

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

Guided Imagery and Music: Contemporary European perspectives and developments

Article

The Process of Surrender: A psychotherapist's homecoming

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ABSTRACT

The article describes how implicit relational qualities between therapist and client contribute to the psychotherapeutic process. The process encompasses the interaction during both the verbal parts and the music-listening experience in GIM sessions. The therapeutic stance is presented through the therapist's subjective 'voice' and claimed to be fundamental irrespective of which problem or symptomatology presented by the client. Each dimension or phase of the interactive therapeutic process is illustrated by a suggested music-listening experience, to facilitate for the reader to create a connection to his or her own implicit relational qualities as a therapist.

KEYWORDS

intersubjectivity, therapeutic process, subjectivity, interactive regulation, recognition

Katarina Mårtenson Blom qualified as a licensed psychologist in the 1970s and began her professional career in child and adolescent psychiatry. Experience in different child-guidance clinics led to her training as a licensed psychotherapist in 1989. Katarina started private practice in 1996 as a psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer in psychotherapy. During the 1990s, she trained in Guided Imagery and Music with Frances Smith Goldberg at the Therapeutic Arts Training Institute, and acquired the Swedish psychotherapy supervisor and trainer's licence. In November 2014 Katarina completed her PhD at the Doctoral programme in Music Therapy in Aalborg University. She has published several articles, book chapters and, with a colleague, a book on intersubjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is based on two manuscripts: first, from my keynote speech at the 10th GIM conference held in Vadstena, Sweden, 2012, and second, from a workshop introduction at the 12th GIM conference in Athens, Greece, 2016. The subject of both presentations concerned the significance of the therapeutic relationship in psychotherapy as well as music therapy.

The article is written with the author's subjective experience as therapist as the point of departure. The purpose is to illustrate the composition of

therapeutic presence and the therapist's inner self-regulation. These components are suggested to be fundamental in all therapeutic work irrespective of the patient's symptoms or psychic sufferings. The text is accordingly not illustrated with excerpts from specific sessions but intended to be 'heard' as the 'inner voice' of the therapist. This voice is an expression of her fundamental therapeutic stance, irrespective of specific interventions.

The process of converting the manuscripts into an article was epistemologically grounded in a hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and a first-person perspective (Husserl 2002, Merleau-Ponty

1945/1997) in combination with an arts-based research methodology (McNiff 1998).

As a clinician and researcher, the implicit qualities in human interaction have always been my interest, and considered an important source of knowledge (Mårtenson Blom 2004, 2014). Today we know that implicit qualities in the therapeutic relationship are the major change factors rather than any specific therapeutic method (Wamplod 2010).

My first experience of a practice-based research project working in a child and family guidance clinic in Stockholm was about inviting families from previously terminated treatments. In collaborative interviews (Andersen 1997) the collaborative qualities of the interaction between therapists and clients were explored (Mårtenson Blom 2006).

The first attempt to systematically register and reflect on inner, subjective and mostly implicit sensations, images and metaphors was conducted as part of my work as consulting supervisor in different settings. I used the diary form, writing a reflective report from a session, and then, as an aesthetic response to this report, a more metaphoric, lyrical, imaginative piece that mirrored the experience and helped me to process it as supervisor. This was presented in a book chapter on supervision (Mårtenson Blom 2004). In the project, the self-inquiry was depicted in an aesthetic, arts-based form – that of poetic writing (McNiff 1998).

These projects have informed and inspired my professional development as verbal psycho-therapist and GIM therapist, and the book chapter as well as the article were included in English versions in my PhD thesis (Mårtenson Blom 2014).

In summation, the writing process for this article – to explore the therapist's subjective experiences of a Process of Surrender (Mårtenson Blom 2010, 2014) – was grounded in a phenomenological perspective on research, traditions of collaborative research (Andersen 1997; Reason & Bradbury 2001) and arts-based research (McNiff 1998).

Relational modes and the Process of Surrender

The components of implicit interaction are fundamental in developing the therapeutic intersubjective field (The Boston Change Process Study Group (BCPSG) 2010; Beebe & Lachmann 2014) with or without a music-listening experience.

In my PhD study, the components were linked to

relational modes and were found to be particularly important in relation to experiences of transcendence as well as during experiences of surrender in GIM sessions (Mårtenson Blom 2014). The study used a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, and was based on previously written articles and book chapters where essential themes of interest were identified. First, music in GIM was explored as a relational agent, with musical elements metaphorically serving as relational ingredients in verbal as well as GIM therapeutic practice. Second, the epistemology of implicit and subjective knowledge was considered crucial in understanding the transforming power of GIM. Third, the collaboration between therapist and client was assumed to mirror the intersubjective perspective.

