemed to allow her childhood trauma to begin to be dreamt (or processed) for the first time. This, in turn, seemed to be necessary so that she could begin to anticipate death as a journey into light.

As Mrs F was able to surrender more deeply to a music selection when I repeated it⁹, which I did in many sessions, she became more deeply held within the embrace of the infinite which the music mediated for her, resulting in her identifying the experiences to be spiritual ones. She wanted to rest in and assimilate these experiences, rather than to talk about them. The more numinous experiences in GIM are indeed very difficult to describe (Bush, 1995), and do not need to be described to have their effect. As Bruscia (2002) suggests, such experiences of music as primary therapist are essentially ineffable ones even when there is some type of imagery content associated with them. The music allowed Mrs F to transcend her difficulties as very little else did as she journeyed towards the end of her life. She had found that there was a way through the pain and even torment of her inner experience, leading to peace, spiritual blessing and acceptance.

As someone who experienced a traumatic childhood and had such a poor relationship with her mother, Mrs F seemed to have an especial sensitivity to collective trauma and grief. I have noted this with other traumatised clients. Mrs F's past-life image of being burnt to death was an especially striking example, however it might be understood psychologically. Finally, Mrs V's experience of souls passing, which may have arisen through collective attunement in anticipation of the Paris terror attacks, was once again one where the music was central in the generation of the imagery with its infinite dimension, as she herself described it.

SUMMARY: MUSIC-GENERATED EXPERIENCES OF TRANS-SUBJECTIVE-PARTICIPATION IN GIM AND BEYOND

This article describes how the music in GIM can be experienced as a transformative presence which has the potential to put clients in touch with the trans-subjective-participation in which everyone and everything can be understood to be connected and ultimately one at a spiritual level. The real-illusion of trans-subjective-participation is experienced in GIM as the client goes deeply within, open to the music and what it can bring. It is because the clients are in an altered state of consciousness, akin to dreaming awake, that such remarkable experiences of trans-subjective-participation can occur.

Beyond GIM, all manner of other active and receptive music experiences have the potential to open consciousness to dream awake (Campbell, 1968; Lawes, 2013), both in therapy and in everyday life. This gives music the potential to generate the real-illusion of trans-subjective-participation in many different ways and in many different contexts, and this participation contributes to individual and group wellbeing. These areas –which are beyond the scope of this paper– would benefit from further exploration in the future.

⁹ Repeating an individual musical selection in GIM is an important clinical technique, originally developed by Summer (2011).

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Μουσική, πνευματικότητα και ευεξία: Εμπειρίες υπερ-υποκειμενικής συμμετοχής στη μέθοδο Guided Imagery and Music (GIM)

Martin Lawes

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σε αυτό το θεωρητικό άρθρο εξετάζω κάποια παραδείγματα περιπτώσεων από την εφαρμογή της μεθόδου Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), μιας μουσικοκεντρικής μορφής ψυχοθεραπείας. Στη μέθοδο GIM η εμπειρία των απεικονίσεων του πελάτη εξελίσσεται τη στιγμή που ο ίδιος ακούει μια σειρά από προ-ηχογραφημένες μουσικές με τη συνείδησή του να βρίσκεται σε μια μεταβαλλόμενη ή ασυνήθιστη κατάσταση. Στο άρθρο διερευνώ την πνευματική εμπειρία που ενυπάρχει στην GIM, καθώς σχετίζεται με τη δια-υποκειμενική συμμετοχή [trans-subjective-participation] στην οποία πιστεύω ότι εδρεύει η προσωπική εμπειρία των πελατών. Αυτή η εμπειρία βρίσκεται σε ένα επίπεδο συνείδησης που ξεπερνά την ατομική ύπαρξη, τον χρόνο, τον χώρο, ακόμα και τον θάνατο. Οι σκέψεις μου διευκρινίζονται εδώ μέσα από παραδείγματα από την εργασία μου στον χώρο της ανακουφιστικής και της παρηγορητικής φροντίδας όπου, για παράδειγμα, οι πελάτες μπόρεσαν να βιώσουν τους δεσμούς με τους αγαπημένους να διατηρούνται και πέρα από τον θάνατο. Τέτοιες εμπειρίες σύνδεσης σε πνευματικό επίπεδο, ακόμη και αν κατασκευάζονται από τη φαντασία, μπορούν να είναι πολύ πραγματικές για τους πελάτες. Όπως αναφέρω, είναι πραγματικές ψευδαισθήσεις [real-illusions] οι οποίες φέρνουν τους πελάτες σε μια αυθεντική επαφή με την πνευματική διάσταση, παρ' όλο που η τελευταία ως πράγμα από μόνη της [thing-in-itself] παραμένει εντελώς πέρα από την φαντασία. Άλλα παραδείγματα περιπτώσεων περιγράφουν τη συλλογική διάσταση αυτής της υπερ-υποκειμενικής συμμετοχής στη μέθοδο GIM, όταν αυτή σχετίζεται με το τραύμα και τη θεραπεία του.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

μέθοδος Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) της Bonny, απεικόνιση [imagery], πνευματική εμπειρία, μεταβαλλόμενες καταστάσεις συνείδησης [altered states of consciousness], παρηγορητική φροντίδα, πένθος, υπερ-υποκειμενική συμμετοχή, πραγματική ψευδαίσθηση [real-illusion]