

MUSICAL RELATIONSHIPS: TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EARLY MOTHER-INFANT INTERACTIONS

David-Augustin MÂNDRUȚ¹

ABSTRACT. This paper investigates musical relationships in the case of the early mother-infant dyadic interactions. To accomplish this task, it is first needed to come back to some important authors from the tradition of both phenomenology and psychoanalysis. The theories of Husserl, Schutz and Taipale will prove themselves to be useful. Secondly, I shall deepen the investigation of the early mother-infant interactions through the prism of theories coming from Winnicott, Stern and Thomas Fuchs. My main task will be to demonstrate that these early interactions have a musical quality, similar to Colwyn Trevarthen's thematization of communicative musicality. To prove my point, I have to first establish the features that make these early interactions be musical-like. Winnicott's potential space and the example of babbling will follow my argumentation. I will also stress on the importance of the face-to-face interaction through affect attunement and mutual tuning-in. All these interactions are modes of being-with-another (Stern). An example will be found throughout this paper, namely a specific mode of being-with-another, which was called by Winnicott the primary maternal preoccupation.

Keywords: musical relationships, babbling, potential space, face-to-face interaction, mutual tuning-in, affect attunement, primary maternal preoccupation, synchronization, rhythm, being-with.

Introduction

There has been a lot of recent talk about the so-called musical relationships, or even of relationships which have a musical feature. Here we could recall Daniel Stern and Colwyn Trevarthen's thematization of the early life of the infant, but also

¹ PhD Student, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: davidmandrut@gmail.com.



the entire tradition of phenomenology starting from Edmund Husserl's texts on time and consciousness. The phrase "musical relationships" was first introduced by Martin Buber, in a psychotherapeutic context, namely when he wanted to emphasize that therapeutical relationships must be seen as an unfolding, and not as an imposing² or prescription. Unfolding would be the way in which music presents to us, while imposing would be an idiosyncratically attempt at convincing the other that we are right (in some manner or another)³. Unfortunately, this phrase was never developed by Buber in a unitary theory, but nonetheless certain phenomenologists and developmental psychologists elaborated this idea. These authors will be the ones who we are going to use in our present paper.

In his lectures on the internal time-consciousness, Husserl invokes the case of the melody⁴, so that he can facilitate the understanding of his theories with certain examples, while Alfred Schutz explicitly uses the metaphor of "Making Music Together", in order to demonstrate how communication between persons might arise⁵. The term mutual tuning-in relationships will become recurrent in later discussions. This concept simply means that two streams of consciousness, two durations, might be synchronized by virtue of music. The Finnish phenomenologist Joonas Taipale will be also present in our article, with his very interesting ideas about the nature of empathy and the melodic unity of the other. Taipale claims that empathy is structured in the same way as the experience of listening to a musical piece, and this argument shall strengthen our understanding of the phenomenon of musical relationships.

Regarding developmental psychology and historically speaking, Donald Winnicott will be our starting point, even though he does not elaborate a psychology of music per se, but because his concept of potential space appears very useful for explaining certain early phenomena from the life of the infant, such as babbling and the early use of musical notes. Daniel Stern puts forth the theory of affect attunement, of which I will try to see how it works in conjunction with Winnicott's primary maternal preoccupation, which is also a way of tuning-in and being-with. Fuchs' theories will be also recalled, especially his ideas concerning synchronization and desynchronization, ideas about which I want to link to the issue of the primary maternal preoccupation.

In this paper, the main perspective will be drawn from Thomas Fuchs' theory of desynchronization. The early mother-infant relationship is usually seen through the prism of the "in-sync" theory, whereas we propose that explicit temporality, namely

² Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 37.

³ Ibidem, p. 82.

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 11.

⁵ Alfred Schutz, "Making Music Together", In: *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 159.

the thematic and even reflective form of temporality, arises out of the desynchronization between mother and infant. Fuchs suggests that the implicit temporality of synchronization is the infant's primordial way of being with his or her mother, whereas desynchronization would indicate the beginning of explicit temporality. This would mean that both infant and mother acknowledge the presence of each other as independent beings. The initial state of the mother-infant merger will be called "rhythmical coupling", and desynchronization would mean exactly the fading-away of the primary maternal preoccupation.