Data collection was carried out through two focus group interviews with GIM therapists (n=7), GIM session transcripts (n=38, participants (n=10) configured a non-clinical sample) and collaborative interviews with therapists and participants (n=4). Data analysis was performed through hermeneutic methodology and thematic analysis based on a preliminary study (Mårtenson Blom 2010) with developed categories of analysis for GIM transcripts and the key concepts of Process of Surrender and Relational Mode of Surrender.

The findings confirmed the usefulness of the categories of analysis from the preliminary pilot study. It was possible to illuminate the GIM process in new ways, e.g. it was possible to make assumptions about patterns in the participants' implicit relational knowing and deepening levels of interaction between therapist, music and participant. From an intersubjective perspective, the analysis contributed with new knowledge about the change process in GIM during transpersonal and spiritual experiences, and the transformational therapeutic process in its entirety. The concept of Relational Mode of Surrender (Mårtenson Blom 2010) from the small study was further explored and applied to the GIM process. A music analysis was conducted with the aim of exploring the interaction between music-classification categories and experiential categories (categories of analysis). The findings illuminated important elements and connections in the intersubjective field consisting of music, therapist and participants. Implications for clinical practice, training of GIM therapists and further research were discussed.

In this article, the 'voice' of the therapist-author will hopefully move the reader into a perspective, or mode, in accordance with the 'voice' of the

therapist-author, with a possibility to 'travel' together with the author, and be reminded of her/his therapeutic subjectivity. The lines in italics are the therapist-author's expressions which are addressed to the reader with added emphasis.

The ingredients of the process, or relational modes, will be described one after the other; however, it should be noted that in clinical practice they often emerge in spirals. In connection to each ingredient or dimension, a piece of music will be suggested as an illustration. This provides the reader with a possible music-listening experience while listening to the inner voice of the therapist. The pieces of music are available on Spotify.

In the article, I explore and 'travel through' the necessary relational modes of the process. They can also be considered domains of implicit relational knowing, and as such, mainly implicit parts in the interactive regulation between therapist and patient.

- The therapist's subjectivity and presence
- Subjectivity as part of the intersubjective field
- Recognition – the sense of being known
- Non-recognition, risks and possibilities
- Aesthetics of change
- Transcendence and the Process of Surrender
- Spirituality

The ingredients were identified and explored in the PhD research project summarised above. For a more developed theoretical background, I refer you to the thesis.

THE THERAPIST'S SUBJECTIVITY AND PRESENCE

During all the years working as a psychotherapist, I have known one thing for sure, having always felt certain of my uncertainty, or sense of vulnerability. This sensation is not in the foreground. Rather it is a keynote, and as such therefore has been "singing" about a kind of trust or faith.

By and by, I learned to trust its contradictory messages about trust, insecurity, vulnerability, and nowadays I know that it guides me into what is important, what is the essence in each meeting. This implicit, procedural and bodily experience is like a deep shivering inside when something important is happening. As if I then must let go of my certainty and feel my dependence, my

connection to the other, to what's emerging *between us* as we meet. To be able to stay in relation to this space between us, I move hopelessly, but also with hope and aspiration, into the field of vulnerability; hopefully not alone, but together.

Strong experiences with music, so deeply healing and challenging, connect to inner relational attachment-scripts that convey a sense of *welcome home, here's your safe haven, beyond danger and threat, where you may cultivate your curiosity, love for yourself and life, and deep sense of togetherness and communion*. In terms of attachment theory and neuroplasticity research, this statement is congruent with the three basic human needs of safety, curiosity and communion (Porges 2001; Shore 2003). It holds a threat as well as a promise, a threat against old dysfunctional inner working models and a promise that it is possible to reconsolidate them.

Even if I, as a therapist, select pieces of music and induce an altered state, the Other is not going to enter a transforming process, unless we know how to enter and maintain a fruitful relationship, how to use the intersubjective process of sharing lived experience which is both the art and the soil of the art.

Music can never represent a method or technique. If we are to do psychotherapy, or convey the psychotherapeutic stance, we need to be familiar with our own implicit relational knowing, even though it is impossible to be aware of it while it is happening.

