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NON-WESTERN PRACTICES OF HEALING-MUSIC AND APPLICATIONS FOR MODERN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Abstract — Résumé

Although there are ethnic groups and non-European cultures which neither understand illness in a western sense nor use healing-rites in a functional way similar to western therapeutic treatments, it makes sense to investigate whether those practices could be helpful in current psychotherapy.

Thus, concerning the basic aspects of music, three aspects are discussed: the anthropological existence-oriented, cognitive structure- and contents-oriented, and effect-oriented aspects. Furthermore, in investigating the origin of musical meaning three interdependent components are defined: the common physiological and metaphysical, the culture-related, and the individual ones. Finally, some examples of non-western healing music in psychotherapy are given, e.g. in practices of shamanism, Chakra-meditation and Taoism.

The issue of these investigations is to reveal the effective core of music-associated healing-rites, to modify them in regard to our culture and to integrate them into a modern system of psychological or psychiatric intervention.

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**Basic Aspects of Music**

The variety of music-therapeutic results ensures that the effect of music on the psyche is based on a multifunctional process comprising physiological, emotional, and cognitive factors as well as on anthropological, cultural and individual conditions. The first approach leads to the question whether transcultural invariants of music exist. Three aspects are to be discussed: 1) the anthropological existence-orientated, 2) cognitive structure- and contents-orientated and 3) effect-orientated aspects.

1) The Anthropological Existence-Orientated Aspect:

The development of culture and the creation of arts point to mankind's essential character. Human life cannot be reduced to what is called basic needs. Definitely related to a mental dimension human life goes beyond the biological basis of life (as e.g. René Spitz could prove by his research on hospitalism). Psychological as well as philosophical attempts to confine mentality to a clear-cut system of representation and communication failed. For example, neither the philosophical aim to develop a distinct language, avoiding various possibilities of interpretation, by excluding the different experiences of people, nor cognitive-psychological (not cognitive psychology itself) theories which tried to narrow down the psyche to a mere information-consuming system, succeeded. There is a distinct desire to express and to experience life in a way which seems to reach the core, the essence and the sense of being. Where rational reflection comes to an end the symbolic meanings of the arts reveal their significance. Facing the eternal and insoluble questions of life for thousands of years mankind has generated cultural answers, integrating the transcendental sense of artistic symbols, the creative act as a fundamental form of being itself and a deep aesthetic yearning.

2) The Cognitive Structure- and Contents-Orientated Aspect:

As sound is a neuropsychological phenomenon caused by the physical fact of oscillation, and as any piece of music comprises specific tonal and rhythmic patterns, music is necessarily based on physical and formal structure. This effects two different outcomes: on the one hand the structure, e.g. the basic beat, can induce a physiological reaction as was mentioned above, on the other, music will be associated with specific contents, which mainly depend on music-related life events. Nevertheless an individual understanding of music and a subjective identification-process of sound and emotion can lead to distinct music-based symbolisations of life events or life experiences. Reflective composition, rather than inspirational, would use this in a conscious way, while the music-experience faces repressed psychic contents.

Thus structure and meaning form an unavoidable essence of music which retain its constancy.
3) The Effect-Orientated Aspect:

When dealing with therapeutic aims the outcome of a music-related treatment is described by a diagnostic-specific and patient-related modification of behaviour, emotion and cognition. This comprises both production and reception, improvisation and interpretation. Music may be integrated as a supplement-intervention within a complex therapeutic e.g. behaviour-therapeutic concept, but it may also be effective on its own. It might effect the intended process by the means of the typical relationship between individual and sound. While e.g. Christoph Schwabe's concept of »Regulative Music-Therapy« belongs to the first group, Paolo Knill's »Expressive Therapy« follows the second path.

In any case, music has various influences comprising e.g. altered states of consciousness, modification of behaviour (when acting as reinforcement), and integration of disordered personality. In order to apply music in a distinctly therapeutic way, the issue is to discover the complex interplay of individual enculturation, life-experience, physiological impact, interpretation and association, cathartic expression, and symbolic identification and creation, as a process of life-realisation. Their interdependence and significant balance are decisive for the result. As there are anthropological and culture-associated factors as well as individual components, science has to face both an empirical path of research and the analysis of individual cases.

The Origin of Musical Meaning

Although many discussions about programmatic music show that music need not necessarily be bound to an extra-musical meaning but reveals its aesthetic significance on its own, music has always been related to a more or less distinct meaning. Three mostly interdepending components form the specific basis: 1) the common physiological and metaphysical aspect, 2) the culture-related aspect and 3) the individual aspect.

Together with the three aspects above these form a holistic system which helps to develop the understanding of music-therapeutic effects. The anthropological aspect stresses the aesthetic and creative process as significant for mankind and its realisation of life. The cognitive aspect comprises the dimensions of music which can be investigated. The effective aspect points to the outcome of receiving as well as of producing music. Interplaying with these factors the issue here faces the complex phenomenon of the significance of music.

