



ISPSO 34th Annual Meeting, Copenhagen 3rd - 9th July 2017: Dreams always take place: Spaces, Places, Rooms, and Furniture, inside and around us

PARALLEL PAPERS IV
SATURDAY 8th JULY 1345-1500
ROOM V - 7.0.28

Mark Argent

Bach is the answer: what is the question?

The aria "Erbarme Dich", from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* was in my mind for most of the 2016 OPUS conference, initially in response to Gerry Fromm's keynote on the trauma of nazism recycled across the generations, but persisting as I approached presenting on the complications of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump.

This paper explores a rich, and partly non-verbal, mythic framework which might make sense of this. Many musicians think in music, which makes music a valuable part of the countertransference -- not least as a way of holding space for what can be under-valued because it doesn't work in words (1). As a cellist performing baroque music, I am engaging with words that are not my own: the starting point is to ask "What might these words have meant to the person setting them?" This applies particularly to religious music, where so much has changed that it becomes an invitation to look into another world.

I see looking at the religion of another time or another place as a way to learn about what of oneself one sees in that religion (2). The words "Erbarme Dich" ("Have mercy my God") might seem an apt response to Brexit and Trump, the aria, at that place in the Good Friday liturgy pulls together a rich combination of condensations: collective and individual brokenness, life and death, conventions that protect us from government assuming too much power. Bach's approach seems to offer a mythic framework to make sense of reality for his time. Globalisation, and in particular the emergence of China and India as major economic powers is having a profound effect. The contrast with what's seen in Bach highlights the absence of a shared mythic / religious framework for a globalised world. In its absence there are conflicting understandings and many fragmented and regressed responses (3).

Contemporary Western culture tends to behave as if there should be complete and absolute answers, and struggles because they can't be found. Fascism is one way of fabricating the illusion of certainty (4). Alternatively, one of the functions of religion is to create mythic framework which makes the anxieties of not knowing bearable. That is often lost in power structures that accrete around religion, which are

neatly side-stepped by musical approaches that are partly outside words.

1. "Music and countertransference: rethinking issues of interdisciplinarity" in Pamela Burnard, Valerie Ross, Helen Julia Minors, Kimberley Powers, Tatjana Dragovic and Elizabeth Mackinlay (eds) *Building interdisciplinary and intercultural bridges: where practice meets research meets theory* (Cambridge 2017)
2. "Looking at you, looking at me: using a Lacanian theoretical approach to learning from Balinese Hindus" *ibid*
3. Howard Schwartz, *Revolt of the Primitive, an inquiry into the roots of political correctness*, New Jersey, 2003
4. Christian Wieland, *The fascist state of mind and the manufacturing of masculinity*, London and New York, 2015

Mark Argent

Independent consultant. Associate of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations.