

## **Music, group and group analytic music therapy in adolescence**

*Anthony Brault*

### **Abstract**

The adolescent subject is required to recover their sound envelope bruised by puberty. All of the sound world and in particular the body's sonority must be reorganized to guarantee the narcissistic continuity of the pubescent child. Music, especially when it accompanies the group of peers, offers teenagers a way to reconstitute a sound envelope. In more pathological cases, group analytic music therapy will help acquire this function.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Group analytic music therapy, Music, Sound envelope, Sound violence

### **The reorganization of the sound world in adolescence**

Based on the premise that music has the function of organizing the sound world – “this strange universe” (Wolff, 2015, p. 45) – of the subject, its use by adolescents since the origins of civilization and in all cultures (1) can specifically question the need to reorganize the sound universe at this time of life. Let's go back to the baby first. The latter – long before its birth in airspace – is surrounded by sounds, a real “noise brouhaha” as formulated by Edith Lecourt (2007a). This muddled set of sound is particularly frightening and must then be metabolized so as not to completely disorganize the emerging psyche of the subject. If this applies to all sensorialities, the sensory sound has the peculiarity of piercing all the envelopes; one cannot close the auditory cavity as one can close the eyes or regurgitate milk (Anzieu, 1976; Aulagnier, 1975; Lecourt, 1987). This specificity of the sound (which also applies to the olfactory) will endow the voice, in the first place the maternal voice, with a special status. The infant will cling to the maternal voice, already well known when they was only fetus, making more pleasant, in any case more bearable, the ambient sound. So if music gives order to sonority (Wolff, 2015), this function originates from the musicality of the maternal voice forming a “sound envelope” (Anzieu, 1976) necessary for the development of the Self (of the psyche).

With puberty, the sound envelope shatters (Brault, 2018). The eruption of the pubescent body gives a new coloration to all the sounds emitted and or heard by the subject. The genital sexuality permeates the body and informs the psyche of its genitalization, which it does not yet attribute to itself. This movement, which the theoreticians of the adolescence process call, in reference to the theory of P. Aulagnier (1975), “pubertal violence” (Gutton, 1991; Marty, 1997b), acts principally – this is in any case our hypothesis – in and by the body's sonority (2), because, as

we were saying before, the characteristic of the sound is to burst, to arise, to pierce all the limits, while remaining elusive. If the voice of the teenager who is genitalizing (we will not develop this here) is paradigmatic of this violent transformation of the body's sonority (Marty, 1996, 1997a; Brault, Marty, 2018), all the sounds of the body, of oneself and of others, express pubertal violence.

A thirteen-year-old patient told us that, for some time, being in his room had become hell. As it was next to the bathroom in the family home, he could hear from his bed all the noises that his parents made – and in particular those of his mother. To protect himself from this, he increased the volume of his stereo, which, on the other hand, greatly annoyed his parents.

We already see in this short clinical vignette the function that music has in covering and protecting the teenager from the genital excitement that the body's sonority (in this case of the other) awakens in him. But when the need to protect oneself takes precedence over the need to become a subject, the symptoms appear, testifying to the impasse in the process of adolescence, this is the case for example of pubertal psychosis.

### **The group analytic music therapy**

From the outset, Albert was extremely intrigued by the sounds when he first joined the analytical music therapy group. As soon as Albert sits in his chair, in presence of the three other teenagers who are involved in the mediation, he looks up to the ceiling to make sure he heard— "What is that?" he asks. Indeed, Albert, who has a fine hearing capacity, perceived well that the footsteps of the colleagues upstairs resonated inside the room. He then asks, "What is that?" With his eyes on the window, Albert hears the noises of cars outside. "Now there are cars that don't make noise... it can be very dangerous," he says. Suddenly, he bursts into laughter. Albert had a thought, which he shared with the group. He imagined a bull being crushed by a car, his two horns piercing the car's body and the driver's body. In the next session, Albert says, "What is this?" This time, it is the sound of the kettle being heard through the "false" wall (a sliding door) that separates the room from the kitchen in the consultation centre. We are indeed unlucky... This room is particularly poorly soundproofed, the ceiling, the wall or the window reducing very little the surrounding noise. "There's a hole in the wall", Albert wonders. It's just as if... So he knocks with the palm of his hand repeatedly against the wall behind him. Albert smiles, he sketches a rhythm, let's say a pulsation, which he accompanies while dancing, or rather by swinging on his chair.