1) The Common Physiological and Metaphysical Aspect:

Archaic and traditional mythical music particularly evokes transculturally independent imaginings which are associated with distinct meanings. Often the music's material essence works in a specifically physiological way e.g. provoking altered states of consciousness by the means of effective ostinato rhythmic or overtone patterns, modifying heart-beat and breath-frequency or influencing the adrenalin- and/or stress-level. Probably interplaying with those factors,
the metaphysical aspect of music points to a non-verbally expressable facing of the essential questions of mankind. Sometimes quite close to alternative psychotherapeutic methods such as Rebirthing or Holotropic Integration, the arts, especially music, have opened insights which can not be explained by scientific research or an everyday life-experience: eternity, the essence of life or the sense of delivering the spirit from the body within the process of death etc.

2) The Culture-Related Aspect:

Funeral marches, wedding songs, Christmas tunes and hymns are examples of highly significant music within a culture. Thus enculturation effects a specific understanding of such music, often combined with specific behaviour, specific emotions and cognitions. While the physiological or metaphysical »factor« of music works relatively independently of the respective culture, the culture-related aspect is highly associated with the stipulated meaning of music. For therapeutic application this fact indicates a distinct decision for music. While — provided that there are no transcultural invariables or life-event-related influences — e.g. Chinese funeral music could be used for a music-therapeutic relaxation-session with a western patient, the same treatment would not work in a comparable way with a Chinese. Though, as will be shown below, non-western music can be used in western psychotherapy.

3) The Individual Aspect:

Life events can establish a strong and specific understanding and experiencing of music. Since the father of Mr. A died on Christmas Eve some years ago Silent Night, Holy Night has become the symbol of unexpected death, and the destructive impact of senseless catastrophe. As strong individual associations with music are common, music therapy has to make up a detailed anamnesis comprising life-event-related music in order to avoid unintended effects (by disturbing repressed traumata, actuating conditioned behaviour or activating association-chains) as well as finding music which can be effectively used within the therapy.

Examples of Non-Western Healing Music in Psychotherapy

Music has been playing an important role within various ethnic healing processes. This probably points to a basic anthropogenic ability: to be psychosomatically influenced by music. Not only do both non-European practices and modern music-therapy profit from this aesthetic relationship, accomodations of non-European methods to western psychotherapy can open new insights. The issue is to reveal the anthropogenic core which is responsible for the »music-therapeutic« effect and appears as transculturally invariable.

In respect of creative arts therapies, Shaun McNiff's theory of »The Shaman Within« (1988: 287) provides the first response: »I see the shaman as an archety-
pal figure, a universal character, who helps to deepen and expand the image of
the creative arts therapist. For me the concept of the shaman is an academic
term that gives a common name to indigenous healers throughout the world. I
worked with a Native American healer who laughed at the idea of being called
a shaman. He thought it was an anthropological word that had little to do with
his community where everybody knew what he did and where they just called
him by his name.«

The basic idea of transforming indigenous healing methods for modern
psychotherapeutic reasons is how to reactivate those common human abilities
which are mainly repressed within our rational and profit-orientated society.

Beat of the Soul, Drumming and Trance

Shamanic sessions comprise drumming, trance and archetypal symbolic
imaginings e.g. of flying through the world, «up» and «down» to the regions
of spirits and the dead. Lawrence (1926: 117) shows how the drums reach di-
rectly into the soul, which he describes as pulsating blood. «This 'blood-
rhythm' is the source of the sympathetic relationship between drums and soul».
(McNiff 1988: 290).

In respect both to depth-psychology, to psychoanalysis and the analytical
concept of C. G. Jung on the one hand, and to hypnosis, respectively to hypo-
therapy on the other, an appropriate approach to shamanism-related psycho-
therapy e.g. with emotionally disordered patients, could start by feeling the
own pulse:

Sitting in the lotus-position patients (who are not psychotic or schizo-
phrenic) try to feel their thoughts flow away and just to experience what is
going on within their own bodies. After a period of inner relaxation the
pulse causes impulses on the upper part of the body which begins to oscillate
in quite a smooth way. For beginners it is often difficult to submit to a
steady pulse, and this might require specific pre-exercises. «The most funda-
mental task is the keeping of the rhythm ... Shamanic drumming demands
endurance, lasting power, discipline, and submission to a continuing rhythm.
As I have said before, rhythm is itself the primary healer» (McNiff 1988: 289,
290).

While feeling the unity with his own pulse the patient becomes aware of
occurring inner rhythms, which call for implementation e.g. by sighing, clap-
ing hands or drumming. The interplay of pulse and the «rhythm of the
soul» together with its realisation foster trance-processes and lead to a hypno-
ic state which form the basis for various further interventions or self-
regulation.