Face-to-face with music

Schutz states from the beginning that I, the subject, experience my fellow-man by sharing the same sector of time and space. Sharing the same segment of time, me and my fellow-men grow older together. On the other hand, the sharing of the same sector of space means that my fellow-man appears to me as himself and not as someone else. Schutz rightly claims that the body is implicated in this process of recognizing otherness, namely when he tells us that the other's body appears to us as a unified field of expression, that is, of concrete symptoms through which his conscious life manifests itself to us vividly. Here we could recall two adjacent theories, namely Mead's theory of gestures as the *sine qua non* of social communication⁶ and Heidegger's conceptualization of gestures as unified compartments of the other person⁷, more exactly, of the other's being-in-the-world. This temporal and spatial immediacy is what Schutz calls the face-to-face relation⁸.

The phenomenologist continues to explain that, if attention is paid to the other, we might engage in a face-to-face relation, by means of the Thou-orientation, which has to be reciprocal. Of course, this relation can be one-sided. If this face-to-face relation is a reciprocal one, then we might speak of the We-relation. Stressing the importance of attention and of this turning to the other⁹, Schutz recalls the theories of Bergson (especially the attention to life¹⁰) and of Martin Buber¹¹.

⁶ George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 61.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp. 90-91.

⁸ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 23.

⁹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 26.

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 172-173.

¹¹ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 27.

In the beginning of his chapter dedicated to the experience of musical communication, Schutz claims that music is a meaningful context which is not bound to a conceptual scheme, yet this meaningful context can be communicated. The aim of Schutz's essay is to prove that social relationships have a musical quality. Schutz also criticizes Mead's attempts to explain social interactions through gestures or even through language. The author describes this prejudice by virtue of the way in which communication in a certain society is mediated by language.

The first chapter of Alfred Schutz's text is intended to be a critique of certain sociological conceptions of how people come to interact in a social situation. Scheler and Sartre are mentioned among others, and Schutz's main critique is that all the theories of these authors lacked the essential aspect of every social, and one could add, interhuman relation. This essential feature of virtually every face-to-face relation is what the author calls the mutual tuning-in relationship. Upon this mutual tuning-in, every communication is founded. Recalling Martin Buber's famous *I and Thou*¹², Schutz insists that this mutual tuning-in is the ground of the authentic We-relation.

The mutual tuning-in relationship has a certain dimension connected to time. By virtue of it, people come to live together simultaneously. The author also hopes that his analysis of music will shed light on the matters which are concerned when talking about communication.

Next, there comes the definition of music, which for Schutz is a meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time, and here Bergson's notion of duration is addressed¹³. Recollections, retentions, protentions and anticipations are also involved in this process, first described by Husserl¹⁴. Duration, therefore, becomes the very form of existence of music¹⁵. The beholder and the composer are united by a time dimension common to both, which is nothing other than a derived form of the vivid present shared by the partners in a genuine face-to-face relation, such as prevails between speaker and listener. This simultaneity between the flow of consciousness of the beholder and that of the composer is made possible by the ongoing flux of the musical process. The mutual tuning-in relationship is the experience of the We, upon which all communication is then built. The performer and the listener are tuned-in to one another, are living together through the same flux, and they are also growing older together as the musical process lasts¹⁶.

¹² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 3-4.

¹³ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London: Dover Publications, 2001, pp. 73-74.

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 30.

¹⁵ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, pp. 170-171.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 174-175.

The participants involved in making music together do not only share the same segment of time, but also the same segment of space. The unified comportment of the other is very meaningful in this musical and communicative process. The mutual tuning-in relationship means, before all other aspects, sharing the other's flux of experiences in inner time, by living through a vivid present together, more exactly, by experiencing this togetherness as a genuine We¹⁷.

In short, Schutz was trying to tell us that music is a meaningful context, which is bound to objective time, and which could allow for two streams of consciousness to be synchronized. The composer/listener relation becomes the paradigmatic case for face-to-face interaction, or even vice-versa. Recalling the synchronization theory, the inner duration of the I and the inner duration of the Thou become simultaneous, which allows communication to arise. Thus, I and Thou grow older together by virtue of the mutual tuning-in relation. This idea of the synchronization of the two streams of consciousness will be taken up again in the essay "Mozart and the Philosophers"¹⁸.

The quest for affect attunement

Before reaching our division dedicated to Winnicott's theory, Daniel Stern's notions of affect attunement and vitality forms¹⁹ must be considered, both being related to one another in a very subtle way.

In *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Stern stresses the importance of affective experience in the mother-infant dyad. This affective experience will be the ground for virtually every intersubjective relatedness. We can now recall Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship which was the condition for every type of possible communication. Schutz's theory lacks the affective dimension, whereas Stern does not focus that much on the experience of time, although we could insist that affect attunement implies some sort of synchronization, or even resonance.

For Stern, interaffectivity is a concept mainly designed for the situation when one speaks about mirroring or emphatic responsiveness. Therefore, the problem of sharing affective states is closely related to the mirroring function. Winnicott took some time to talk about it in his most famous work, *Playing and Reality*²⁰. In his theory of justice, Shaun Gallagher emphasizes that social justice should not first be

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 177.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 179.

¹⁹ Daniel N. Stern, *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 3.

²⁰ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 149.

conceived necessarily in terms of mutual recognition, as in Honneth's thematization, but in terms of responsiveness to the other²¹. Here we could recall Buber's saying that every responsibility is ultimately build out of the capacity to respond to otherness²².

Daniel Stern insists that affect attunement should be clearly differentiated from imitation, even in the Piagetian sense, where exists different types of imitation²³. If imitation implies that two people share the same modality, affect attunement must be understood ultimately as a cross-modal experience. We are going to come back to this aspect later, but for now we are going to follow Stern's conceptualization which implicates three steps.

First, the mother has to read the baby's feelings from his/her bodily behavior, so here we could also address Trevarthen's and Gallagher's thematizations of primary and secondary intersubjectivity²⁴. Second, the parent must perform a behavior which is not a mere imitation, but it nonetheless corresponds in some way to the infant's behavior. Third, the infant must be able to read this corresponding response as having to do with his/her own feelings²⁵.

Affect attunements give an impression of a kind of imitation, but this sort of match is largely cross-modal. What is being matched is not the other's behavior per se, but rather an aspect of the behavior that reflects the other's feeling state. We are now coming close to Stern's definition, where he tells us that affect attunement is the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state.²⁶

The advantage of affect attunement in face of mere imitation is that the first tells us something about the inner feeling state of the other person. As Stern puts it, imitation renders form; attunement renders feeling.²⁷ Attunements and imitations must not be considered to form a dichotomy, rather they seem to occupy two ends of a spectrum.

Now Stern will wonder about the core components which make affect attunement possible. He identifies six of them, namely absolute intensity, intensity contour, temporal beat, rhythm, duration, and shape. The level of intensity of the mother's behavior has to match that of the infant. For example, her vocalization might have the same intensity or force as the infant's hand movement. The mother and the infant's effort both showed an acceleration in intensity, followed by a sudden decrease²⁸.

²¹ Shaun Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 203.

²² Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 18.

²³ Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 6.

²⁴ Shaun Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 101.

²⁵ Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, London: Karnac Books, 1998, p. 139.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 142.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 142.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 146.

Stern goes on to differentiate categorical affects, such as joy or sadness from vitality affects. In the case of affect attunement, we usually speak of vitality affects. The vitality affects are connected to the matter of being alive, and those dynamic, kinetic qualities of feeling distinguish the animate from the inanimate. Vitality affects are experienced as dynamic shifts within us or the others. Attuning with vitality affects is essential for the process of being-with-another, as described by the developmental psychologist. Now attunement becomes the means by which the feeling of connectedness might emerge²⁹.

We also have to consider Taipale's further argumentation about the functions of affect attunement. The Finnish phenomenologist claims that affect attunement comports two different, but related phenomena, which are essential for the development of the child. These are the mirroring function, and the regulating one. By tuning-in to her infant, the mother gives the child a sort of self-understanding, because if this attunement is good-enough, namely it does not represent a mere imitation, the infant feels that he or she is not alone in that specific interaction. For Taipale, mere imitation might even insult the child and anger him or her, because the infant might feel mocked by the mother's gesture, whereas if genuine attunement takes place, both mother and infant learn something very important about each other³⁰.

The primary maternal preoccupation

Jan Abram correctly observes that the experience of mutuality between mother and infant, which is made possible by the mother's identification with her infant, namely what Winnicott calls the primary maternal preoccupation is akin to Daniel Stern's affect attunement³¹. We need to insist on this last point, in order to see what it does actually mean. We could ask ourselves if the primary maternal preoccupation is the condition of possibility for virtually every affect attunement, or we could as well wonder if affect attunement is met only in behaviors related to this preoccupation. I now wish to describe this possible relation between affect attunement and primary maternal preoccupation. To accomplish this, a certain analysis of the main features of this specific behavior, as it was described by Winnicott, is needed. I have already ventured in the domain of Stern's affect attunement, so our task is partly accomplished. Nevertheless, we must not forget Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship, a concept which we took somehow as the ground for our discussion. In the next divisions we

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 157.

³⁰ Joonas Taipale, Self-regulation and Beyond: Affect Regulation and the Infant-Caregiver Dyad, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7: 889, 2016, p. 5.