Sounds from outside and sounds from inside, sounds from above and sounds from next door, between Albert and the sound environment the boundary is even thinner than the thickness of the wall that separates the room from the kitchen of the

therapeutic center. So fine that one wonders even if there is one (note that of the ten sessions for this group, Albert had only missed one... due to storms).

Group analytic music therapy is a therapeutic apparatus (3) created by Edith Lecourt (2007b) that takes the form of free improvisation – free sound association – with the help of musical instruments. In our clinical setting, group sessions last one hour and are held once a week. During each session, we offer patients a minimum of two improvisation sequences (about five minutes each). This allows during the second improvisation to experience through the sound what has been said and interpreted beforehand. Each improvisation is followed by a sequence of free verbalization, then by listening to the improvisation (it is therefore always recorded) and again a second sequence of verbalization on the listening experience.

Let's go back to Albert. For him, the "sound limits of the Self" (Lecourt, 1983) are no longer structuring, not able to offer the constitution of his own sonority space. The sounds of the outside invade the interior of the body and therefore no sonority space of its own can be formed. Faced with the absence of limits, the anguish of fragmentation emerges: as illustrated by the impression of the hole in the wall and the image of the bull horns piercing the car and the driver ("beautiful" illustrations of the virulence of paranoid anxieties). To combat a disorganizing intrusion, Albert creates (to himself) a rescue body, a real "sound wall", in the sense of Roland Gori (1975): a wall of sounds against the envelope piercing sounds. Moreover, his sound manifestations during the improvisations testify to this: it was always necessary, at each session, that Albert plays louder than the others, that we only hear him, in a deafening sound volume.

A few sessions later, Albert takes the metallophone to improvise with. After the improvisation, he expresses his discomfort to play with his instrument by associating on his perception of different noises emanating at the same time from it. Three sounds: the sound of the metal blade, the sound of the wood bordering the metallophone and the sound of the scrap end that holds the blade. As he speaks to us, Albert plays with the metallophone to explain what he means. He makes us hear these three sounds, very different, which at times can resonate together. He explains that he did not like the fact that these three sounds "were there" at the same time. We offer associations in relation to the group: today there are three individuals playing and maybe he is speaking about the difficulty to play together and, at the same time, to make three different sounds (there was at this session a rain stick and a sleigh bell in addition to the metallophone). Albert agrees.

Though it is difficult to perceive and play with three different sounds, Albert shows a capacity to discriminate them. The three sounds of his instrument referring, it seemed to us, to the three sounds of the group. If it is about melting them together, be as it may, an interval, here between three sounds, is actually formed. In other words, there is an attempt of a perception of the difference between these three sounds and

between the three members of the group. The setting up of an interval is one of the principles of the work of sonority that can be achieved in music therapy (especially with these patients at the edges of, if not “fallen” in, psychosis). Working through the sound interval, it is a whole perception and a construction of the relationship that can be drafted in music therapy.

We see through this quick clinical vignette the possible work in a therapeutic framework on the sound matter, the draft of an organization of the sound space. As well as all the importance of the group that help form for Albert the ounce of a sound envelope inside which he begins to hear and discriminate different sounds. The double mediation specific to group analytic music therapy, the group and the sound, potentiates the formation of a double envelope, groupal and musical, in which the teenager can experiment, where he could not in a situation outside the clinic (or at least), the limits of his body's sonority and functions: the limitation between the inside and the outside and between oneself and the other (Lecourt, 1983; Brault, 2020). The formation of this double envelope is of major importance in the evolution of the adolescence process. This hypothesis is confirmed by clinical experience (especially in group analytic music therapy) as it is confirmed by human experience when one observes the daily life of adolescents and the importance given to group and music.