How do we dialogue? How do we share silence? How do we listen? How do we take turns in the interaction? How do we share feelings? How do I stand beside you? How can I walk in your shoes? How can we share vulnerabilities? How can I find your music? How do we develop our relational knowing? How do we become the persons we are meant to be?

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *allow yourself to connect to the inner space where you care for and hold your curiosity for the other, when you meet a client*.

Music: Hugo Alfvén's *Revelation Cantata (Uppenbarelsekantaten)*.

SUBJECTIVITY AS PART OF THE INTERSUBJECTIVE FIELD

There is something amazingly unique in experiencing as subjects. When I touch my own hand, the touched hand is not just a mere object

since it feels the touch itself. The decisive difference between touching my own body and anything else, be it another inanimate object or the body of another, is precisely that it implies a *double sensation*, that of touching and that of being touched (Merleau-Ponty 1945/1997; Zahavi 2005).

My subjectivity as therapist and my embodied experience is immersed in double sensations. As such it is an instrument needing its regular tuning. This happens in the local, small movements between us. I believe that is the most important, to stay close to the local, small movements, the casual, messy movements; to wait, to open, to listen, to move, to follow, to let go, to receive, to be moved. The tuning takes place through breathing, sensing and acknowledging together until we are in tune.

Mostly this happens beyond consciousness, is sensed while it is happening, or just a moment after it has happened. This demands a certain rhythm in my awareness, and a thoughtful, sensible tempo with pauses and silences in the interaction.

And I must beware of being too occupied with what we talk *about*. The content shifts into the background so that the implicit qualities of the interaction come into the foreground.

RECOGNITION – THE SENSE OF BEING KNOWN

Louis Sanders' (2002) explorative studies of parent-infant interaction generated the definition of the concept of recognition. He micro-analysed short film sequences and the following is one example: A small new family is slowly synchronising its interactions. Mother (M) is breastfeeding, baby is whimpering, father (F) tries to carry the baby, M offers the other breast, baby whimpers, F receives and holds the baby, starts to talk to the interviewer and sits closer to M, puts his hand on baby's head. When the film is watched back in slow motion, second by second, it is obvious how, *simultaneously*, the baby's hand and F's finger start to move towards each other; without conscious awareness, baby grabs F's finger and immediately falls asleep (Sanders 2002). A dynamic system is calibrating.

The keynote, in this system as well as in a therapeutic system, is the process of recognition and fittedness (BCPSG 2010:60). The recognition process is characterised by strong emotional movement and a sense of fittedness in the interactive regulation.

In human development, and in the therapeutic endeavour, therapist and client connect to the deep

sense of who we are – here I am, here we are - through the sense of being known, through mutual recognition. The emotional field in between develops when “I sense that you sense that I sense”. At the heart of self-experience and the possibility to develop the self-in-relation lies the task of knowing myself through the experience of being known (Lyons-Ruth 2007; Sanders 2002; Tronick 2001).

“I know that you know that I know...” As human beings and living systems we develop through increased coherence – emerging parts integrate into more complex and adaptive patterns of action, eventually into a sense of wholeness. We recognise each other. The process is experienced in moments of meeting that convey the above mentioned fittedness (BCPSG 2010).

When I as therapist deeply receive the client within the common context of therapeutic agreement, and we together also share this experience of willingness, we experience a moment of heightened affectivity and vitality. The togetherness is a collaborative activity that contains and resolves tension between two divergent systems. The recognition process is an intrinsic knowing necessary for a living system to keep its identity and still develop.

We meet and stay in each other's gaze, in each other's faces.

How do we recognise being known? Perhaps we sense being lifted to a new level, or open to new depths. Perhaps something greater, the “Third”, emerges between us (Benjamin 2005; Ogden 2001; Stern 2005, 2010).

Music that meets this recognition process moves us further towards meeting ourselves. Pieces of music that match these interactive qualities contain elements that are supporting and opening, exploring and deepening, and exploring with surprises and contrasts (Wärja & Bonde 2014).

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Let the music help you to deepen and explore sensations of recognition and a sense of safety.*

Music: Franz Berwald's *Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major, Adagio*.

NON-RECOGNITION – RISKS AND POSSIBILITIES

When therapist and client experience deep recognition, they also become deeply aware of the intrinsic conditions of being and becoming subjects in front of each other. Together, we search, listen, sense from within and from outside simultaneously.

We attune precisely because we won't imitate each other. We attune through analogies, and we become aware that we are also different, separated, alone. We notice each other's Otherness; that we are different, separate, and unique, and that we must be able to experience and rest in the domain of non-confirmation and non-recognition.