³¹ Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, London: Karnac Books, 2007, pp. 81-82.

will also try to demonstrate that the early musical interactions between mother and infant will build up, via the potential space, the later artistic creativity. The most telling example will be that of babbling, a phenomenon which was described by Marc Richir as a kind of proto-musicality³².

From the start of his article, Winnicott insists on the fundamental role played by the holding environment in early infancy. We will find out, that this initial holding environment is made possible by the mother's primary preoccupation. Furthermore, Winnicott is addressing Mahler's theory of symbiosis³³, suggesting that the matter with the merged state, or the fusion state is not primarily a biological issue, but a psychological one. So Winnicott introduces the concept of identification in order to explain the mother's readiness to her infant's needs³⁴.

The mother identifies with her baby, but her baby does not identify with her. With the infant, the matter belongs more to the state of dependence, even the absolute one. Winnicott tries to explain this situation by giving us everyday examples, such as the mother who was also a child some time ago, or the way in which her parents took care of her, or even the manner in which she played, as a child, the mother role. On the other hand, the child has never before had the chance of being involved in these kinds of situations. Concluding, we must acknowledge the fundamental asymmetry between the mother's perspective and that of the infant, this asymmetry being provided by the examples cited above. Time is involved in all these situations. The mother is obviously older than her child, so she had time to go through all these sorts of experiences and interactions, while her child is just beginning to know what it means to be a human being³⁵.

The mother found in the state of primary preoccupation has first to meet the child's needs. All real life is meeting, as Buber's saying goes³⁶. The fundamental feature of this state of which we are talking about would be exactly this meeting, of the child's needs. Of course, this is not the entire discussion. In a letter from Winnicott's correspondence, the British psychoanalyst insists on the importance of the way in which the mother (most probably the one found in the primary preoccupation) meets the infant's spontaneous gesture³⁷. More about this spontaneous gesture later.

³² Marc Richir, *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2010, p. 19.

³³ Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, London: Karnac Books, 2002, p. 39.

³⁴ D. W. Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, London: Tavistock, 1958, pp. 300-301.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 301.

³⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 9.

³⁷ D. W. Winnicott, *The Spontaneous Gesture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 43.

Biologically speaking, this state, namely the primary maternal preoccupation, starts to develop towards the end of the pregnancy period, and it implies a heightened sensitivity towards the infant. It lasts for a few weeks after the birth, and it is not easily remembered by mothers who have recovered from it, because the mothers' memories of this period become repressed³⁸.

The mother who is in this primary maternal preoccupation provides the setting for the infant's constitution, so this constitution might begin to unfold. The mother, by meeting the child's spontaneous gestures, helps the infant master these spontaneous movements, so that the child might become the owner of them³⁹. Summarizing, the mother has to take care of the child's going-on-being, this state of coherence, which is similar in some key aspects with Bergson's duration⁴⁰. Going-on-being is ultimately a temporal process, and the key term, which Winnicott uses somewhere else regarding the time factor in development is integration.

There it is established ego-relatedness between mother and infant, and this allows the child to recognize his or her mother as a human being. A good enough environmental provision in the earliest phases of development enables the child to exist, and here we can recall Richir's theory of the process of humanization, which begins with the exchange of gazes between mother and infant⁴¹.

Recent studies on enactive cognition have shown how the presence (of the mother in our case), and the early corporal interactions in the case of the mother-infant dyad essentially shape the way we perceive the We-relation. This phenomenon was called by Zebrowski, who draws on Merleau-Ponty, mutual incorporation. Therefore, what we will call in a later section of this paper "rhythmical coupling", is somehow related to the notion of embodied resonance. Thus, participatory sense-making can unfold⁴².

The primary maternal attunement

We now must move towards our comparison of the two phenomena, respectively affect attunement and the primary maternal preoccupation. As Jan Abram pointed out, these two types of behavior comport similar characteristics. Maybe the key term to be used here is what Daniel Stern called the implicit relational

³⁸ D. W. Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, London: Tavistock, 1958, p. 302.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 303.

⁴⁰ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London: Dover Publications, 2001, pp. 73-74.

⁴¹ Marc Richir, *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2010, p. 36.

⁴² Robin L. Zebrowski, Mutual Incorporation, Intercorporeality, and the Problem of Mediating Systems, *Studia UBB. Philosophia*, 67:3, 2022, p. 33.

knowings⁴³. These implicit relational knowings are the way we understand and react intuitively towards the other's behavior. These implicit relational knowings bear a certain embodied dimension, such as in Richir's transcendental interfactivity⁴⁴. In the case of the primary maternal preoccupation, the mother feels and detects intuitively the child's needs and desires, and once more intuitively she goes on to meet those needs and desires. Intuition, in the case of this phenomenon, might be said to be always also a corporeal phenomenon, which denounces our embodied selves. The child's bodily behaviors might indicate to the mother that she has to start handling her infant. We can think just of crying, and the way in which somehow the mother also feels what the child is feeling. Or we could just think of the agitated child, this being a sign that the mother has to intervene, for example, to rock him or her etc.