### **The music and the group in adolescence**

We noted earlier that if music is the cultural object par excellence of the teenager, it is because sound attacks as much as it constructs the pubescent child (Marty, 1997a). Because the onset of "the pubertal" (Gutton, 1991) provokes a particular breach through the sound, music becomes a necessary recourse to its metabolism. This hypothesis is in line with the work of Edith Lecourt (1987). Following on from Didier Anzieu's (1976) study, the sound envelope proposes the existence of a “music-verbal envelope”: "To speak of a sound envelope is to arrive, inside the sound experience, at a level of mentalization that ensures – without necessary recourse to the other senses – surface, continuity and contenance. I think this level is really only reached with the codes of verbal language and music” (Lecourt, 1987, p. 235).

Edith Lecourt's elaborations concern in particular the constitution of the musical envelope in the first chapter of life. The sound is an envelope for the newborn, relying on the verbal code and the musical code of the family (we will not develop the verbal code here). “The expansion of the environment to the societal group will complete their development and ensure their fitness,” she concludes (*ibid.*, p. 246).

We believe that it is in adolescence that the so-called “expansion” takes place, which is necessary to regain the sound envelope pierced by puberty. The music, listened to and/or produced, would therefore offer this possibility to the teenager to integrate, to transform and to put at the service of the culture, the pubertal sound violence. In other

words, music is an act of creation that takes its source in the transformations of the pubescent body and whose goal is its psychic integration. With music, the teenager regains a mastery, lost by the new sonorities that break in and impose themselves on his body, so that the sound can envelop – the modern machinery (walkman, telephone, portable speaker) only exacerbates the ability to control the sound environment. Through this *body-to-body* with music, the teenager has found a way to become deaf to all external and internal sound manifestations (probably also to avoid another type of body-to-body). For example, many teenagers testify to this vital need for music to silence the voices (more or less hallucinated) that assail them.

Other than listening “solitarily” (which is never the case because there is always another that we don't hear and that is therefore present in negative), listening to music in a group is a practice that teenagers gladly engage in with the use of telephone speakers in the street or in more unusual places (cellars, caves), in concerts or other *rave parties*. The peer group (4) and the music offer the teenager the regression towards the fusion of the sound bath (Marty, 1997a), nourishing a narcissism weakened (in the best case) by the dysharmonies of puberty, which the family environment (the mother) can no longer offer without raising the Oedipal threat. If the listening (or playing) of music in group arouses the recollection of a past time where the teenager was a baby bathed with pleasure and unison in the maternal chant, the group and the music, because different from that of the parents, rise at the same time as a bulwark against this incestuous temptation and thus participate in the Oedipal break.

Lucas is sixteen when he comes to consultation. He says that he is depressed, full of dark ideas that come and go. The school demotivates him, he no longer wants to go there. He has a group of friends since middle school of which he was the leader. But lately they've been dating girls when he doesn't see much point in it. So he feels alone, unable to share this new experience with his friends: “I'm not going to force myself to go out with a girl just to be with them”.

Lucas has been playing piano since he was six years old. He was at the conservatory and then decided to stop when he entered high school. However, he is indeed passionate about the piano. When he was fifteen, he discovered jazz and it was over with the conservatory... The piano was then an object of contention in the family, especially with his grandmother, a renowned pianist in “classical music”. For his grandmother, jazz is “non academic”, it's not “knowledgeable”, it's almost a “wild” type of music. The disappointment was great for the grandmother, who saw her grandson as gifted. She refused to go see him play in the jazz club where he performed a few times. As the consultations progressed, a project for the future unfolds: he wishes to “get a break/pierce in music”. He starts a band with the kids of his age who came to the jazz club. They compose, upload their content online and start performing a little. His

