Symbolic Revelations in Children's Musical Creations

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Abstract

Psychoanalysis has long taught us to understand and interpret the symbolism contained in the language of dream images and the imagination. This has resulted in a better understanding of the human mind and human behaviour. On an artistic level, it has been known for decades that the symbolic significance of many works of art is based on dream imagery and the imagination. This symbolic significance can be found not only in the work of adults, but also in the work of children, specifically in their plastic creations. The impact of their imaginations and dreams in this process has been recognized for quite some time in developmental psychology. In contrast, research into the impact of imagination and dreaming on children's musical creations is unknown territory. Especially the way in which children are able to transform musical phenomena into symbols or expressions of archetypes remains unexplored. This study highlights the fact that examples created by children can be very important for both further nuancing musical symbolism and for generating a vocabulary related to auditory archetypes.

Keywords: *archetypes, children, imagination, music composition, symbolization*

1. Introduction

Symbols can be found in the many forms with which people have expressed themselves across time. It is characteristic of symbols that, in addition to their sensory perceptible aspect, they also contain an invisible meaning or express an indefinable emotion. Thoughts, actions, situations and objects can be symbolically charged. Since symbols are natural and spontaneous products, dreams are, therefore, the most important source of our knowledge of symbolism (Jung, 1976). Both Freud and Jung observed that dream symbols, more than referring to the dreamer's personal experience, also contain elements that cannot be explained in relation to the dreamer's personal life. Freud called these elements 'archaic remains'. Jung, however, saw similarities between these elements and the collective images and mythological motifs of the primitive mind, to which end he introduced the concepts of 'archetypes' and 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1976, 2003). He described archetypes as instinctive, inherited patterns that refer among others to the way we behave, perceive and respond. Archetypes belong to a deeper layer of the unconscious, namely, to the collective unconscious that is universal and shared.
Jung (1976) emphasizes that the production of archetypes by children is very important to understanding the human mind, since children do not have direct access to specific traditions. In *Children's Dreams* (2008) he points to the fact that children are not yet aware of the archetypal nature of their dream images. Nor are children aware of the archetypal nature of their drawn images. An interesting example comes from my four-year-old daughter Sarah who gave me her drawing saying: 'mama, an egg'. I myself saw budding life in the womb (fig.1).

Figure 1 An Egg

In creation myths, the egg is seen as the carrier of the universe, waiting to be hatched (Lukas, 1894). In addition to being a cosmogonic symbol, Jung (1995) also sees the egg as a philosophical symbol referring to the spiritual, inner and complete human being. Sarah has unconsciously elevated their drawing to a symbol as the egg stands for fertility and creation. This is just one examples that show how archetypes come to life in creative fantasy.

Although archetypes are not images per se, they mainly reveal themselves through imagery. This is why Jung (1976, 2003) refers to archetypes as 'representations' of universal human themes. However, archetypes also reveal themselves through sounds or emerge during the process of composing. Compositions can originate from archetypes, such as those found in mythology, that are then translated into music. This phenomenon is explored in Kozel's (2016) research, which applies Jung's theory of archetypes to musicology. Kozel also relates compositional techniques such as repetition, contrast, variation, and hierarchy to the symbolising manifestations of Jung's archetypes. Martináková-Rendeková (2006) associates archetypes with early memes, mental information patterns that can be 'copied' from one individual's memory to another's. Musical forms with an archetypal nature encompass harmonic cadences as well as melodic and rhythmic motifs. Jung views rhythm as a significant transformer of psychic energy, referring to the music of so-called primitive cultures (Kozel 2016).
Bjørkvold's (1992) quest for spontaneous chants shows how children, when provoking one another during play, generated a universal singing formula as a symbolic representation of 'teasing'. Memes can be found both in compositions by historical child composers (Cooper 2009) as well as those by children born after 1900 (Sundin et al. 1998; Burnard & Younker, 2004). They are inherited patterns resulting from experimentation within the conventions of Western tonality and functional harmony. One of the most common memes are closing cadences. These are formulaic endings whose operation is analogous to the 'all's well that ends well' closing formulas of fairy tales and stories.

2. Research Question

What is the impact of children's imagination on transforming musical phenomena into symbols or expressions of archetypes?