In a similar way group-therapy can profit from the experience of a com-
mon beat, which is typical for rites of ethnic tribes. «Civilized» groups often
need considerable practice and time to develop a common beat, while it is often
easy to submit to it (e. g. as we submit ourselves to a distinct beat when we
dance).
Sound Focusing, Harmonic Singing and Chakras

Sound Focusing (Mastnak 1992) has been developed as a therapeutic method working with the interplay of vocal sound. Its resonance relates to organs or parts of the body and to their symbolic (and/or depth-psychological) meanings. Thus the psyche or psychosomatic phenomena can be treated by appropriate vocalisation and sound meditation.

A first approach requires experiences with a wide range of vocal expression. Concentration on the body comprises sensations of specific »responses«, e.g. the feeling of a light ball in the stomach, a warm »pulsation« of the liver or stream of energy flowing through the spine. Further, the patient explores the modification of body-orientated sensation depending on a modification of the vocal expression. This enables him to use sound more distinctly.

In a second step the patient becomes able to feel the problem areas of his body, to realize their interdependence with psychic problems and to penetrate their psychoanalytical sense. Consequently he should develop skills of vocal expressions in order to influence those regions in a modification-specific way. The basic idea of Sound Focusing presumes that modification of psychogenic body-sensations causes cross-effects on the psyche.

Among various possibilities of vocal sound-expression, harmonic singing plays an extraordinary role, as it is probably the only way of singing at different pitches at the same time. The technique is based on a deep and voluminous sound combined with an intense feeling of face- and nose-resonance. When bringing the tongue back to the uvula, overtones can be isolated and amplified by the whole of the mouth. Modification of the lip-tension supports the process. Harmonic singing has been used as a religious act of meditation within the Tibetan culture (Ellingson 1981). In our context it is used to foster meditation and/or trance-processes in order to deepen body-orientated sensation and to discriminate different vocal effects in the sense of Sound Focusing.

The integration of Sound Focusing and Chakra-Meditation profits from the interplay of psychoanalytic body-symbols and far-eastern theories of energy-streams. The crown of the head, the front, the region of the thyroid gland as well as the thymus-gland, a small distance above and below the navel and the bottom of the pelvis circumscribe the seven chakras, the 7 energy centers. In the case of disorders self-experiencing meditative sensation and sound-focusing is intended to stimulate the chakras respectively to reestablish a correct balance. This chakra-singing can lead from chakra 1 to 7 and back or from 7 to 1 and back. The outcome will be different. The whole process can be combined with wave-shaped dancing (cf. Mastnak 1993).

Taoism, the Two Energy-Circuits and Musical Influence

Taoism knows two main circuits within the individual which are responsible for energy conditions, somatic and psychic blocks and a specific significance of personality (c. f. Meckling 1991, Meckling 1993).
The sympathetic earth-circuit leads from the feet through the legs and the spine upwards, inclines to the front and goes back again. It is associated with the energy of the liver and the lungs, characterized by conscious activities, the will and a somehow self-dominant self-realisation.

The parasympathetic heaven-circuit follows the spine downwards and ascends at the front of the body. It concerns the energy of the kidneys and the heart and is associated with reception and participation. Positions which foster the activation of the heaven-circuit, e.g. the palms of the hands and the feet upwards, accumulate bio-photones, i.e. somatotropic energy substances.

Gregorian Chants effect a balance of the two circuits, high sounds stimulate the earth-circuit, deep ones — often combined with trance-processes — the heaven-circuit. Tibetan OM-Singing is supposed to be the most effective possibility to produce energy.

In all cases, archaic as well as ethnomedical practices comprise a high level of knowledge of natural healing-factors. A transcultural application has to respect both those traditions within their complex cultural interdependence as well as the anthropological distance and the problem of transcultural assimilation and accommodation. Thus intercultural integration can cause new insights and promote alternative forms of effective therapeutic interventions.

REFERENCES


Sažetak

NEZAPADNE PRAKSE LIJEČENJA GLAZBOM I PRIMJENE U MODERNOJ
PSIHOTERAPIJI

Premda postoje etničke grupe i neeuropske kulture koje niti razumijevaju bolest u zapadnom smislu niti upotrebljavaju rituale ozdravljenja na funkcionalan način srodan zapadnim terapeutičkim postupcima, čini se da ima smislja istraživati mogu li takve prakse biti od pomoći u suvremenoj psihoterapiji.
U članku se, što se temeljnih aspekata glazbe tiče, raspravlja o aspektima koji su orijentirani antropološki-egzistencijalno, kognitivno-strukturno i sadržajno, te posljedično (s obzirom na efekt). Nadalje, ispitujući podrijetlo glazbenog značenja utvrđuju se tri međuovisne komponente: opća fiziološka i metafizička, kulturno orijentirana i individualna. Na posljeku, donose se neki primjeri nezapadnih liječenja glazbom u psihoterapiji, kao primjerice prakse šamanizma, čakra meditacije i Taoizma.

Namjera i željena posljedica ovih istraživanja je otkrivanje djelotvorne jezgre ozdravljajućih rituala povezanih s glazbom, njihovo modificiranje s obzirom na našu kulturu i integracija u moderni sustav psiholoških ili psihijatrijskih intervencija.