This phenomenon was called by Daniel Stern the motherhood constellation⁴⁵. In the case of the mother actually feeling what the child's feels, we might speak of a symmetry which bears certain asymmetrical features, such as the age and experience difference between the mother and the infant. This way of being-with-the-other, and feeling what the other is feeling, while keeping distance⁴⁶ from him or her (in Buber's sense), might also be called a moment of meeting (in Stern's terms)⁴⁷. Very often, Stern uses the example of two persons knowing what each other want and desire, such as in the example of "I know that you know that I know". This is also a sort of symmetry, which indicates towards a more profound asymmetry, because here we are not talking about mind-reading, but of embodied practices, which give us only symptoms about the other's behavior. Now we might have a certain talk about affect attunement.

For Stern, the mother attunes to her baby, similar in the way described by Schutz, even though the mother-infant relation is not mentioned by the latter. Whereas, for Schutz, music was an objective meaningful context (which allowed the meeting between two or more embodied minds), for Stern music is embedded in our behaviors. Recalling the implicit relational knowings and the primary maternal preoccupation, we might argue that the mother feels intuitively and knows what the child's needs and desires in an embodied fashion. Furthermore, when the child is gesticulating, even spontaneously, in a meaningful way, the mother will know what to do, also in an embodied and intuitive manner.

⁴³ Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern, *The Music of Dan's Life*, *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 37:4, 2017, p. 222.

⁴⁴ Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 526.

⁴⁵ Daniel N. Stern, *The Motherhood Constellation*, London: Karnac Books, 1998, p. 171.

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, p. 135.

We must nevertheless add that affectivity plays a major role in this process, as it was described by Stern. Therefore, the mother will know what she has to do, because of the state in which she finds herself attuned to her baby. Joonas Taipale again pointed out that affect attunement implicates two main features, namely the mirroring function and the regulating function (which was discussed above). In the case of Winnicott's spontaneous gesture, meeting the gesture, i.e. mirroring it in a confirmative manner, will help the child develop a self-understanding about his or her self, and about the mother as well, because the child will learn that he or she is not alone in that specific situation. The regulating function is far more complicated, so we will leave aside this issue for further research, but for now, we might resume our discussion in the following way: The mother, who finds herself in the state of primary maternal preoccupation, will know in an intuitive and affectively-embodied manner about what her child is feeling, needing and desiring, and she will act accordingly when it comes to spontaneous gestures, such as hand movements, or even smiles and babbling (of which we are going to talk later). Answering her child in a cross-modal manner, the mother intuitively confirms the infant's gesture, and contributes to his or her awakening (in Husserl's terms⁴⁸). Music was associated by Stern and Taipale with vitality forms, which bear certain features, such as movement and the temporal contour etc., which enable these forms to unfold. Music or musical behaviors might as well be seen as the infant's earliest forms of vitality, which allows him or her to communicate with her mother. As Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern would add, for the infant, music comes before the lyrics⁴⁹, because these early forms of vitality represent a non-verbal way of communicating with the other. As we have been analyzing the points of view coming from Schutz and Stern, we found out that music maintains and first established communication between two subjects.

The infant's psychological life is seen as somehow cyclical, but also in a timeless manner, meaning that the child does not yet possess a sense of time, namely he or she does not know how to read a clock, for example. Furthermore, he or she lives somehow at the mercy of desires and needs, which are cyclical. The going-on-being of which we spoke earlier needs to be provided by the mother, in order that the three temporal dimensions might be integrated⁵⁰. We could assume that this integration is made possible by certain narrative functions, which enable the so-called narrative identity⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Band XV. Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 604.

⁴⁹ Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern, *The Music of Dan's Life, Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 37:4, 2017, p. 223.

⁵⁰ D. W. Winnicott, *Talking about Children*, London: Da Capo Press, 1996, p. 233.

⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume I*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 52.