2.1 Image as a Means and End

In analytic therapy, of which Jung is the founder, the wholeness of the person is central. Dream analysis constitutes a significant aspect of this therapeutic approach, as it is through dreams that the unconscious communicates with us. Contents of both the personal and the collective unconscious surface via symbolic language. An abstraction must be made from this language in order to learn to understand in what sense the unconscious can be the guide and counsellor of consciousness. An atmosphere of mutual emotional attunement between the therapist and client is necessary for this. It is a spiralling dynamic process in which geschehen lassen (to allow to happen), betrachten (to consider) and sich auseinandersetzen (to confront oneself) are related to each other and deepened in each session (Humbert, 1988).
Characteristics of analytic therapy can be found in a music didactics in which the wholeness of the child is central. A key aspect is that the child is able to use his or her imagination to (1) gain access to the personal and collective unconscious and (2) activate and articulate latent knowledge. Thus the child is able to create a spontaneous drawing, such that he or she lingers in the world of dreams, magic and more. By abstracting from and musicalizing the drawing, latent knowledge can be merged with new material. In this way, the child learns to understand what musical syntax is. Conversely, one can start from music-theoretical concepts in which the child gains insight by 'imagining' these. All of this must also take place in an atmosphere of mutual emotional attunement between teacher and child. This too is a spiralling dynamic process in which 'going along with the child's fantasy', 'taking the musical manifestation into consideration' and 'answering questions with questions in a Socratic way' are related to each other and deepened in each new composition (Roels, 2002).

2.2 Dreams, Spontaneous Drawings and Music

Dreams and spontaneous drawings contain common elements: shapes, atmospheres, colours, movements, figures, emotions and more. In abstracting from the dream, these elements are linked to connections, events and facts drawn from reality. It is at this stage that the therapist can observe how symbols and archetypes appear and distinguish themselves from other dream material. When abstracting from the drawing (the imagined story), these elements are linked to musical parameters. Similarly, it is at this stage that the teacher can perceive when symbolic thinking occurs and how musical archetypes appear and differ from other musical manifestations. Collaborating in a contrapuntal and harmonising manner is necessary to be able to reflect on the meaning of the dream as well as on the transformation of the drawing: the musical composition.
Jung observed dreams based on their narrative aspects and dramatic unity. He saw structural similarities with classical drama noting a beginning, middle, and end. Inspired by this, Gallbach (2006) in her work

Dream-Processing assumes a dream structure consisting of an exposition, plot, climax and lysis or outcome. In addition to this structural aspect, we also find principles such as repetition, variation, contrast, inversion, counterpoint, symmetry, sequence, dynamics, etc. In music, we encounter all these principles as structural elements of an archetypal nature or as memes, as previously discussed by Kozel (2016) and Martináková-Rendeková (2006). Gallbach (2006, p. 191) refers to the complementary power of music (listening and playing) and dream images as transformers of emotions: 'The archetypal patterns of energy and image are united and become one when they are seen, heard and felt'.

3. Method and Analysis

From my teaching practice in part-time art education I developed a method in which students, especially children, simultaneously learn to play the piano and compose. Specific to the method is the integration of the ability to visualize. For example, spontaneous drawings are musicalized and music-theoretical concepts are imagined (Roels, 2002). Based on my notes and audio-visual recordings, I researched the compositional strategies of my students over these many years and have written on this in multiple publications (Roels & Van Petegem, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2016a). This research demonstrated the power of the capacity to visualize; in children, this stimulates interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and symbolic thinking. This findings, reinforced by my fascination with the symbolism in the visual arts and in Jung's theory of archetypes, led to the idea of linking the symbolic thinking of my students with, among others, the ideas of Jung. Furthermore I had a lot of conversations with Robert Thomas. Being a Jungian clinical psychologist and pianist/improviser, he was the right person to expertly supervise research into symbolic thinking in a musical context.
The research stems from the real-life context of both my teaching practice and the conversations with Thomas. The results - composition and drawings - were not generated through the fulfilment of specific tasks within a set time limit, but were allowed to emerge in a context of dialogue, mutual empathy and intuition. That's why I started from a phenomenological approach. This gave me the opportunity to describe what happened by narrating things as they unfolded, to interpret and to reflect, and which, therefore, allows me to speak directly to the reader and share insights which invite discussion (Van Manen, 1990). According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who refer to the logic of justification concerning data collecting and analysing, I have avoided complicated coding procedures and specific pre-determined analytical models so as not to be restricted by the limitations which these impose.

