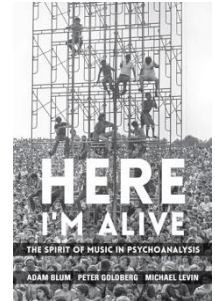


BOOK REVIEW

Here I'm alive: The spirit of music in psychoanalysis (Blum et al.)

Reviewed by Katy Bell

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Title: Here I'm alive: the spirit of psychoanalysis **Authors:** Adam Blum, Peter Goldberg & Michael Levin **Publication Year:** 2023 **Publisher:** Columbia University Press **Pages:** 304 **ISBN:** 97802 3120 9458

REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

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In the "Preface: Liner notes" of this wide-ranging, thought-provoking book the authors Peter Goldberg, Adam Blum and Michael Levin set out their key assumption that human musicalisation begins in-utero and underpins much of human "psycho-somatic-social life" to an extent that is generally overlooked today. Written collectively as an exploratory project over five years of monthly gatherings, the book itself, set out in two halves as a vinyl record with Side A and Side B, resembles an album of songs (chapters) based on a common theme but with each differently extemporised through the three voices. The writing elaborates recurring motifs, which provide the experience of a live "working-through." In an interview recorded as part of the podcast series *Psychoanalysis On and Off the Couch* (Schwartz, 2023), episode 148, Peter Goldberg observes to Harvey Schwartz: "...the book is not a psychoanalytic book about music; it's a sort of musical book about psychoanalysis, in the sense of how we are operating at a kind of musical level when we practice."

Music therapists are familiar with creative ways of thinking about and employing music to effect social and community change. In this work, written from an orientation of the analyst's position beside the couch, the authors ground their use of the word *music* fundamentally on Boethius's concept of *musical humana*. Boethius, was a Roman politician, writer, and philosopher during the Early Middle Ages. Strongly influenced by the works of Plato and Aristotle, he wrote prodigiously. One of his works which was particularly influential in the middle ages is *De institutione musica* in which he put forward the notion of a tripartite division of musical types: *musica mundana* (cosmic music), the orderly numerical relations that control the natural world; *musica humana* (human music), the union of body and soul in which he argues that the beauty of anatomical harmony, plus the relationship to the soul,

is analogous to musical order and symmetry; and *musica instrumentalis*, audible music produced by voice or instruments.

By referencing Boethius's concept of *musica humana* early in the book, the authors establish a framework that underpins their view that the socio-cultural-individual system by which humans thrive is essentially musical. They term this musical system *the weave*:

The work of psychoanalysis, in this view, is to facilitate fuller and freer vibration at each node of this series, cultivating and amplifying the idiomatic freedom of each instrument to sing through the chorus of *musica humana*, to resound the psyche-somatic energies of being human, to surf the waves of the weave (p. xix).

They add to this conceptual framework that:

One of the projects of this book will be to recover, as Laplanche once did, aspects of Freud's monumental oeuvre that suggest an alternate, perhaps more musical Freud – indeed, as Phillips once put it, a 'post-Freudian' Freud, a Romantic Freud. (p.xviii)

This statement is a reference to the characterisation of Laplanche's work in his return to the letter of Freud's text; a method of reading Freud, strictly according to Freudian principles, which led to a complete rethinking of the foundations of psychoanalytic theory and practice. From a recovery of Freud's abandoned seduction theory, Laplanche (1987) developed a "general theory of seduction" which outlines the crucial importance of the Other in the transmission of enigmatic messages or signifiers as a key element in the creation of the unconscious: in Laplanche's words, "The *enigma* is in itself a *seduction* and its mechanisms are unconscious" (Laplanche, 1987, p.128). This theory, which could be viewed as a post-Freudian model, is aligned simultaneously with the irreducible foundation of psychoanalysis and with human subjectivity.

Theoretical influences in the book are drawn largely from the Independent Group of psychoanalytic thinking, focusing on the relationships between people rather than the drives. They include Donald Winnicott, Marion Milner, Jean Laplanche, Jacques Lacan, Thomas Ogden and Adam Phillips. Philosophical influences include the works of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Peter Sloterdijk.

The established premise for the book is that to fulfil our potential as psychical, embodied, and social beings, we must acquire a way of becoming "recognisable members of a cultural collectivity that both includes the nuclear family and extends beyond it in social scope and history" (p.xii). The authors elaborate that, born in a state of "utter insufficiency" – a state Freud called *Hilflosigkeit* (helplessness) – the infant's experience of perceived attacks from the outside world becomes "tempered by the forecasting of temporal continuity, organised into the weather of play" (p.89).

Whilst recognising that many theorists have made similar claims, the trio highlight their departure from the majority of theses (that acquired systems of belonging are inscribed through language or cultural practices and norms) in their assertion that our system of belonging is essentially musical. The term coined to encapsulate this way of being in "the socio-cultural-individual musical system" is the weave. In order to achieve this it is proposed that contemporary analysts need to be

both good conductors and – in order to work creatively with different patients, to re-member those who have become fractured and dislocated from society - able to jam: “to help one’s patients become not necessarily fellow analysts but fellow artists, moved by the ethos of the weave” (p.xix). Examples of potential strands of the weave permeate the book, many of which resonate with the practice of music therapy. Selected for this review are a small number to offer a sample of style, rather than give a full account of the work.