I added this discussion concerning the early cyclical and timeless life of the infant, because there needs to be emphasized that via the process which should be called “rhythmical coupling”, the good-enough mother synchronizes her own rhythm with the child’s, so that she might feel when the child is needing or desiring something. This cyclical life of the infant, despite being timeless, is seen to comport a certain rhythm. We borrowed this term, namely the “rhythmical coupling” from Fuchs’ theory of melancholia⁵², and also the emphasize he had put on the issue of desynchronization. But we were not the first ones who linked the mother-infant dyadic relation with the problem of rhythm. Henri Maldiney suggested that via the rhythm, the “here” and the “there” are instituted⁵³, in the phenomenological sense. Moreover, Richir spoke about the rhythmical and cyclical way in which the infant hungers and destroys the breast, in a rather psychoanalytical fashion⁵⁴. The term “coupling” was, of course, first introduced by Edmund Husserl in his theory of intersubjectivity⁵⁵, but even though Husserl describes the early life of the infant in a later text, he nevertheless does not mention the rhythmical way in which the mother is coupled to her infant, namely the way in which the infant’s needs and desires become somehow a certainty for the mother, an imperative. Only by virtue of the primary maternal preoccupation, can the rhythmical coupling take place. In this way, the child’s rhythm of life becomes a certainty and an imperative for the mother, meaning that she will know how and when to take care of her infant in the most appropriate, good-enough manner.

This synchronization, which we have called the rhythmical coupling will progressively fade away, at the same time with the primary maternal preoccupation. This process will involve somehow the issue of desynchronization. Winnicott and Taipale explain very elegantly the way in which the mother’s fading primary maternal preoccupation will result in her failure to meet the child’s immediate needs, so delay and frustration from the child’s part will enter the scene. Nevertheless, if this frustration does not transform itself into trauma, because of the mother’s absence, the infant will gain trust in her mother, via the potential space. Moreover, the process of the self-other differentiation will emerge, as Taipale pointed out⁵⁶. Here we could

⁵² Thomas Fuchs, *Melancholia as Desynchronization: Towards a Psychopathology of Personal Time*, *Psychopathology*, 34, 2001, p. 182.

⁵³ Henri Maldiney, *Regard, Parole, Espace*, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012, p. 203.

⁵⁴ Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 508.

⁵⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982, p. 112.

⁵⁶ Joonas Taipale, *The Pain of Granting Otherness: Interoception and the Differentiation of the Object*, *Gestalt Theory*, 39, No.2/3, 2017, pp. 166-167.

recall Freud's argumentation about the passage from the pleasure principle to the reality one⁵⁷.

Babbling: an exemplification of the potential space

From the beginning of his book, *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott introduces, alongside the early use of musical notes, the mysterious presence of babbling in the guise of a transitional phenomenon⁵⁸. We have already mentioned Richir's idea that babbling could be considered a form of proto-musicality, a thought which was already present in Kierkegaard's writings on music from the first division of *Either/Or*⁵⁹. We so far established that babbling is a form of proto-musicality, and this proto-musicality has to be met by the mother's validation/confirmation. Mirroring the child, the infant gathers knowledge about his or herself and the mother. By this act of validation/confirmation, we might suspect that the potential space is already at place, playing its fundamental role. Before elaborating our theory, I want to turn towards some main features of this potential space.

In the first chapter of *Playing and Reality*, this concept is not yet named as it will be in the next chapters, but it is only addressed as the third area of experience. This area of experience separates and at the same time unites (and this is the paradox), that which is subjectively conceived with that which is objectively perceived. Therefore, the potential space will also involve the relationship between the mother and the infant, a relationship which might seem to separate both of them, by uniting. The good-enough mother's care has the role of disillusioning the child and at the same time to introduce exteriority to the infant. The potential space is also the space where phantasy and reality play and interact with each other in various combinations, which give rise to marvelous contents of experience⁶⁰. This potential space is also the place for playing and of cultural experience⁶¹, and having said all of these, I can now come back to our hypothetical discussion of babbling.

From a psychoanalytical point of view, drawing mostly on Winnicott's theory, we could emphasize that babbling, via the validation and confirmation which comes from the mother or mother-figure, might transform itself into actual creative musical

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XII*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, p. 218.

⁵⁸ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part I*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Joonas Taipale, Being Carried Away. Fink and Winnicott on the Locus of Playing, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 52, 2021, p. 202.

⁶¹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 128.

impulses. As Winnicott puts it, the mother's failure to adapt to the infant's needs (given a specific task) will be the means by which the child comes to trust the mother, but also to trust his or herself. We could also draw here from Richir's theory of the moment of the sublime, which is a hyper-condensation of affectivity, which might give rise to more elaborate forms of activity or experience. What I wanted to explain is that there exists proto-forms of experience and more elaborate forms of experience.