4. Results

Example 1. The composition Music Box by Katrien (aged 12) is based on a made-up story. Katrien learned to compose by transforming her own drawings. From this process she learned to understand how the musical material can be arranged and manipulated on the basis of non-musical phenomena and skills. Here, the need for a drawing as a means of composing was transcended.
Katrien's story: there is a music box in the attic which comes to life. It drags itself out from under the dust so that it can play….until it stops.

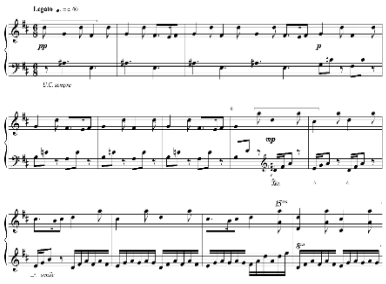

Fig. 2 Music Box

Musical analysis: Katrien represents the music box with a simple melodic cell, a minor second, which she ornaments. To represent 'the box dragging itself out of the dust' she looks for dissonances and let them dissolve into a perfect fifth (bar 9). After this, she spontaneously transposes the beginning of her motif, looks for a triad and says: "now the box can begin to play" (bar 9). The transposition is continued. Katrien already knows an Alberti bass (bar 11 left hand) and so I encourage her to develop the movement further.
Psychological analysis: musical structure is already embedded in the story, just as the story structure can already be embedded in a dream. Where the content of the dream acquires meaning through identification with the dream figures, Katrien has given meaning to the content of her composition by identifying with the movements and gestures of her music box. This is evident from many spontaneously applied affective

elements. For example, dissonance, with intervals such as the minor second and the tritone, stands for the scary fact of 'being buried under dust'. The perfect fifth creates consonance and relaxation. When Katrien spontaneously integrates a cadence (bar 9 IV-V-I or G-A-D) with a major tonic triad on the first beat, she 'found' tonality. In saying "now the box can begin to play", she has made both the major triad and the tonal element a symbol for 'the coming to life' of the music box.
This is in line with Smeijsters (1991), who emphasizes how the psychological meaning of a fragment depends on the degree to which musical elements are reconciled. As an example, he gives the tonic triad on a strong beat. In addition to consonance and dissonance, he also refers to major and minor as means of expressing satisfaction and dissatisfaction as well as cheerfulness and sadness. The tonal system with its tonic-oriented character offers space for cadencing, which stands for dissolving tension and creating stability. Doğantan-Dack (2013, p. 208) examines this musical organisational principle from a psychological perspective and expresses it as follows: 'Tonality provides an archetypal psychological space within which the human ability to shape different paths towards stable affective states could evolve'. We also see how Katrien related the finding of tonality to the transposition of the motif; first an octave higher, then higher and higher. This gives extra emphasis to 'the coming to life' of the music box. With the accompaniment pattern of the Alberti bass, the rhythm reappears as a transformer for life energy. The composition Music Box is permeated with auditory symbols of an archetypal nature.

Example 2: Visualization of the phenomenon Bitonality by Jela (aged 10) arises from the abstraction of both the sound (fig 3a) and the concept itself (fig.3b).
Jela plays a dance in which the left and right hands assume different tonal centres. She experiences the soundscape as strange, so I ask her to draw the dancers who could go with such music. She draws a male and a female figure. Both have four arms, the man has one eye and three legs, the woman three eyes and one leg. These are characteristics that we find in figures from mythology and iconography such as the Cyclops, Trinacria, Shiva, etc. Afterwards, I explain to her the musical meaning of the concept bitonality. I refer to the two tone centres in the dance and to the binding factor of the rhythm. To see how she understands this, I ask her to visualize the concept. And here we see how Jela symbolizes the combination of two tonalities as the combination of two identities. The binding factor of the rhythm, she interprets as 'walking together'.