In the therapeutic interaction I as a therapist then often connect to feelings of my own vulnerability and insufficiency. Sometimes the otherness of the other can explode or flood the space between us. Flood the room, run around like an unleashed dog, abrade the newly woven strands between us.

This also happens in relation to the music. The otherness of the music, apart from former experiences of being known by it, can also jump up like a ghost. Fear of extinction is evoked. The fear or dread in meeting otherness evokes true, real experiences of not being known.

Woven into my therapeutic subjectivity are also experiences of not being recognised when my deepest sense of self was expressed. Reconnecting to that experience guides the process of witnessing and co-regulating in the therapeutic relationship, practising non-confirmation and non-recognition (BCPSG 2010).

When we dare to sense this absence, emptiness emerges. We can rest in emptiness together, allowing us to let go of all meaning, invite, or at least face, meaninglessness together, go astray... together.

The relationships between us and to the music hold and help practise non-confirmation and non-recognition. Pieces of music that are helpful in this work can be classified as exploring and challenging, rhapsodic, transcending, fragmentary or splitting (Wärja & Bonde 2014).

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Let yourself connect to your capacity to meet sensations of being challenged, and let the music help you explore.*

Music: Karl Birger Blomdahl: *Aniar, Act 1 Scene 2, Instrumental.*

To explore and discover Otherness, non-recognition ruptures also evoke risks for dissociative qualities to enter the relationship with both the music and the therapist. Dissociative states affect the quality of presence and awareness, both in therapist and client, interacting recursively (Mårtenson Blom & Wrangsjö 2013). What is at stake in the therapeutic relationship when dissociative states occur is also the quality of

the state of consciousness for both therapist and patient/traveller.

For me as a therapist, the qualities of my presence and awareness depend on:

- my vulnerability and capacity to recognise
- my capacity to surrender to a collaborative dialogue
- my inner patterns and tendencies towards dissociation

Dissociation is considered a strategy of defence, a way to regulate affective inner states, not just an effect of traumatic experiences (Beebe & Lachmann 2002, 2014, Mårtenson Blom & Wrangsjö 2013). It is considered a way to handle deep abandonment and experiences of lack of recognition. It also affects our ability to be present. Dissociation breaks down our presence, and presence is an arch towards transcendence. A transcending movement within or between us may carry our experiences across borders of self and other into that which is greater than both of us. When the feeling of presence collapses and we dissociate, self-regulation and interactive regulation is impeded by defensive mechanisms.

Dissociation can happen in relation to the music, as well as in relation to the therapist. It is even likely that this has happened in the dialogue, without our awareness, when it later happens in relation to the music.

Between us, in the therapeutic dyad, the quality of my presence and my own dissociative tendencies are important to identify.

In more and more complex movements, back and forth, in deepening spirals during a therapeutic process, the experience of being known should hopefully be recalled.

Sometimes the longing for deep recognition can be too challenging to carry, no matter how much stabilising work is done. The present between us can still become chaotic.

However, we may share confusion, failure and absence. Sometimes we must let go of all meaning and receive meaninglessness, emptiness. How can I acknowledge the otherness of you; the incomprehensibility, even distastefulness, of you? You notice that I do not understand. When you don't feel understood and recognised, you need me not to deny or destroy. How can you otherwise be/become the one you are? When I don't feel understood or recognised, I need you not to deny or destroy. How can I otherwise be and become the one I am?

We need to carry the common burden: the burden of subjectivity. We are dependent on each other's capacity to recognise (Benjamin 1998, 2005).

I notice your attacks, trying to stay.
Asking you, begging you to do the same.

We are leaving the land of submission
We are entering the land of surrender.

Give in.

Not *to* me, but *with* me.

(Composed by the author based on text by Benjamin)

Still, the burden can be shared with me and the music. In sharing together, we may even hear or sense a calling, from something greater, perhaps through the growing field of awareness, nourished by mutually shared emotions of gratitude and love, that both may surrender to.

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Allow yourself to receive the music and let yourself be moved by it.*

Music: Allan Pettersson: *Herren går på ängen, Barefoot Songs.*

AESTHETICS OF CHANGE

When we discover inter-dependence we can let ourselves be moved by its beauty. The aesthetics of the change (Keeney 1983) and the movement into deeply acknowledging how inter-dependent we are bring us beauty. New patterns emerge between us and connect us.

We become bold, playful and sloppy, daring to surprise each other; we feel relief when nothing fits and let uncertainty puncture, let words evaporate... do nothing... be in nothingness.