The transitional phenomena are situated exactly at the middle of the road between the two abovementioned. Winnicott's starts his discussion with the experience of thumb-sucking, which from the start is invested with phantasy contents that will enhance this experience into a playing-type of activity. Babbling comes next, which for Winnicott, is also linked with the contents of our imagination. Next, there comes the presence of the mother or the mother-figure which must meet the child's spontaneous gesture, in order that the child might begin to trust the mother and his or herself, and even start enjoying the babbling activity. This babbling, might even transform itself, via this playful potential space, into cultural activity, such a singing etc. Maybe this is the reason why Winnicott places babbling alongside the early use of musical notes in his description of transitional phenomena.

I emphasized the role played by babbling in the early development of the child in order to point towards our main thesis, which is the innate musicality of interhuman relationships. We hoped that through Stern's theory of affect attunement we revealed the mirroring function of the mother, and the way in which she gives her child back a part of his or her Self (Winnicott). This would be Winnicott's theory of the mirror-role in a summarized version. Babbling seems to be a means of communication from the beginning, because just as in language, babbling is addressed to someone. We can believe that the child babbles more often in the presence of the mother than when he or she is alone and when he or she just wants to auto-affect his or herself, which, of course, would be pleasurable.

So, if I were to subscribe to Trevarthen's communicative musicality theory, babbling, alongside these forms of vitality (which also involve the body via movement) which were discussed above, would be the first means by which human communication is established. Moreover, taking a dialogical-relational stance, such as in Vygotsky's thematization, we could insist that via the *Zone of Proximal Development*, the caregiver enhances the child's experiences and actualizes his or her possibilities of action⁶². If Vygotsky insisted on the role played by the caregiver for the child's development of more mature capabilities, Winnicott is emphasizing the affective dimension, without naming it as such, because in this early affect attunement, which is made possible

⁶² Sandra Smidt, *Introducing Vygotsky*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 121.

by the primary maternal preoccupation, the mother mirrors and regulates the infant's Self. Again, the main verb which we have to use here is "to meet", because from this meeting of the mother and infant, all the rest proceeds harmoniously. The mother is there to receive the child's spontaneous gesture (babbling, as in our example), then she mirrors and regulates the child's Self, and this gives the infant's knowledge of his or her being-with-the-other and being-with-oneself. All of these might result in the development of cultural capabilities via the playful potential space. Babbling was considered by us a truly transitional phenomenon, because it is also a musical one, and this very aspect helped us in arguing that the early mother-infant relationship is ultimately a musical one. I might add that not only do the mother and infant communicate via music, but also the mother, via the mirroring function, has the potential of enhancing the child's musical experiences, and even the communicative ones. We must nonetheless emphasize again the fundamental role played by the face-to-face relationship, such as it was described by Schutz's metaphor of "growing older together".

Back to Husserl: Time and music

Before concluding our essay, I would like to make a few observations in light of Husserl's theory of the internal time-consciousness. These observations are possible by virtue of Joona Taipale's article concerning the melodic unity of the other⁶³. I will also borrow some key elements from Buber's late philosophical anthropology.

The internal time-consciousness can be divided, hypothetically, into three main components. We have first the primal impression, the retention and the protention. The primal impression could be considered as a now-point, but nonetheless, a now-point which is not an isolated instant, but a present which implies two temporal horizons, that being those of the retention (the immediate past) and that of the protention (the immediate future)⁶⁴. All these combined give us the experience of a melody, for example.

For now, we must remember Husserl's notions used in *Experience and Judgement*, namely those of satisfaction (of the object grasped) and that of the synthetic unity⁶⁵. These two concepts do not seem to exist in a very close relationship, but our argumentation will try to combine them and see what the actual interaction between

⁶³ Joona Taipale, *Empathy and the Melodic Unity of the Other*, *Human Studies*, 38, 2015, p. 476.

⁶⁴ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 34.

⁶⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement*, London and New York: Routledge, 1973, p. 105.

them is. Husserl insists that when we come to have a complete grasp upon the object, we somehow feel satisfied (by the wholeness of the grasping act). We can interpret this “total grasp” in terms of the synthetic unity, a concept which first appeared in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*⁶⁶. Buber spoke of the synthetic apperception in connection to the unitary grasp of otherness, a process which involved the movement, or the acts of distance and relation⁶⁷.