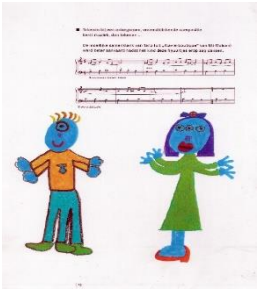

Fig 3a Bitonality

Fig. 3b Bitonality

Psychological analysis: the simultaneous presence of two tonalities in a piece of music is a phenomenon that requires clarification if we are to understand it intellectually and emotionally. The bitonal dance has become meaningful for Jela as she manages to associate the strange soundscape with her fabulous creatures. The auditory is complemented here by the visual. A similar phenomenon that requires clarification are the mythological beings such as the hermaphrodite or centaur. Here, the visual must be complemented by the auditory (the explanatory story) if we want to understand these 'androgynous' figures. Bitonality became accessible to Jela through the association of soundscape and fabulous figures. In the same way, a dream becomes accessible and meaningful by involving the "dreamscape" – the perceived environment created by the dream – and dream figures with each other. Jela's symbolization of the concept bitonality could refer to the phenomenon of 'sub-personalities' as found in the Voice Dialogue method (Stone, 2006). This phenomenon stands for (1) the presence of different energies in one person, namely energies with a separate style and their own values and (2) pathological phenomena of bipolarity or schizophrenia. A parallel can also be drawn between Jela's invention and bizarre dream figures with regard to sub-personalities. Her interpretation of the rhythm in the music as 'walking together' can be seen as the simultaneous functioning of two identities within one body, within one and the same heartbeat.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study demonstrates the ability of children to think symbolically, act archetypically or act in such a way that archetypes are, in addition to visually, also aurally-musically articulated. This ability of children surfaces 'archaeologically': by creating a learning context that focuses on the inner world of imagination and perception in children, and that takes childlike 'imagination' as the starting point for learning to compose and understand music-theoretical concepts.

In the examples we see how affective elements arise from spontaneous behaviour, making them comparable to the affective elements with an archetypal character generated by our dreams. The dream world and imaginary world are close to each other since they both provide access to latent experiences and knowledge. Katrien ends on the key-note or tonic of D major to express 'the will to life' of the music box. The fact of connecting 'the finding' or 'returning to the key-note' with 'human will and well-being' is found in Schopenhauer (2012). Schopenhauer is fascinated by the impact of tonality on feeling: minor for pain and fear, and major for its release. His perception is reflected in the composition of Katrien. Furthermore, in Music Box, we find that the rhythm intensifies with regard to 'coming to life', confirming Jung's (Kozel, 2016) vision of 'rhythm as a transformer of energy'. Katrien instinctively integrates a cadence. Cadences can be viewed as memes or mental information patterns (Martináková-Rendeková, 2006). However, much more than these memes, they are musical patterns with a surprising dimension. For Katrien, the cadence is the run-up to life; the movement and playing of the music box. As an archetype, these formulas are, therefore, of a different order than the memes or transferable memory patterns with which child composers experimented within the Western tonal system (Cooper, 2009).

Psychoanalysis has long taught us to understand and interpret dream imagery. The messages contained therein can help us 'to harmonize with the profound process that orients to us the path of our lives' Galbach (2006, cover). According to Jung (1976), the messages from our dreams contribute to the completion of the process of individuation: namely, to becoming a more complete person, a person who can think and act in a self-organizing and problem-solving way. However, for music teachers, there is still a long way to go in terms of discovering and understanding the messages that children manage to convey musically based on their imagination. Such messages remain hidden when teaching is purely aimed at learning to reproduce music, or when learning to improvise and to compose is predominantly based on theory. By using their imagination, children learn to understand musical syntax and theory from an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary context. Musical development, in which self-organizing and problem-solving thinking and acting can take place, is implicit in this.

We can also ask ourselves to what extent the imagination stimulates the formation of auditory phenomena and to what extent a form of synergy and synaesthesia arises between the visual and the auditory. This question also arises in the conversion of sound to image, as in the example of bitonality. However, the imagination also has an impact on motor action, so that children – surprisingly – transcend their learned play-technical possibilities (Roels & Van Petegem, 2016). It is, therefore, not surprising that neuroscience research indicates that 'the strength of a person's mental imagery – their ability to picture something in their mind's eye – is linked to the excitability of different brain regions' (Neuroscience, 2020).

Further research is needed to deepen our knowledge of musical symbolism and build a vocabulary related to the perception of auditory archetypal phenomena. The input of children is of paramount importance in this endeavour. In Children's Dreams (2008) Jung sheds light on the archetypal imaginings of children, and indicates that childhood dreams must be taken seriously and studied. This study indicates that children, more than forming archetypal images, also represent auditory archetypes, and that their compositions should be taken seriously and studied. It is also emphasized that children know how to make connections between visual and auditory archetypes in a natural way. It is, therefore, very important that, in a musical learning process, children are invited to use their imagination. This allows them to access the deeper and universal dimension of music, just as we can access a deeper and universal dimension of our existence through our spontaneous imagining.

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