parents take a very negative view of this project, judging it as a “childhood dream”. He becomes very upset because he needs the support of his family to believe in it. The actual “dream” would be “the Olympia”, making tours around the world, filling concert halls, but Lucas knows very well that he is still far from all this. Right now, he just wants to do what he really enjoys. He absolutely does not see himself later doing the “same mundane job as his parents” and wants to do something “really different”. For Lucas, music holds this first function of differentiating himself from his parents. But it is not the only one. Lucas talks a lot about his little sister who is barely a year younger than he is. It is clear to him that she is the “favourite”. She is “brilliant” and the similarity with their mother is uncanny... She definitely has all the qualities! They “don't get along, really not...”. She talks all the time and he feels totally excluded during dinner conversations. So he gets up, goes to the piano and the more the sister talks, the louder he plays. But the word always wins over music, which is forbidden by the parents when the conversation *tone goes up*. Angry, Lucas climbs into his room and raises to the maximum the volume of his stereo. This family scene is repeated almost every night... And from session to session, he reproaches his parents for being “obsessed” by his sister, and above all, for not hearing that he seeks their attention.

The musical investment of Lucas lets us hear the multiple functions of this cultural object in its adolescent crossing. It restores an emotional flavor to his teenage depression, his worry of loneliness and that impression, which will appear during the sessions, that he, unlike his friends, his parents and his sister, will not find love. Through jazz, Lucas meets another world, other teenagers with whom he shares this common passion, and builds a project, perhaps “ideal” (for his parents anyway), but especially an “expression in action of desire” (Lesourd, 2004, p. 28) which makes it possible to reconstruct a narcissism weakened by puberty as much as to recreate the lost object of love of childhood – and it is moreover through his jazz band that he will meet a girl of which he will fall madly in love. The family scene of the evening meal depicts this narcissistic wound of having lost the object of Oedipal love, the attention and the listening of the parents who, according to him, are only interested in his little sister. In contrast to Sigmund Freud's adolescence where he had succeeded in silencing the piano of the family's household, the object of an unbearable dispute between his mother and his sister Anna (Houssier, 2018; Lecourt, 1992), Lucas does not manage by the piano to silence the voice of his sister. Music translates this paradox of offering him a voice, different from his parents, different from his grandmother and sister, while being the representative of the loss of his child's voice (a consequence of puberty). It is this paradox concerning the separation that takes place in the family group, as much feared as desired, and vehicles his sadness, that leads him to consult. In other words, if the investment of music could act for Lucas as the support for the work of mourning of the childhood and its internal parental

objects, it nevertheless prevents him from expressing his voice as an adult by shutting the silence that this grief imposes.

## **To conclude**

The formation of a “musical envelope” (Lecourt, 1987) offers the adolescent the possibility of integrating the experiences of the pubertal sonority of the body. The music would be conceived as a form of the *sonority of adolescens* (5) that opposes as much as it transforms (sublimates) the violence of the pubertal sonority into creativity. Thus, it lies on this line of crest between creativity and destructivity: As an object of passion shareable with the group of peers and vector of sublimation, it nevertheless borders on the risk of becoming an object of addiction or even an object of fetish that denies the loss of the all-powerfulness of childhood. Its sublimatory or addictive potentiality undoubtedly depends on its relational valence for the subject and on the way it can be used as a medium with others, a means of touching and being touched by the other, or on the contrary of getting away/protecting oneself.

For adolescents whose puberty has caused severe psychic disorders, group analytic music therapy can be seen as another possible way of integrating pubertal sound violence. This approach, which updates by and through the sound the draft of a work on the limits of the self, offers adolescents a space in which they can express all the violence of the pubertal drive energy and transform it into creativity. From (and thanks to) the double mediation of group and sound, the teenager experiences the destructive and foundational double valence of the sonority in order to appropriate his body, his thoughts and his (psychic) space all the while cultivating an identifying link with the group of peers.

