



PERGAMON

New Ideas in Psychology 19 (2001) 85–88

NEW IDEAS IN
PSYCHOLOGY

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Book Reviews

Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture, David Schwarz; Duke University Press, 1997

The perception of music is a topic that some psychologists would approach through neurological investigation, such as researching whether master musicians interpret melodic phrases like a native language in the brain's left hemisphere. Or perhaps, one might study how the brain processes spatial, symbolic, and emotional aspects of sound. Yet, David Schwarz's *Listening Subjects* boldly suggests an alternative way of understanding music, by showing that each musical phrase, each pitch represents some analyzable intention of the creator. Music manifests a window to an inner reality of the composer and the listener, becoming more than simply a language or a sound. Schwarz reveals that instead, music involves juxtaposing contradictory elements of culture, unconscious desire, and emotional release, which then encompass the listener's musical encounter.

The author blends psychoanalytic concepts, music theory, and literary criticism to illuminate the shadowed meaning of selected modern and classical pieces, ranging from the Beatles to Schubert to Diamanda Galas. Experiencing such music creates a fantasy of the 'sonorous envelope' in which we feel surrounded by sound as if in a womb environment, where we experience music as a thing or a space.

Schwarz synthesizes multiple aspects of a particular musical creation to suggest meaning. As in psychoanalysis, significance abounds for those who attend to converging evidence, and Schwarz certainly cites convincing sources, most frequently the internal structure of the piece itself. Musical notes, key changes, and instrument choices, in addition to the lyrics and history of a piece, all lead to an interpretation. The performance of the music further exemplifies its meaning, such as through the internalized sighs in Schubert or the escalating distortion of Peter Gabriel's voice.

In addition, music signifies aspects of culture specific to gender and sexual desire, as evidenced throughout *Listening Subjects*, and Schwarz's most significant insights directly unveil these mysteriously shrouded subjects. For example, the classical love dilemma portrayed in Schubert's symbolic representation of unrequited love and the blatant sexual frustration in the Beatles 'I Want You (She's So Heavy)' result in a male confrontation with self. The narrators address the unattainable female in fantasy, as underlying reality beckons through their self-echoing voice of contradiction. Peter Gabriel's 'Intruder' further encourages voice recognition in male listeners who

recognize musical sound as a reflection of their “horrid desires” and castration anxiety. In this case, layers of musical accompaniment tempt our ears to listen as an all-knowing intruder, while the music simultaneously attends to a feared perception. At the extreme, Schwarz describes Oi punk music as expressing ideas of sadism, nationalism, and sexism in an attempt to alter the music of other cultures. The boundary between self and the dissimilar other intensifies throughout this music, with unconscious inclusions of phobic denial and male bonding.

The contradictions within music and our listening experience compel us to question reality. Throughout the text, Schwarz inquires how music envelops us, and he answers this question by perceiving reality as partially composed of fantasies. While the composer, the musicians, and the notes create the musical meaning, it is the listener who arguably makes the most prominent contribution to music interpretation. However, Schwarz’s approach may occasionally overextend the listener’s contribution to the piece’s meaning, as he broadly implies that chord changes represent everything from androgyny to power. Despite his sometimes remarkable claims, Schwarz’s multiple areas of expertise uphold an integrated understanding of several pieces, showing that our entire mind is necessary to comprehend fully the layered implications to musical creations.

Caroline Pyevich

PII: S0732-118X(99)00022-7

Prescribe Pets, not Prozac: Review of companion Animals in Human Health, Cindy C. Wilson, Dennis C. Turner (Eds.); Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998.

The morning after I was invited to write a review of this book I was hurrying down Madison Avenue when I overtook a woman pushing a stroller. I noticed, to my astonishment, that the stroller was occupied not by a child but by a Sussex spaniel, wrapped in a Scottish plaid blanket. This publication is apparently quite timely. However, cat and dog lovers hoping for heartwarming anecdotes of loving relationships between owners and their pets may not particularly enjoy the book. It is an analytical survey of research in human-animal interactions (HAI) from a wide range of disciplines since the first international conference held on the subject in the 1970s.

The book starts with an historical overview of the research, concentrating on the value of pet contact for human well being. It explores the psychological relationship between humans and their animal companions and attempts a dispassionate analysis of the emotional bond between them. A number of research projects have been undertaken, all of which point to the positive effects of pet ownership on the quality of human life but have not produced any hard and fast evidence for them, perhaps due to the many economic, cultural, and personal family factors. Doctors and other health care professionals, however, report an increased quality and length of life in pet owners and have concluded (at a conference in 1998) that pets do indeed occupy a special place in the environment and lives of many people.