Following Taipale’s argumentation but trying to insist at the same time on the Husserlian dimension of it, we want to argue that when we grasp the other as a unity, namely as a totality, the experience is similar to that of grasping and understanding a musical piece. The other, roughly speaking, is given in the now, in the present, but this experience is always transcendent, meaning that it implies more than that, namely the two temporal horizons, which were discussed above, namely those being that of the immediate past (retention) and that of the immediate future (protention). By virtue of the synthetic unity, or the synthetic apperception, we come to grasp the other as a wholeness, as a unity and totality, similar with the way in which we grasp the musical piece (the non-simultaneous notes) of which I spoke above. Both experiences of this specific grasp provide satisfaction, in the first case that of grasping the other as a whole, and the second being the way in which we grasp the melody, for example, as a continuum and a unity. Unfortunately, Buber did not see this musical feature of grasping the other, but nonetheless, he provided us with the concept of synthetic apperception, which would mean the same thing as in Kant, but applied to alterity, namely to the other person. Therefore, when Kant spoke of the manifold of experience, in Buber’s sense we could speak as well about the manifold of the other’s way of appearing to us.

Linking the abovementioned talk with our thesis, we could argue that what we have called the “rhythmical coupling” is made possible only by virtue of this musical grasp of otherness. For example, when the mother attunes to the child’s cyclical rhythm (of life), she understands her infant in the way we intuitively grasp a piece of music of our likes.

Recalling Thomas Fuchs’ discussion concerning implicit and explicit temporality⁶⁸, we could suppose that this gradual decrease of the rhythmical coupling (between mother and infant), will result in the experience of explicit temporality. For the mother, it means coming back to the explicit temporality, whereas in the case of the mother who finds herself in the primary maternal preoccupation we would talk mostly

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 250.

⁶⁷ Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 62.

⁶⁸ Thomas Fuchs, Implicit and Explicit Temporality, *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, 12, No.3, 2005, p. 195.

about implicit temporality. Somehow, we come back to Freud's opinion that time appears for the child in the case of a certain discontinuity of the psychic system⁶⁹. When the child moves towards independence, the mother will fail (a specific task which involves good-enough caring), as Winnicott stated many times, and this will grant the infant trust in his or her mother. The mother, whose primary maternal preoccupation fades will experience once again the explicit temporality, before this state of being (the primary maternal preoccupation). For the child, the movement towards independence might seem to coincide with that towards explicit temporality.

If we consider the merged-state theory of Winnicott and Mahler, the child is merged with her mother, so the end of this merged-like period will result in the experience of explicit temporality. In our words, the decrease, or even the end of this rhythmical coupling will result in both the mother's and the infant's experience of explicit temporality. The end of this rhythmical coupling, namely of the synchronization between mother and infant goes hand in hand with the child's experience of independence, because from now on, he or she might somehow handle himself or herself without the help of the mother. I could as well suppose, as Fazakas and Goze did⁷⁰, that the child introjects the mother's good-enough holding, which later transforms itself (through the process of introjection), in the transcendental soil. This soil grants the independence of the child, because the infant has now trust in the world. A metaphor might be useful, namely the moment when the child actually manages to walk on his or her own feet. Now it makes sense why Winnicott emphasized the rhythmical dimension of separation⁷¹. Our argumentation follows that this desynchronization of the infant with his or her mother is not a sign of pathology, but of independence. I must clarify one more aspect. For us, rhythmical coupling might be an effect of the initial merging-state between infant and mother, as it was thematized by Winnicott and Mahler.

Concluding remarks

Concluding, I want to state that my primordial attempt was to bring together theories from philosophy/phenomenology and developmental psychology/psychoanalysis, in order to show that the nature of the relationships we live through our everydayness is utterly a musical one. Perhaps the main benefit which this

⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIX*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1986, p. 227.

⁷⁰ Istvan Fazakas & Tudi Goze, *The Promise of the World: Towards a Transcendental History of Trust*, *Husserl Studies*, 36, 2020, p. 185.

⁷¹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 149-150.

article might bring along is the introduction of the concept of rhythmical coupling, which might be useful in explaining the early mother-infant dyadic interactions, but also the process of primary maternal preoccupation and the attunement that follows. Furthermore, there was an attempt to talk about a topic from Winnicott's theory, which was not elaborated by many, which is exactly that of babbling. I saw babbling as a truly transitional phenomenon, in the sense that through a good-enough interaction via the potential space, this babbling might transform itself into creative musical experience. Another topic on which I insisted was the similarity between Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship and Daniel Stern's affect attunement. Whereas the first insists mostly on the temporal dimension of synchronization, the latter describes very carefully the affective feature of this process.

These discussions of the early mother-infant dyadic interactions led us to the phrase "primary maternal attunement", because in the case of this attunement there resonates a certain "tune", which we find in this specific word. What I wanted to emphasize is that the mother who finds herself in this preoccupation will intuitively, but also in an embodied fashion, know what the child needs, wants, and desires. Moreover, she will know how to respond in a manner which will trigger the affect attunement, namely not through mere imitation, but through cross-modal interactions.

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