THE BODY’S WAY OF DREAMING

In this early chapter, the authors notice a shift of interest in their contemporary analytic practice from *what* is being communicated between analyst and patient to *how* it is being communicated. Bodies, it is argued, do not communicate through words but “speak” through symptoms that are manifestations of repression and psychic conflict, and the place where the everyday sound environment contains musical potential is in live interaction with other embodied beings. It is observed that if the prototype for musical life is found in the prosody of sound exchanges between infant and caretakers, then it is no surprise that the vocal exchanges we have with other people over the course of the day carry the potential, in the music of conversation and embodied interaction, of a renewed connection between our embodied existence and our being in the world.

Just as hearing a “piece” of music may fail to move us musically so, the authors observe, the most incidental, random collection of sounds within a functional timeframe might be capable of producing a musical experience. A parallel is drawn between Bion’s injunction to put memory and desire aside (Bion, 2007), in order to fully experience a session in real time, and the degree to which we must relinquish what we know about a formal piece of music so that the actual musical experience may be enhanced.

Resonant musical experience born of communal perception is, the authors articulate, very different from the use of sound patterns noticeable in the “mute sound prisons” (p.12) of obsessional and compulsive mental states – states in which access to a shared sensory world has been replaced by repetitive use of patterns within the chamber of a “sensory cocoon.” Music, here, is no longer available for creative use but functions exclusively to regulate (quieten?) and control emotional life.

References are made to Didier Anzieu with links to the sensory envelope that he describes in his paper “The Sound Image of the Self” (Anzieu, 1979). In this paper Anzieu sets out to describe the way in which a foetus is immersed in a bath of sound from five months of intrauterine life onwards, and how a composite of sense registers from this time forms our fundamental sense of ourselves as being bodily intact and distinct from our surroundings. There is much in Anzieu’s book (1995) “*The Skin-Ego*” that could usefully be explored as companion reading for this section. Beyond the skin ego and in-utero sound mirror, attention is given in the chapter to the sound communities in which we live, shaping our bodily sense of self, and through which we are linked to the ideological and social patterns of our cultural and economic surroundings. It is through this aspect of the weave, the authors argue, that our embodied subjectivity is shaped culturally.

THE RHYTHM OF THE HEAT

There is a playful observation at the beginning of this section, characteristic of the style of this book, that Freud famously avoided taking the train, as he did writing about music. The paradox of the former is accentuated in the way Freud chose to describe what he called the “fundamental rule” of psychoanalysis, free association, by inviting the patient to speak whatever comes to mind – as if one were riding a train and noticing the changing views that passed the carriage window.

Evocations of the embodied experience of riding in an old-fashioned carriage, the repetition of rhythm of wheels over track and the encapsulated passing of time, are elaborated as ways of exploring “rhythimized consciousness,” offered here as a correlate of Freud’s (1913) “evenly suspended attention.”

Rhythm as the rudimentary organisation of perceptual experience is widely explored in this chapter, which includes its function in our sense of embodiment, the repetition of the frame in psychotherapeutic work, the rhythm of sexuality and the effect of movement in music. Rhythm is also traced in the verbal to-and-fro of the analytic process and the quasi hypnotic dream-like states that approach the “dreamlike unreality” described by Abraham (1995). Finally it is linked to the shifting, wordless alpha and beta functions of Bion’s theoretical legacy. Adapting the notion of alpha and beta functions to a carer rocking a baby to sleep, the authors suggest “a kind of ‘beat-function,’ rhythmizing the infant into dreaming” (p.29). The other end of this spectrum is the unravelling that takes place when a patient’s world has no rhythm:

When consciousness fails to become rhythmised it can get no help from shared beats and becomes a slave of quantity without quality. When things are dysfunctional in the rhythm section there is only noise, nausea, the disintegration products of a quantified, reified world. (p. 33)

Getting the hang of, or falling into a rhythm is seldom conscious, but instead it “takes hold without fanfare as a kind of found creation” (p.33). This “found creation” is linked implicitly to the individual’s own style – when the patient can express their material in their own way. “One must learn the necessity of a scansion that comes to fold and unfold a thought,” Derrida is quoted, “This is nothing other than the necessity of a rhythm – rhythm itself” (p. 28).

RE-MEMBERING, RE-BEATING AND WORLDING-THROUGH

The title of this chapter borrows from Freud’s paper *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914), the point of this effort being to remember, rather than being stuck in a cycle of repeating:

When the trauma of a broken embodiment becomes iterated into the repetition of a sampled loop (sometimes called a symptom), a disruption of the continuity of going-on-being becomes a patterned, anticipatable, musical landscape, a ritual substitute through which to harness otherwise totally chaotic noise. (p. 157)

Musical compositions (and improvisation), the writers observe, become a temporal framework in which to dwell between the predictability of home and the arena of the world. In this way music is like a symptom – doing two jobs at once, spiralling out towards the world in what Sloterdijk (2014, p.157) calls “an incessant gesture of life,” while reaching back from the world towards the indistinctness that precedes finding the world anew.” It is noticed that this alternating movement which permeates many of Freud’s seminal papers on psychoanalysis – *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad* (1925), *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915) and the fort-da of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) – “becomes the to-and-fro of subjectivity itself, being in music at the same time as one is being made by the music” (p.157-158). It is awareness of this alternating movement that is identified by the authors as being a remusicalisation of the analytic space.

CONCLUSION

This is a book brimming with theoretical couplings between psychotherapeutic practice and music, weaving connections between individuals and communities. We are invited at the outset to share in a “musical voyage” (p.xii) – a voyage which is suffused with the creative energy of a live musical collaboration. The pleasure, and sometimes the necessary frustration, of this voyage is like the opening of a conversation that leaves the reader buzzing with thoughts and observations, eager to join in.

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