## **References**

- Anzieu, D. (1976), L'enveloppe sonore de soi. *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 13, 161-179.
- Aulagnier, P. (1975). *La violence de l'interprétation*. Paris : PUF.
- Brault, A. (2018). Le perceur d'enveloppes. De la violence sonore à l'adolescence. *Connexions*, 109, 31-42.
- Brault, A. (2020). Aux limites de l'entendable : la violence sonore pubertaire. *Adolescence*, 38, 69-88.
- Brault, A., Marty, F. (2018). Une grosse voix qui ne peut se faire entendre : méandres dans les remaniements de l'identité sonore à l'adolescence. *Corps & Psychisme*, 73, 13-26.

- Calame, C. (2013). Le chant choral des jeunes filles à Sparte. Cadences poétiques, rythmes rituels, arts musicaux et identité sexuée. *Cahiers de Littérature Orale*, 73-74. En ligne : <http://journals.openedition.org/clo/1935>
- Gori R. (1975). Les murailles sonores. *L'Evolution psychiatrique*, 4, 779-803.
- Gutton, P. (1991). *Le pubertaire*. Paris : PUF, 2013.
- Gutton, P. (1996). *Adolescens*. Paris : PUF.
- Houssier, F. (2018). *Freud adolescent*. Paris : Campagne Première
- Lecourt, É. (1983). Le sonore et les limites du soi. *Bulletin de psychologie*, 36, 577-582.
- Lecourt, É. (1987). L'enveloppe musicale. In D. Anzieu et al., *Les enveloppes psychiques* (pp. 223-246). Paris : Dunod, 2000.
- Lecourt, É. (1992). *Freud et le sonore, le tic-tac du désir*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Lecourt, É. (2007a). De la musique avant toute chose. *Spirale*, 44, 147-153.
- Lecourt, É. (2007b). *La musicothérapie analytique de groupe*. Courlay : Fuzeau.
- Lesourd, S. (2004). Reconstruction narcissique du moi adolescent. *Figures de la psychanalyse*, 9, 25-34.
- Marty, F. (1996). Le travail de la mue. *Adolescence*, 14, 169-190.
- Marty, F. (1997a). Figures sonores de la violence à l'adolescence. *Adolescence*, 15, 103-115.
- Marty, F. (1997b). Violences à l'adolescence. In F. Marty (dir.), *L'illégitime violence* (pp. 7-17). Ramonville Saint-Agne : Éditions érès, 2000.
- Schiavinato, J. (2005). Les groupes d'adolescents. Expérience de la pratique de psychodrame. In D. Bass (dir.), *Au fil de la parole des groupes pour se dire* (pp. 247-256). Toulouse : Éditions érès.
- Wolff, F. (2015). *Pourquoi la musique?* Paris: Fayard.

## Notes

- (1) For example, one can refer to the studies of the anthropologist Claude Calame (2013) on the choral singing of the girls of Sparta in the 7th century BC.
- (2) This is what we have proposed to call "pubertal sound violence" (Brault, 2020).
- (3) Initially, it was a research design.
- (4) With or without music, identification with the peer group (horizontal identifications) is also a possible way of reassurance about narcissistic continuity. The group is a true "narcissistic double" (Schiavinato, 2005) for the teenager, which allows them to better separate from their family group, protect them from the danger



of the virulence of genital sexuality while at the same time offering them the possibility of integrating it psychically.

(5) In reference to what Philippe Gutton (1991; 1996) calls *Adolescens*, the process of elaboration and desexualisation of pubertal violence (this is a second latency specific to the process of adolescence).

**Anthony Brault** is a clinical psychologist, doctor in clinical psychology, temporary member of the *Psychologie clinique, Psychopathologie, Psychanalyse* laboratory (University of Paris), member of the *Association Française de Musicothérapie* (AFM) and of the editorial committee of *La Revue Française de Musicothérapie*, member in training at the *Collège International de L'Adolescence* (CILA).

Email : [anthonybrault@hotmail.fr](mailto:anthonybrault@hotmail.fr)

**Traduit du français par Haya Sleiman Haidar**