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Just let yourself play with the music.*

Music: Jan Johansson: *Sy ihop dom. Music From Four Centuries.*

In this openness, the client, and therapist in her inner experience, might even meet some old exiles from the past; dissociated parts, old inner "immigrants" might come back, a small baby boy, a young girl, or something formless, shapeless.

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Just continue to move into this piece of music, and try to be sensitive to what/who is calling you.*

Music: Jan Johansson: *Emigrantvisan. Jazz in Swedish.*

Play and reality begin to interact in the field of togetherness. Spoken words contain layers of meaning and become bewitched. Reality might even expand into something even more real, as if it reflects something beyond that we have longed so much for. The implicit relational modes of interaction may become symbolic. The sense of who we are and where we are heading can reconnect to our inner keynote, to our key-rhythm; the implicitly known core self, as a centre within. We recognise the emergence of a sense of homecoming and the therapeutic agreement is beginning to become fulfilled.

Music, then – does it also change? In GIM, a receptive music therapy, the music does not interact in the moment since it is pre-recorded, but it is still a powerful relational agent. As therapist, I select... Or do I? Who selects? What selects?

When therapist and client are in the field of togetherness, consciousness grows beyond individual borders.

When therapist and client are in the field of music, consciousness grows beyond individual borders.

Music is a memory, a wider space in time, eternally there and beyond. It can only be rediscovered, we can only reconnect to it and be recognised.

TRANSCENDENCE AND THE PROCESS OF SURRENDER

As human beings, we may long for transcendence; the experience of transcending borders of self and of the field between us. Perhaps we also long for surrender, even though it has a slightly scary or uncomfortable quality. Most problems people suffer from are signs, or callings, to reconnect to what is deeply and subjectively known; to recognise the very feeling of being known, and then transcend into something greater which may receive them.

When we connect to deeper levels of consciousness, we inevitably also connect to that which connects us all as human beings, between us.

In my PhD project, summarised in the introduction of this article, surrender appeared as an ongoing experiential movement between a deep sense of being known and a deep sense of seclusion and aloneness, even abandonment (Mårtensson Blom 2014). Sometimes this paved the way for transcendence and a mystical experience, but then always as a surprise emerging beyond intentional will.

Sometimes music can surprise us, sweep us away in transcendence. When that happens, we need to catch the movements in retrospect and reconsolidate the patterns of surrender.

Somewhere here, unconditional love enters the field between us.

The music assists in interacting, sharing and regulating lived experience. Music, togetherness, dialoguing – as organically connected as possible – move and change in the meeting and cultivate communion.

The suggested listening experience may assume the following focus: *Let yourself find your inner place of communion and let the music meet you there.*

Music: Esbjörn Svensson Trio (E.S.T.): *Believe, Beleft, Below.*

SPIRITUALITY

It is my clinical as well as personal experience that we become deeply emotionally moved when we fall; when nothing is solid anymore. There is loss, grief, despair, confusion. When meeting the other I must also be prepared to fall. The uncertainty and vulnerability sensed inside induces me to approach the unconditional. A deep bodily sensation of surrender is an experience of grace.

To be together and travel in music and dialogue, to be known in Otherness, is for me the essence of psychotherapy.

And music is a crack in time where eternity oozes in (Stinissen 2004).

Music recognises
 Music finds fittedness
 Music meets my otherness and abandonment
 Music abandons and provides silence and emptiness
 Music surrenders and transcends

So, gods are wandering yet upon the earth.
 One of them sits, perhaps, beside your hearth.

Think not that any god can ever die,
 He walks beside you, but you shield your eye.

He bears no spear, nor wears a purple gown.

But by his deeds a god might be made known.

It is a rule unbroken, be advised:
 when gods are on the earth, they go disguised!
 (Lyrics: Hjalmar Gullberg)

Music: L-E Larsson: God in Disguise, Op. 24.

EPILOGUE

Through this writing process, ingredients of the therapeutic implicit field between therapist, client and music, investigated in a PhD study, were explored from a subjective perspective. The steps of a Process of Surrender were illustrated through listening to suggested pieces of music. It was challenging to make explicit and try to convey in writing what was subjectively felt as “true” and intersubjectively, practically – clinically – confirmed as useful and relevant. However, findings from the PhD project as a representative of a more “objective” and reflecting perspective served as important guiding statements. The material of the article, both text and listening experience, was previously presented to different audiences and feedback from these groups also encouraged me to make a written text available.

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